

# 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.

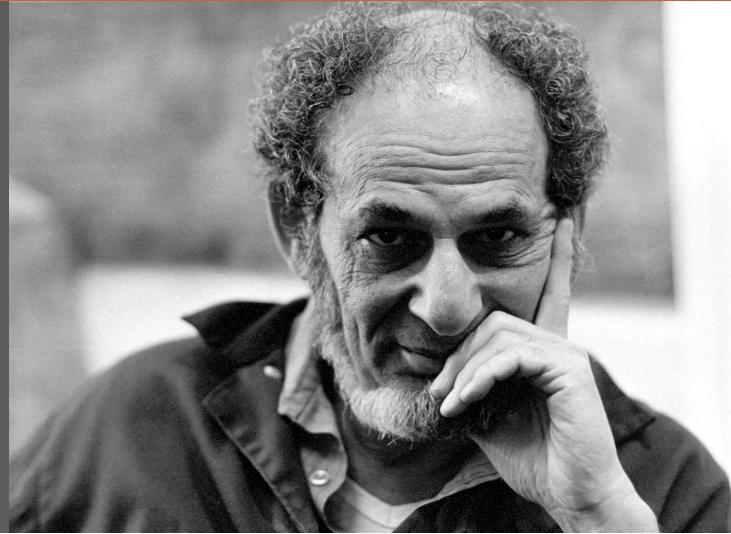


PHOTO BY CAROL KITMAN

## About the Artist

A native New Yorker and long time resident of Leonia, NJ, Elias Friedensohn began exhibiting in 1951. Over the course of four decades, he had more than 40 one-person shows of paintings and sculpture.

After graduating from the High School of Music and Art in 1942, Friedensohn attended the Tyler School of Fine Arts at Temple University. He served with the army in Europe during World War II, received his B.A. from Queens College (CUNY) in 1948 and studied at the Institute of Fine Arts of NYU from 1949 to 1951. He joined the Queens College Art Department in 1959 and retired as Professor Emeritus of Art in 1987.

In addition to one-person exhibits in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Berkeley, Friedensohn's work has appeared in major national shows at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, The Whitney Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, the Smithsonian Institution and many others. His paintings and sculpture are represented in many permanent collections, including the Whitney Museum, the Sara Roby Foundation, the Minneapolis Museum of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum. Articles on the work

have appeared in *Art News*, *Art Forum*, *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Time Magazine* and other publications.

He was the recipient of several prestigious awards including a Guggenheim grant, a Fulbright to Italy, and American Academy of Arts and Letters award, and grants from the New Jersey Council on the Arts.

## About This Issue:

**Issue #7 of the Elias Friedensohn newsletter features some of the Ten Plagues leading to the Jews' Exodus from Egypt. Friedensohn's suffering grotesques seem particularly alive in this era of late modern plagues—from tsunamis to terrorism and Ebola. Imagine how he might have painted Zika or the Syrian refugees.**



Locusts

Watercolor

12 1/4" h x 9" w

Circa 1983

### Friedensohn's "Fierce Haggadah"

Let's begin with the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. About 3,500 years ago, "to let my people go," God assaulted the Egyptians with Ten Plagues. Or so the story goes. Out of this rich weave of mystery, violence and moral ambiguity, Israel was born. We dare not trivialize it or make it 'nice' in any conventional sense. We cannot run away; we must wrestle with it.

As Elias Friedensohn has written: "There is in the Haggadah a wealth of fierce Biblical material which seems to be either ignored or dealt with obliquely...as though to spare everyone's

(Continued) ▼

Friedensohn's "Fierce Haggadah"

*(Continued)*

sensibilities." He chose to plunge in, "to design a fierce Haggadah...fierce both in the depiction of evils and, by contrast, fierce in the quality of jubilation."

I want to suggest that it is the genius of Friedensohn's provocative images of the plagues that they collapse these binaries; they force us to confront an infernal union of jubilation and evil: a Dante-esque comedy.

Let us consider the biblical source: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go in to Pharoah; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show those signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your son's son how I have made sport of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them; that you may know that I am the Lord."

