

# the art of elias friedensohn

1924—1991

## Drawing on the Imagination



Maine  
Landscape #2

Charcoal on paper  
28 1/2"h x 22"w  
Circa 1962

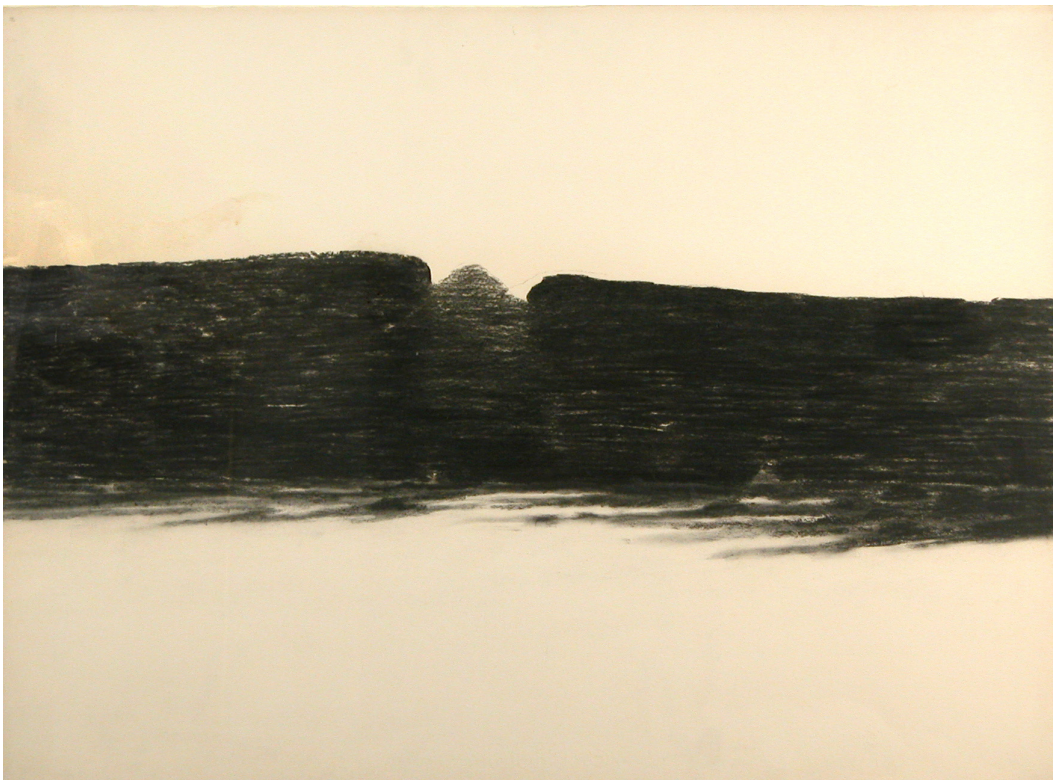
Elias Friedensohn has left us a significant body of work. His figurative allegories in a variety of styles play with a range of human emotion from love to savagery. These charcoal drawings are the sole exception—a moment of intense involvement with specific aspects of nature. Inspired by the tidal shore, he did them over several summers in the early 1960's on Deer Isle, Maine, then stopped abruptly.

(Continued) ▼

## the art of elias friedensohn

He would walk across the blueberry field from his rented house and go along the edge of the water to the old ferryboat landing he used as a studio, all the while watching the big, late summer tides lapping at the shore of the Reach, that part of Penobscot Bay, which runs between the island and the mainland. The incoming tide formed inlets that slowly widened until, six hours later, the whole beach was covered with water right up to the low sandstone cliffs. Eli studied this tidal progress day after day, from beginning to end and back again, and drew from it some fifty images, many of them seemingly repetitive. The four I've chosen struck me as a sort of culmination—neater and more controlled, but also more dramatic.

Looking at them, I saw that the light of the water and the dark of the sand were arranged so as to give the spectator some distance from the scene in order to appreciate the angle at which it should be viewed. In fact the shoreline that nature offered, meandering and littered with rocks, struck me as having been traced by the purposeful hand of an architect. The first of the four pieces (*Maine Landscape #5*, first page) showed a large vertical slope of sand, darkest at the bottom, with a cove just glimpsed behind. Only when I came right up to the surface was I aware that the image had changed: I was staring down through darkly tinted water at high tide. The graphic technique was flawless: stroke after stroke in measured pressure, lightening as I looked upward, the water appearing as still as the shadowed sand had been a moment before. (Continued) ▼



Maine Landscape #5, "The Notch" | Charcoal on paper | Xx"h x Xx"w | Circa 1962



The second drawing titled 'The Notch' (*Maine Landscape #5*, previous page) plays with the way a viewer distinguishes distance between his position on one shore and the shore of a neighboring island. In the simple horizon portrayed there is a central cleft through which the summit of a faraway hill is sighted. Very close up, the arrangement flattens and seems to suggest the outline of the female clitoris—a very different sort of close-up.

