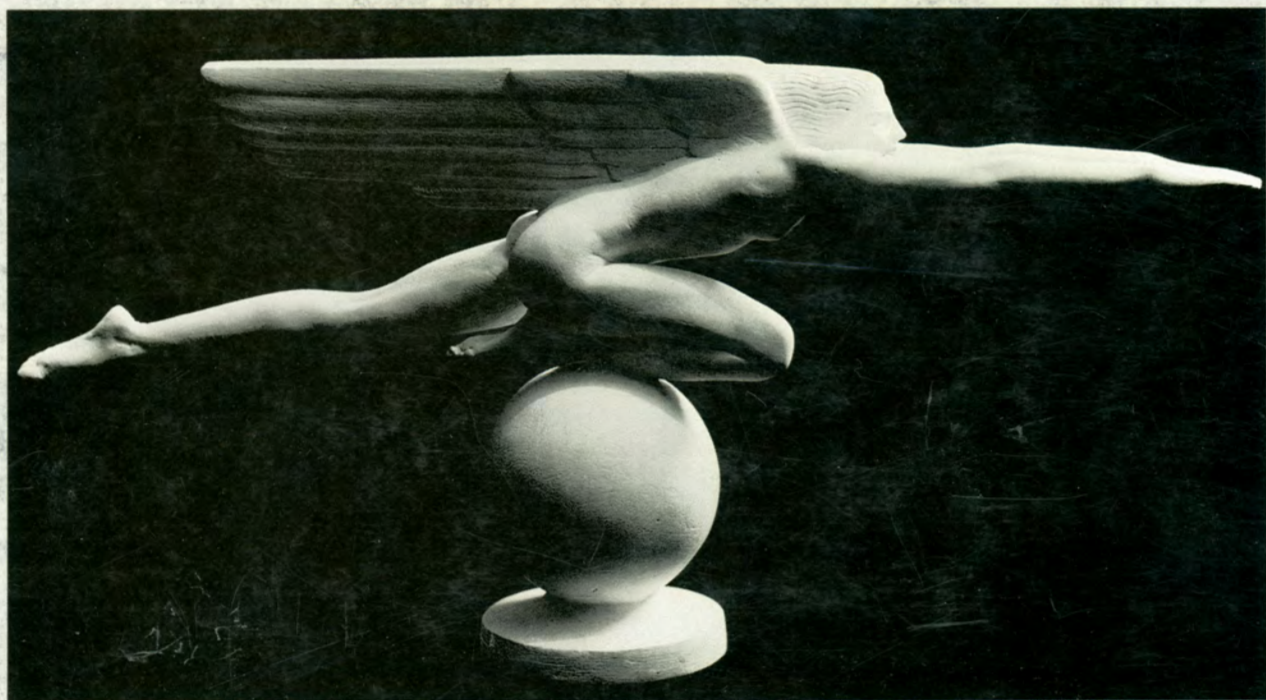


# AMERICAN WOMEN SCULPTORS



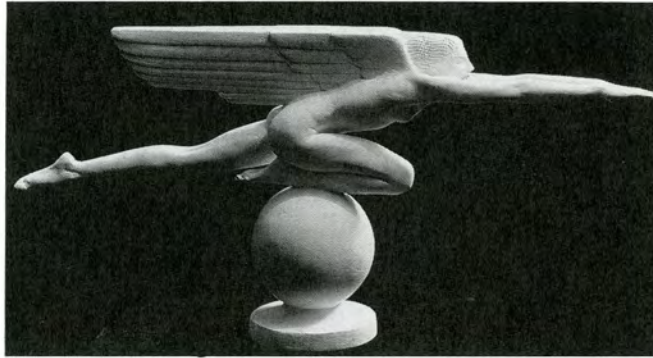
A  
History  
of Women  
Working  
in  
Three  
Dimensions



CHARLOTTE STREIFER RUBINSTEIN

AUTHOR OF AMERICAN WOMEN ARTISTS

AMERICAN  
W O M E N  
SCULPTORS



A  
History  
of Women  
Working  
in  
Three  
Dimensions

CHARLOTTE STREIFER RUBINSTEIN

G.K. HALL & CO.  
B O S T O N



All rights reserved.

Copyright 1990 by Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein.

First published 1990

by G. K. Hall & Co.

70 Lincoln Street

Boston, Massachusetts 02111

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Book design by Barbara Anderson.

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rubinstein, Charlotte Streifer.