*(Continued)* ▼

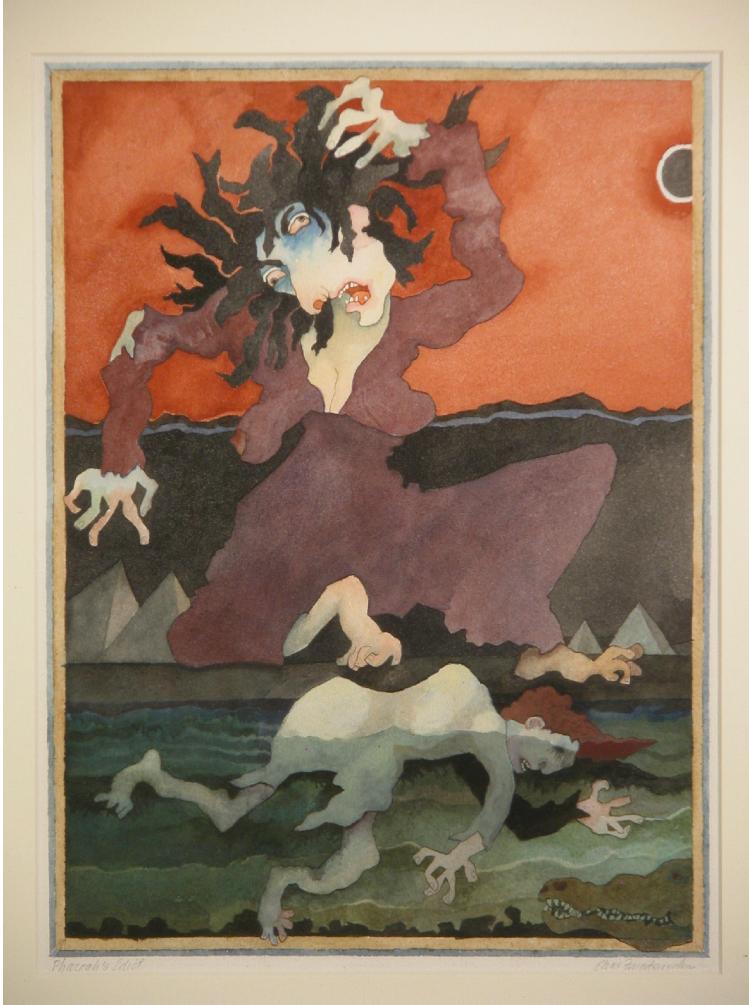


*Angel of Death with Harvest*

Watercolor

12 1/4" h x 9" w

1983



**The First Born, in Water**

Watercolor

12" h x 9" w

Circa 1983

### Friedensohn's "Fierce Haggadah"

*(Continued)*

"Sport"? A scholar, commenting on the Hebrew verb, hit'allel, says it means "to act with capricious power". Another scholar suggests "I toyed". Rashi, the famous 10th century expicator, offers "I laughed at". Mockery, it seems, is the controlling emotion. But who is laughing at whom?

When I look at these de-humanized, tortured mortals writhing in pain, it's almost more than I can bear. Am I looking in a mirror? Have I, as a Jew, created this hell by demanding satisfaction, justice, and revenge for what was done to me and my people? Is this my fantasy? Or God's? Does this 'comedy' require Henri Bergson's "anesthesia of the heart"? The cycle of questions cannot be stopped. Is this not the process set in motion only by the best art?

—Charles Persky

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

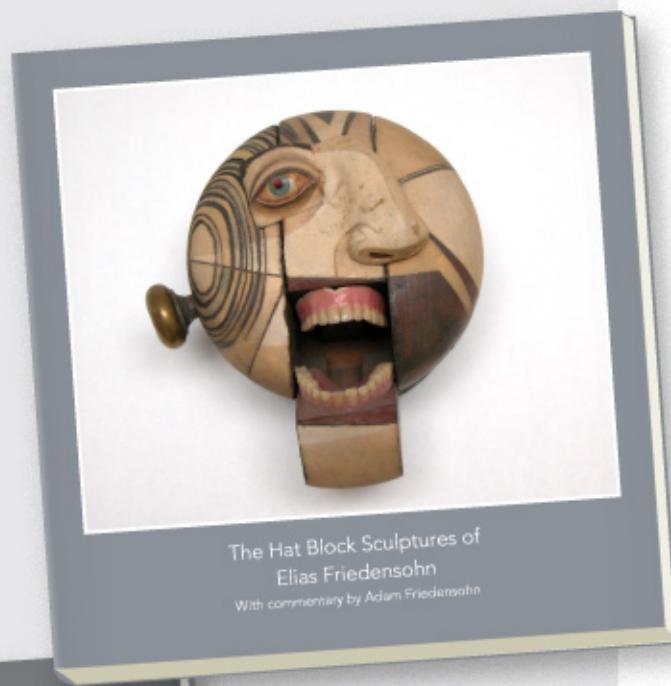
## Books

**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:**

doris.friedensohn@verizon.net with your order. She will request your mailing address  
and check. Your order will be shipped directly to the address you provide.

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