The third drawing, (*Maine Landscape #1*, this page) a vertical one, is peaceful—a wide cove seen from above and at an angle, my proximity seeming to deliver much the same effect as the first drawing: the shadowed sand showing itself covered with dark tidal water. (Continued) ▼



**Maine Landscape #1**

Charcoal on paper

30"h x 22"w

Circa 1962



Maine Landscape #6 | Charcoal on paper | 22"h x 30"w | Circa 1962

The fourth drawing (*Maine Landscape #6*, this page) built to a different and beautiful effect: a big pile of large boulders, from a distance seeming to be blacker than the blackest black, rose to just interrupt the view of a small distant inlet. But on moving close, I saw the rocks submerged, their surfaces draped with seaweed and sparkling with reflected sunlight. Eli had turned 'nature' to his own ends.

In his book-length *Secrets Of Elias Friedensohn: A Painter's Reflections on Making Art* (unpublished), he commented in his ironic way on a large painting called 'The Mutual Trust Company': "In 'Mutual Trust' he writes, "two heads are flying away from the bodies which are, in turn, wrenched apart. Is their split a function of ecstasy," he asks, "or an external sundering? Is it a double suicide or the double "little death" of love? The uncertainty is not just the viewer's." A true confession. Eli felt his own allegories deeply. He threw himself into them. Even into, or onto, the Maine shoreline.

—Blair Birmelin



## Intimate Communion



**Rocks and Jetty, #3**

Charcoal on paper

30"h x 22"w

Circa 1962

When my parents rented a house on Deer Isle for the summers in the early- to mid-1960s, I would join them for a week or two when school was over. During that time my father was drawing his Maine landscapes.

This series strikes me as among the most beautiful of all his works. The charcoals hang on the wall without pretense; they are bold in their simplicity, and they exhale serenity. They transform a room into a quiet, meditative space.

*(Continued)* ▼



Untitled (Maine  
Landscape)

Charcoal on paper  
22"h x 30"w  
Circa 1962

My father spoke to me about trying to get the white of the paper to take on a shape ("negative space") which described the plane of the water and the limitless sky at the same time; the horizon is only implied, not seen. The white of the water and sky bends from the pressure of the black shapes drawn by the charcoal.

The landscape was often shrouded in fog. Color was reduced to monochromatic grays. Where did everything go? My father conveyed mystery in the loss of detail in distant vistas. We are left in intimate communion with the most elemental of natural shapes: nothing but the land, sea and fog. For the moment, we are safe.

—Shola Friedensohn

**NOTE: We will be taking a break in July. The next newsletter will be produced in August.**

**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.

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

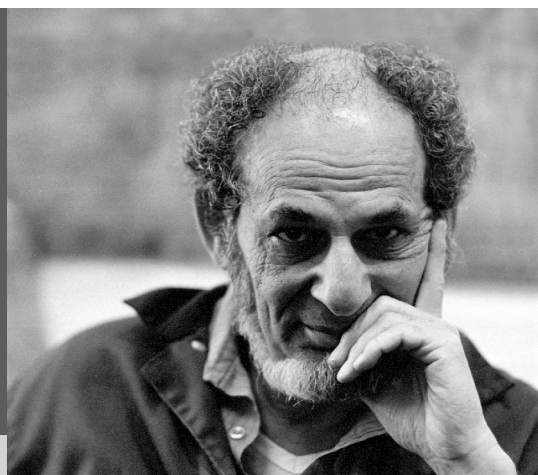


PHOTO BY CAROL KITMAN

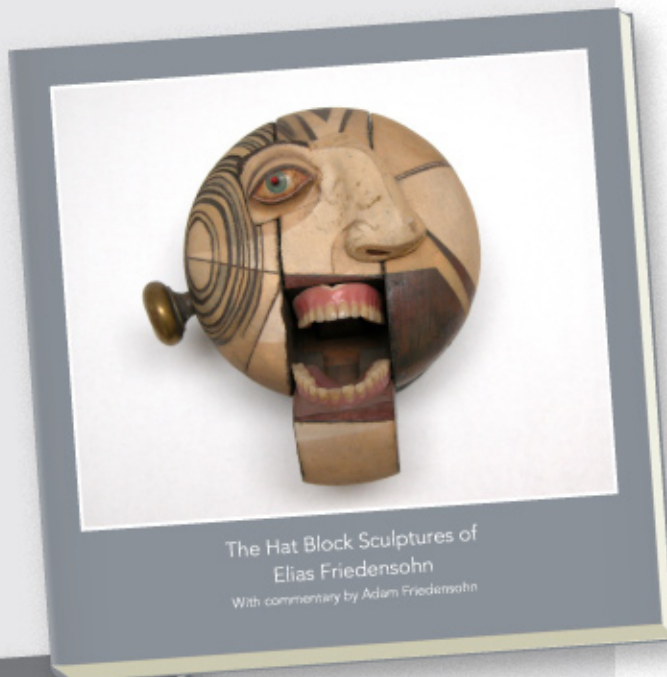
## Books

**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.**

### **New price:**

each book is \$50, which includes shipping and handling; add 7% NJ sales tax of \$3.50.

**TOTAL PRICE: \$53.50**

### **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.

© Copyright 2013 Trust of Elias Friedensohn. Reproduction of any of the works within prohibited without permission.

**Design:**  
Shola Friedensohn

**Technical Support:**  
Rahula Friedensohn,  
Sapana Shakya

**Contributors to this issue:**  
*Blair Birmelin* is a novelist and playwright who also writes about literature and art.

*Shola Friedensohn*, Elias's daughter, is a graphic designer. She shows her drawings yearly in the Cambridge MA open studios