American women sculptors: a history of women working in three dimensions / Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8161-8732-0

1. Women sculptors—United States—Biography.

2. Sculpture, American. I. Title.

NB236.R8 1990

730'.82—dc20

89-26846

CIP

---

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials. ANSI Z39.48-1984

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ☺™

*Woman Entering a Temple*, a rapidly moving figure seems to be entering an open structure. All these have an architectural edge, but some works have a more organic look of growing forms (*Transformations*, marble, Whitney Museum).

After the war Schnabel settled in Paris, where in the 1960s she was designing monumental sculpture in association with architects and designers. Michel Seuphor described her work as "the pursuit of a sculptured architecture endowed with spirit."<sup>67</sup>

**Guitou Knoop (1902–87)**, another refugee artist, created classic, elegant nonobjective compositions, stripped to their essentials, in stone and bronze. Born in Moscow of Dutch ancestry, Knoop left in 1927 to study with Bourdelle in Paris, becoming a French citizen in 1933. She was exhibiting in New York at the outbreak of the war (Wildenstein Gallery, 1936, 1939, 1942) and remained in the United States for several decades.

Around 1948, under the guidance of Jean Arp, she became a nonobjective sculptor, exhibiting at the Betty Parsons Gallery (1959) and the André Emmerich Gallery (1962, 1964). Her work is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Albright-Knox Gallery, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and elsewhere.

**Gwen Lux (Creighton) (1908–)**, a Chicago-born architectural sculptor, came to public attention during a heated controversy over her *Eve*, commissioned for the Radio City Music Hall. The theater owner went into shock when he saw the nudity and modernity of her sculpture and others by William Zorach and Robert Laurent. Critics and artists rallied to their defense, however, and they were installed.

She had studied at the Maryland Institute of the Arts and with Ivan Meštrović in Yugoslavia. She received a 1933 Guggenheim Foundation

fellowship and exhibited in the 1934 Paris Salon d'Automne.

The Radio City *Eve* was followed by many postwar commissions in collaboration with architects. Some of these are the Shakespeare panels for Edward Durrell Stone's University of Arkansas theater; *Power* and *Direction* for Eero Saarinen's General Motors Technical Center, Detroit; and *Synergy* for the State Office Building, Lihue, Hawaii.

Now living and working in Honolulu, Lux uses cast polyester resin and steel in architectural commissions. She has worked toward "a rediscovery of the integration of the arts of sculpture and architecture."<sup>68</sup>

#### FIGURATIVE SCULPTORS

The canon of art history gives the impression that the only sculpture created during the 1940s and 1950s was abstract; but, in fact, excellent figurative sculptors continued to work. Much of their art, like that of figurative painters during this period, has an expressionistic and haunted quality, often filled with existential despair. It was dubbed the "New Images of Man" in a 1959 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

In the 1950s figurative sculptors began to use the new technique of welding. Many of them came out of the Sculpture Center, a combination gallery and workshop (originally Dorothea Denslow's Clay Club in Greenwich Village), where the director, Sahl Swarz, taught the technique. Their work was exhibited at the center alongside that of abstract artists David Smith, Theodore Roszak, and others.

Art historian Wayne Andersen characterized these welded figurative works as "spiky threatening frenetic forms . . . primordial fantasies . . . screaming mothers . . . a monstrous production of expressionistic sculpture that seemed to justify itself by a literal interpretation of the violence



inherent in the process of forming sculpture with the intense heat of an acetylene torch."<sup>69</sup>

True, the method had an effect on the work, but perhaps a deeper reason for the sense of angst can be found in the wartime sense of tragedy, the Holocaust, and later, the atomic threat and the cold war. This feeling pervades the work of abstract and figurative artists alike and emerges in other media, such as bronze and clay. Both groups were seeking more open, fluid forms, in contrast with the massive closed forms of the previous era.

Some sculptors, however, continued the tradition of direct carving. In general, figurative artists were influenced by modernism and abstraction. Elizabeth Catlett and Marianna Pineda studied with Zadkine, and Doris Caesar with Archipenko. Luise Kaish's early work has a gestural quality that relates to abstract expressionism.

Although **Luise (Meyers) Kaish (1925–)** describes herself as a humanist rather than a religious artist, she once said: "I have always been attracted to the first five books of the Bible. . . . I honestly feel that all experience is in the Bible and I think it is as true now as it was then."<sup>70</sup>

In the 1950s she embodied her humanistic visions in a series of deeply moving expressionistic bronze and welded sculptures, which combine the gestural qualities of abstract expressionism with figurative content.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, and raised in New York, Luise was five when her kindergarten teacher called in her parents and advised them to give her art lessons.

