

# the art of elias friedensohn

1924–1991

This monthly newsletter is produced by the Estate of Elias Friedensohn.

Among our goals are to showcase the originality and diversity of the artist's work and to circulate comments on the paintings and sculpture by critics, artists, friends and fans.

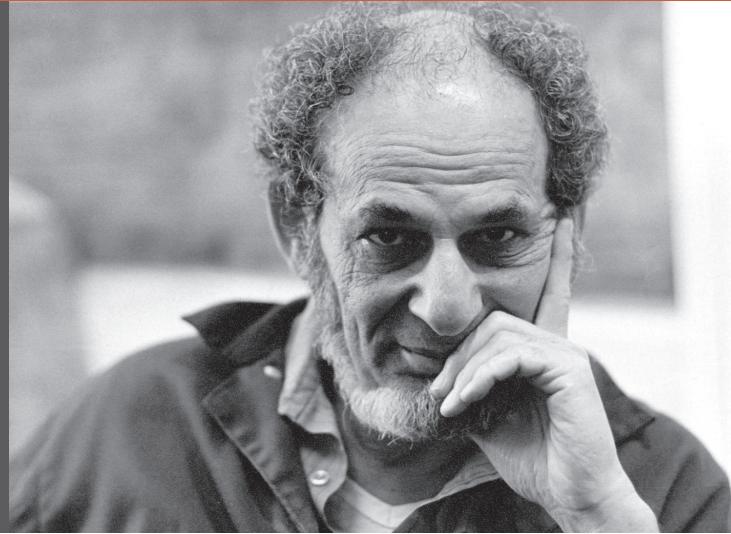


PHOTO BY CAROL KITMAN

## About the Artist and This Issue

A native New Yorker and long time resident of Leonia, NJ, Elias Friedensohn began exhibiting in 1951. He joined the Queens College, CUNY, Art Department in 1959 and retired as Professor Emeritus of Art in 1987.

Over the course of four decades, he had more than 40 one-person shows of paintings and sculpture. In addition to solo exhibits in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Berkeley, his work has appeared in major national shows at the Corcoran Gallery, The Whitney Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago,

the Smithsonian Institution, and many others. Articles on his work have been published in *Art News*, *Art Forum*, *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine* and many other newspapers and magazines.

**Issue #6** of the Friedensohn Newsletter highlights the *Utopia* paintings. A response to a trip to Crete in 1973, these works explore isolation, togetherness, and nature's mysteries. Friedensohn's figures occupy a timeless-seeming world where they dream of love and community.

### Current gallery show:

## Hat Block Sculptures and Crows

Works by Elias Friedensohn



### Luise Ross Gallery

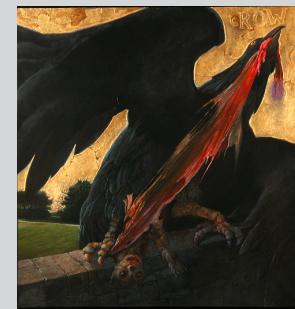
547 West 27 Street, #504  
New York, NY 10001

#### Dates:

8 March – 9 April

#### Opening:

Saturday, March 19, 3 – 5 p.m.



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**Tower of Babel**

Oil on canvas | 60" h x 80" w | 1977

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### The Tower of Babel

By Elias Friedensohn, *circa* 1986

The Hippies, living rent free in the Caves of Crete, play at being gods. Eternally youthful, they make love, drink ouzo, and smoke pot. They spend hours oiling themselves, transforming their bodies into animate bronze statues. A polyglot mix, they speak many tongues. They are the builders of "The Tower of Babel," an architecturally impossible symbol of hubris and disorder. They build without knowledge of the past, without art or calculation. The primitive tower they have constructed is doomed, exposed to the wash of the sea like the sand castles of children.

Is this hippie community real? Does it have its own secret harmony? Are they, these hippies, outside of time?

I confess that their escape from reality is also mine. In many of these Crete paintings, I allowed myself to believe in such a dream. I envisioned a gentle harmony with nature. I willed the forms to be serene and still, but I made them subtly false under the pellucid blue of the Mediterranean sky. In truth, Utopia is not within the purview of men and women, however much we may long for it.

### Cape Litenon II

**A**n air of mystery resonates beneath the muted pastels and pink sunrise or sunset in Cape Litenon II. A lone figure, his back to us, shields his eyes and gazes towards the horizon, while one of the two other figures, seen in profile, stares down toward the beach and the other, in three quarter view, faces the long-distance gazer.

