

the art of  
elias friedensohn articles & reviews



# the art of elias friedensohn

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## Elias Friedensohn – Airports and Escapes; Paintings and Drawings, 1987-1991

Exhibition curated by  
A. Robert Birmelin  
in association with the Art  
Department and the  
Godwin-Ternbach Museum  
at Queens College

March 31-April 30, 1993  
Queens College Art Center  
Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library  
City University of New York  
65-30 Kissena Boulevard  
Flushing, New York 11367

Gallery Hours:  
Monday-Thursday, 9 AM to 8 PM  
Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM  
April 5 to 9: 9 AM to 5 PM

For information,  
call [718] 997-3770  
Public Lecture by  
A. Robert Birmelin  
Wednesday, April 21, 1993  
1 PM, Klapper Hall 401

Artwork photography  
by Howard Nathanson  
Portrait of Elias Friedensohn, 1985,  
by Carol Kitman  
Catalog design by Marvin Hoshino  
Printing by Washburn Graphics

**T**HE idea for this exhibition goes back to the time immediately following Elias Friedensohn's retirement from Queens College. After years of happy encounters, many of them witnessed by his powerful painting *The Secret* that electrified the Art Library in old Klapper Hall, Eli was sorely missed. But conversations on the telephone continued, many connected with his research for the fascinating articles in which he re-discovered the sixteenth-century sculptor Philippe Hodart. In one of these talks an exhibition of Eli's art was first proposed for Queens College, the school bound with his life in art where he nurtured a generation of students. Eli's interest was, alas, checked by his illness. With deep sorrow, we realize this exhibition as commemorative. With lasting joy in his work and in his memory, we present Elias Friedensohn's strong, eloquent, thought-provoking art.

This exhibition would not have been possible without Doris Friedensohn. We are most grateful to A. Robert Birmelin, curator of the exhibition, for the great contribution of his many labors, and to Marvin Hoshino for the design of this catalog. We express our gratitude to Frank E. Witt, Class of 1959, for his generous gift toward the catalog's publication. Additional funding was provided by Acting Provost Elizabeth S. Boylan, Dean John H. Reilly, the Art Department, and the Godwin-Ternbach Museum's Norbert Schimmel Endowment for Museum Educational Programming.

Happily, the exhibition and catalog have benefitted from the efforts of many individuals: Mario J. DellaPina, Director of Development; Ron Cannava, Director of Public Relations; members of the Queens College Publications Office; Blair Birmelin; and Nancy A. Williams. As always, Alexandra de Luise, Curator of the Art Center, and Ellie Glick, the Museum's Assistant Curator, have skillfully executed the myriad exhibition preparations, with the assistance of our volunteers.

Along with President Shirley Strum Kenny and the Museum's Board of Trustees, we join in saluting Elias Friedensohn's artistic achievement.

Suzanna Simor, Director  
Queens College Art Center

Marilyn L. Simon, Director/Curator  
Godwin-Ternbach Museum

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## A Commemorative Exhibition

**E**LIAS FRIEDENSOHN was a graduate of Queens College and returned to serve on the faculty of the Art Department from 1959 until his retirement in 1987. As chairman in the early 1960s, he was a major force in building the department. He was a generous and charismatic teacher, who shared his insights into the creative process with a generation of art students. A painter and sculptor of distinction, he exhibited widely and is represented in a number of public collections.

Friedensohn's imaginative, often fantastical imagery ranged from the lyrically beautiful to the ferociously satirical. He was a man who understood the drama of ideas – ideas about art and literature and history. But what most attracted him was the enigma of the human character with its capacity for destruction and evil and its equal capacity for love and constructive work. He was a complicated man, at times whimsical, at times gripped by an apocalyptic vision as he sought to embody his ideas in visual form.

His airport series, the paintings done in the last years of his life, are haunting images and perhaps his finest, most poignant artistic statement. Waiting passengers gaze out onto runways on which stand strange, bulging jet planes. Friedensohn has painted himself among the travelers. The theme is departure; a recognition of our larger human condition and of the artist's own mortality – a reminder that we all are in transit together on a common journey.

A. Robert Birmelin



*Connecting Flight*, 1991, oil on canvas, 32 x 36 in.