After earning a B.F.A. in painting at Syracuse University (1946), the artist attended the Escuela de Pintura y Escultura in Mexico City (1946–47), where she first became interested in sculpture. On a full graduate scholarship she returned to Syracuse University to study with the

Yugoslavian sculptor Ivan Meštrović (M.F.A., 1951):

He was one of the most magnificent people I ever met . . . a truly great man and a great artist. I think the thing about him was that he was only interested in working. We were a very small group and we were allowed to use the studio at any time at all—late at night, weekends. And most of us did. He brought to us in the autumn of his life a quality of spirit, a way of seeing form and light, and a total commitment to hard work.<sup>71</sup>

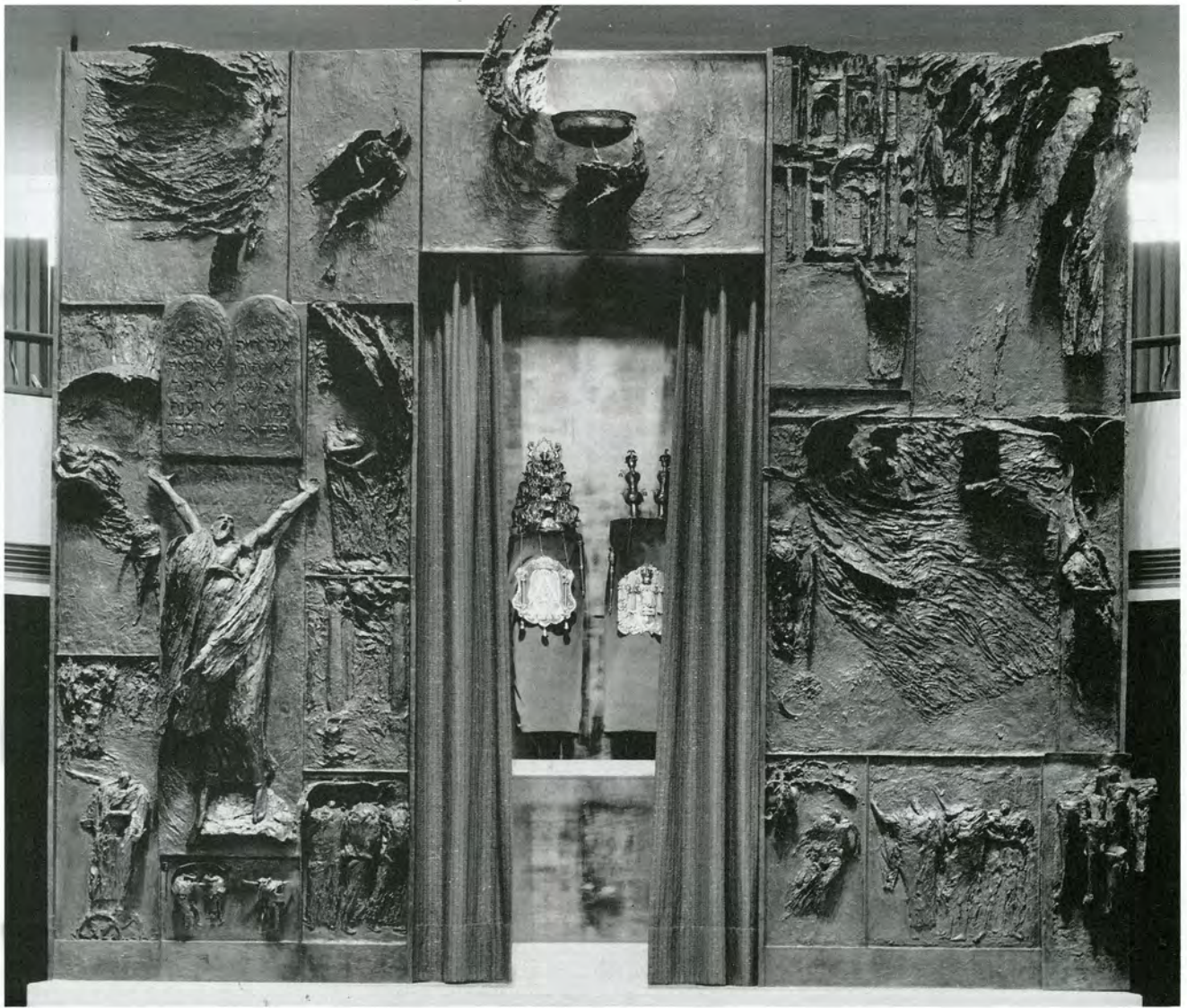
At Syracuse the artist met her future husband, painter Morton Kaish, with whom she has shared exhibitions and visiting professorships. They have a daughter, Melissa. In 1951, when Luise received a Louis Comfort Tiffany grant, the Kaishes went to Florence, Italy, where she studied bronze casting and stone carving at the Institute d'Arte. On a second visit in 1956—this time to Rome—Kaish discovered that attending orthodox services at the Great Synagogue encouraged meditation and contemplation: "There was something about being back in Italy. . . . my feelings about morality received a great jolt."<sup>72</sup>

