

# 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.

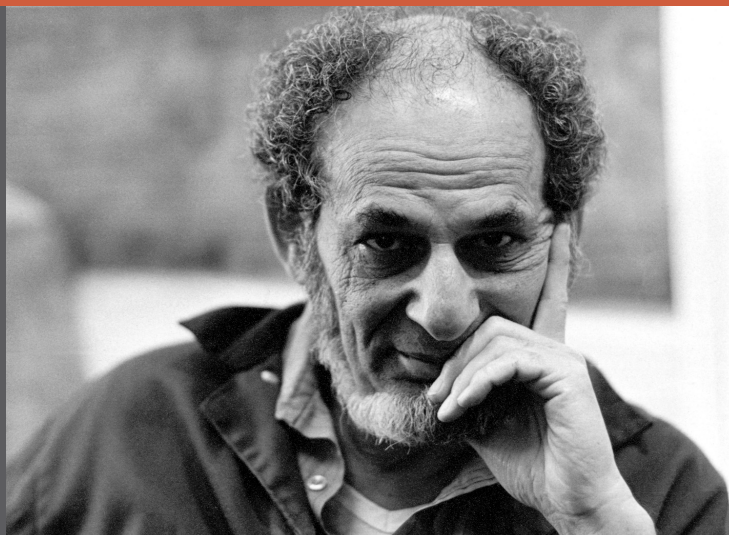


PHOTO BY CAROL KITMAN

## 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, an American Academy of Arts and Letters award, and grants from the New Jersey Council on the Arts.

## About This Issue:

**Issue #8 begins an exploration of Friedensohn's Apocalypse paintings. Responding to a late '60's sense of impending anarchy, the painter contrasts the ugly inner life with the serene visible self. Pure bottled water masks pollution. Buyers of Rose Soap feel beautiful. Advertising is us.**

## Advertisements for Apocalypse: Some Words of Introduction

By Elias Friedensohn

When I began this series, the Sixties were coming to an end. Along with many artists and intellectuals, I was revolted by decadence extolled and the glorification of doomsday dreams. While the Vietnam War continued along with the struggle against racism, extreme responses on the Right and Left took on apocalyptic dimensions. Violence, terrorism, race riots, assassinations, and sexual revolutions: all the complacently held values of the past were under attack.

This snarl of social and political issues propelled me into my own, very particular Apocalypse. I chose images from the past that would give my work a meditative distance: early Goya with the incipient madness of innocent children playing games; the late Mannerists like Barocci with their arbitrary color harmonies and theatrical affectations; gilded medieval altarpieces for the hard sell of faith; and early 20th century advertising cards with their cloying falsity.

The advertising cards had a special allure. They promoted soaps and nostrums for health. From the cards I borrowed the smile, the pretty color, and the game of seducing the viewer. My self-appointed task was to present the Apocalypse as tempting, even beautiful. The “sell” is hidden in aids to health and beauty like *Rose Soap* and *Swanson's Cod Liver Oil*. Grass is healthier than tobacco. Pure Bottled Water masks pollution. The Apocalypse, as I saw it, offers peace in the loss of self.



How could I render the evil of our times? I began by painting classical figures in grisaille to suggest corruption and lingering death. Color, as a token of life, appeared in orange stockings, gold bracelets and advertising lettering along with flowers, fish, halos and the sun. Borrowing from Pop Art, I wanted things to appear more animate than humans; and I wanted the flesh to be weirdly, sweetly succulent.

Swanson's Cod Liver Oil

Oil on canvas

74"h x 60"w

1968/1988

## Pure and Sweet, She Uses Rose Soap

By Elias Friedensohn

*Pure and Sweet, She Uses Rose Soap* sells cleanliness as a civilized disguise. Our lady floats in a shower of perfumed blossoms. Pure and sweet, she shaves her crotch. Once upon a time in our culture, a hairless crotch suggested innocence. Nowadays the shaved crotch might be preparation for making a pornographic film. It's an imitation of pre-puberty, of purity awaiting violation.

What liquid is in the bowl? Is it for a douche? Has she urinated?



*She Uses Rose Soap*

Oil on canvas

60"h x 50"w

1968/1988





Secaucus River  
Bottled Waters

Oil on canvas  
74"h x 60"w  
1968/1988

### Secaucus River Bottled Waters

By Elias Friedensohn

*Secaucus River Bottled Waters* is a cautionary tale. The Lady of the Waters urinates into the Secaucus River, which runs along the New Jersey Turnpike through a vast area of refineries and chemical plants. A half century ago, the town was famous for producing pigs. Old timers remember the smell. Now, signs of industrial pollution fill the atmosphere. Filtered by the sun's rays, the fumes create a strangely beautiful, yellow-pink light—as well as dazzling sunsets of intense oranges and yellows, pinks and reds. The once pure waters have turned poisonous green.

Surrounding the Lady-Goddess, several figures wallow in a riverbed of caked, cracked mud. They swim, dog paddle, dive in and gaze upward. The Goddess' minions are expressionless. Are they innocent victims, fools or both?

Is there a lesson here about the dominion of evil? Pure bottled water masks pollution. The inner life is ugly, even insane, but the outer self exhibits a serene and smiling schizophrenia.

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

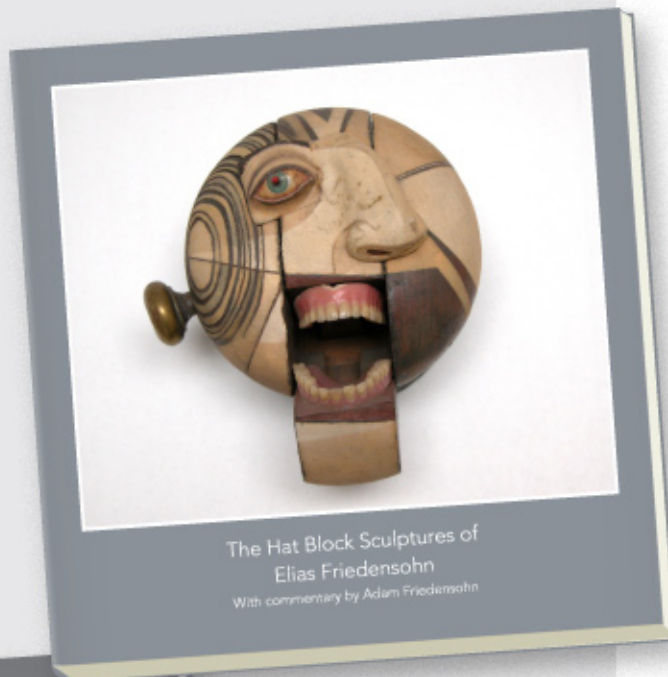
## Books

**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, phone number (for delivery purposes) and check. Your order will be shipped directly to the address you provide.

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