What is the story here? And does there need to be one? Eli would have admired us in our efforts to make sense of the images for ourselves. . .and probably would have smiled upon hearing our theories and asked us to tell him more.

I was taught, in part by Eli, to do research, and my research tells me that this promontory may be where Arab pirates alighted to conquer Crete. Are these three defending the isle, arrested before action, or are they pirates having shed their garb so as to be Edenic in their new home.

There are no doubt varied truths, if there can be such a thing, discoverable in the scene. For me, the beach beckons and the juxtaposition of blues, pinks, rocks, sand and water, fills me with a desire to be among those figures, languidly alert, possibly filled with despair and hope at the same time. But there are three, a more complicated number than one or even two. Do they connect? Not apparently, and yet there is longing in their nakedness. Has one just dropped a towel onto a rock and emerged into partial light? Is he our hero caught in a moment before he acts?

I can imagine Eli smiling.

—Rita Jacobs



**Cape Litenon II**

Oil on canvas

48" h x 60" w

1976



Stavros  
Oil on Canvas  
38" h x 48" w  
1974

### Stavros: In a Utopian Season

A tall blond woman strolls across a strip of rocky beach. She is naked, and so is the tall man, wearing a straw hat, who walks beside her. (Disclosure: I am that woman, and the man with me is my husband, the painter.) For people vacationing on this tranquil beach at Stavros, we seem unexpectedly grave. What were we thinking?

The island of Crete, where we spent three weeks in 1973, seduced and unsettled us. Zeus was born in this dazzling place; Aphrodite bathed in these blue waters. The Minoans -- beginning some 2,000 years ago -- built sprawling villas decorated with frescoes. Inspecting the remains of the Palace at Knossos, we wondered: were these ruins a measure of human talent? Vanity? Capacity for violence?

From our apartment overlooking the Port of Chania, Crete's second city, we watched the sun rise each morning and the fishing boats depart. The air was fragrant with rosemary. We lingered in bed before heading to the beach. Often, we spotted hippies camping in caves. They smoked pot and oiled themselves like gods. They're intruders, my husband announced, and besotted with pleasure. Were we any different?

Back home in the studio, he struggled to determine the scale of the figures in the landscape. How does Man figure in the presence of Nature? Were we foolish to imagine this Utopia as ours? "Stavros," I believe, is a hopeful painting. In making our two figures the same height as the mountains, Eli celebrated human striving and the magic of love.

—Doris Friedensohn

**Books now available (please see next page) ▼**

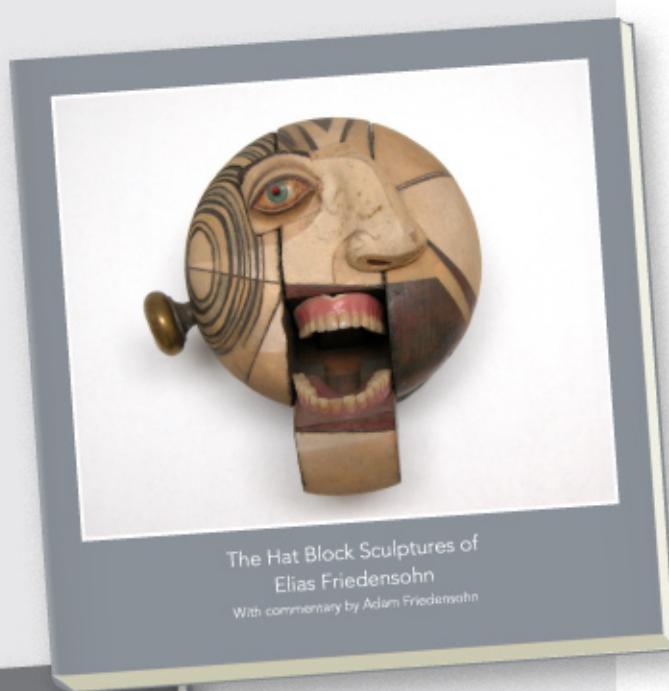
## Books

**Two full-color books  
on work by Elias  
Friedensohn are  
available for order:**

*The Hat Block Sculptures of Elias Friedensohn*, designed and with text by Adam Friedensohn

and

*The True Book of Crows*,  
designed by Shola Friedensohn and with text by Elias Friedensohn



**These handsome books illuminate two aspects of this multi-faceted artist's oeuvre.**

**Price:** each book is \$65, which includes shipping and handling; add 7% NJ sales tax of \$4.55.

**TOTAL PRICE:** \$69.55

**To order, please contact:**

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