The resulting sculptures on biblical themes, shown at the Sculpture Center (1955, 1958), were described in *Arts* magazine:

The blistering pain of revelation infuse[s] with grandeur forty-six exquisitely cast or welded bronzes and coppers. . . . *The Angel of Joshua*, swirling like a manta ray, with surfaces like withering bark . . . scorches the air with his prophecy of unbearable pain. . . . *The Vision of Jeremiah*, a flat, flaking lichen, trembles behind his shoulder and above his head, uttering divine promptings.<sup>73</sup>

Kaish received a Guggenheim fellowship and a monumental commission for an *Ark of Reve-*





Luise Kaish, ARK OF REVELATION (1961–64), bronze, 13½' x 15½'. Temple B'rith Kodesh, Rochester, N.Y. Photo courtesy of the artist.



lation (1964) for Temple B'rith Kodesh in Rochester, New York. Kaish said of it, "I have sought to give visual form to the words of patriarch and prophet in an unremitting dialogue with God."<sup>74</sup>

The thirteen-by-fifteen-foot ark stands in a lofty prayer hall under a wood and glass dome designed by architect Pietro Belluschi. Eighteen bronze panels are welded together around a curtained opening which holds the Torah. Modeled with tremendous energy, in a highly abstracted and expressionistic manner, the panels depict key episodes in biblical history: *Moses Receiving the Tablets of the Law*, *The Angel Staying the Hand of Abraham*, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, and others. A Rochester journalist wrote, "One has a feeling of being seized and swept along on a wind that blows across the pages of all the long history of the Jewish people."<sup>75</sup> Others compared it to the tradition of Ghisberti or Rodin.

Avram Kampf has written:

The tension and elemental experience of the encounter between man and God is expressed in the poetic handling of the bronze. The surface is roughened by the spirited touch of the artist's hand which leaves its mark in the sharp cuts, deep incisions and nervous penetrations. The surfaces tremble as light breaks over the raked, hollowed and furrowed metal. As light advances and recedes, it alternately hides and reveals the wing of an angel, the leaf of a plant, the strings of a harp, a row of mourning men, or a figure blown by a gust of wind.<sup>76</sup>

Other commissions followed for Beth El Synagogue Center, New Rochelle, New York; Continental Grain Company, New York; Holy Trinity Mission Seminary, Silver Springs, Maryland; and elsewhere.

On a fellowship to the American Academy in Rome (1970-72), Kaish, perhaps influenced by

the minimalism of the 1960s, abandoned rough, gestural surfaces and produced works in mirror-like polished stainless steel with movable parts (*Voyage 1*, *Voyage 11*, and *In the Beginning*), which suggest an analogy between space travel and spiritual revelation. For these she used a new technique of hammering and stretching metal over carved wood forms.

One of the artist's most moving works is *Holocaust* (1974-75), a black bronze stele at the entrance to New York's Jewish Museum. An arch curves above an open door, which suggests an entrance into death, or a gas oven, below which delicately modeled plants grow. On the one hand, it implies the horror of death; on the other, it pays homage to those who died and implies rebirth.

Kaish, who has received many honors, is chairperson of the Department of Sculpture and Painting at Columbia University. In the 1980s her reawakened interest in light and color led her back to collages and paintings, shown at the Staempfli Gallery, New York. Some are burned and torn, pulled back in layers that reveal a burst of white light, evocative of the same sense of spiritual revelation found in her sculpture.

**Barbara Hult Lekberg (1925-)** developed a flexible, innovative technique of welding strips of steel, one-sixteenth of an inch wide, into dynamic expressionistic figures. They seem "to live in the focus of a cyclone, striving against nature's forces."<sup>77</sup>

Born in Portland, Oregon, Lekberg studied at the University of Iowa with Philip Guston and Mauricio Lasansky, and took sculpture with Humbert Albrizio (M.A., 1947). In 1948 she came to New York City and learned to weld from Sahl Swarz at the Sculpture Center, exhibiting there from 1952 on.