

Jacob Berenstein

Contemporary Sculpture from Israel

DECEMBER 23, 1999 - MARCH 5, 2000

Haggerty Museum of Art

Marquette University ~ Milwaukee, Wisconsin

PREFACE

This exhibition of contemporary sculpture by Israeli artist Jacob Berenstein was organized with the help of co-curator Max Lahyani who initially introduced me to the artist. The exhibition was assembled swiftly with the thoughtful cooperation of Berenstein and Lahyani. During initial visits to the artist's studio in Tel Aviv, Israel in November of 1999, a wide range of works was made available for selection. The works that were chosen for the Haggerty exhibition are organized around a common theme of recycled industrial materials. These materials are deftly assembled to enable the artist to draw attention to societal concerns facing the world today. I was particularly impressed with the artist's craftsmanship in assembling found objects and with his efforts to transform industrial waste products into meaningful artistic statements.

The year 2000 in Milwaukee has been designated as a year of celebration of Jewish Heritage. This exhibition, together with *Radiant Inner Light: Multi-Media Performance Installation* represents the Haggerty Museum's contribution to this city wide celebration of Jewish culture. We are honored to join our colleagues in the Milwaukee arts community by offering these exhibitions and related performances to celebrate the many-faceted enrichments found in historic and contemporary Jewish culture.

Curtis L. Carter
Director

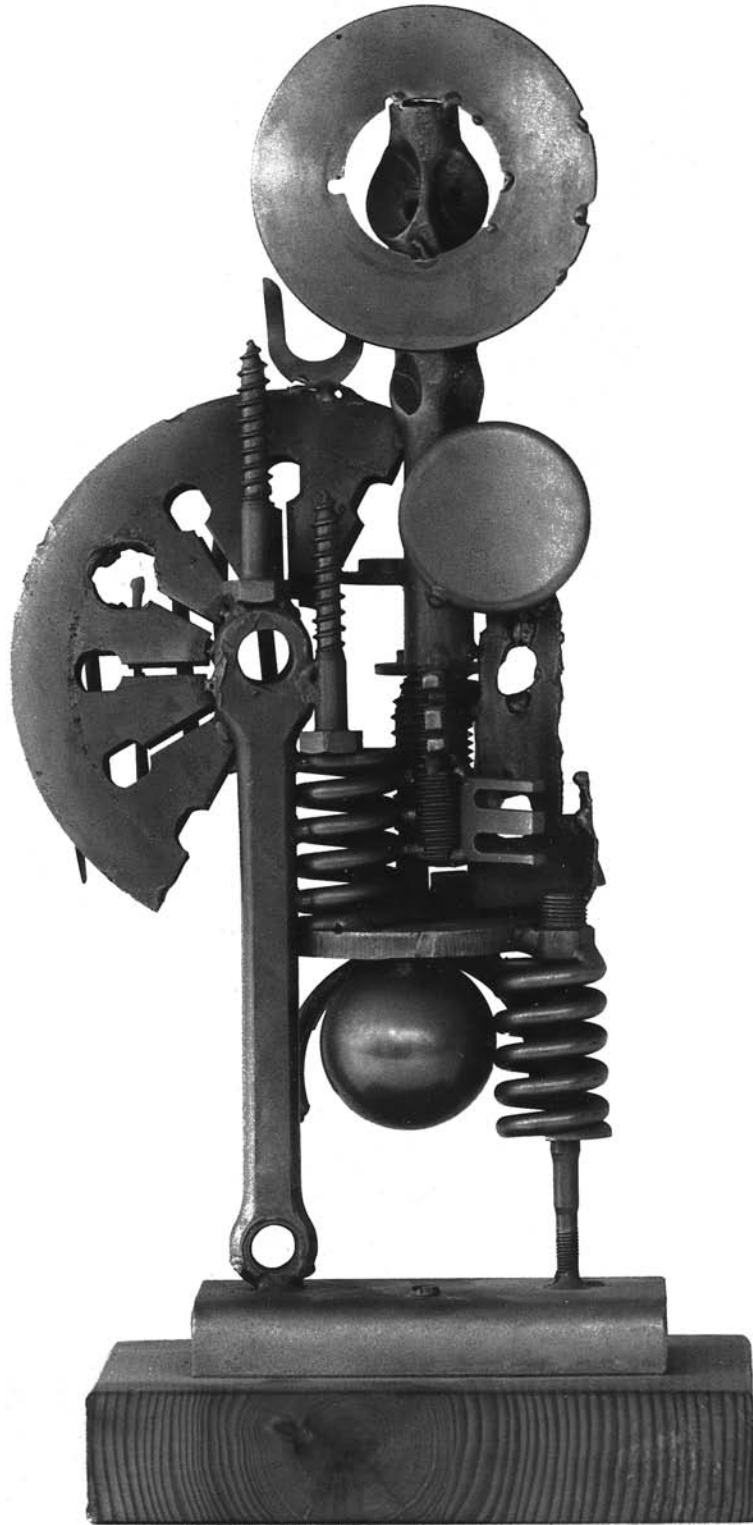
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jacob Berenstein: Contemporary Sculpture from Israel has been made possible by vital corporate, foundation, and individual contributions. Special thanks go to the artist for his cooperation. The generous support of The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Program Endowment, Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani, Geneva, and Mr. Nathaniel Zelazo of Astronautics Corporation of America are acknowledged with gratitude.

Members of the Haggerty Staff contributed to all aspects of this exhibition. Lee Coppernoll coordinated public programming and arranged docent-led tours; Annemarie Sawkins assisted in curating the exhibition; James Kieselburg acted as registrar; Steven Anderson, assisted by Tim Dykes installed the exhibition; Jerome Fortier designed the catalogue; Paul Amitai coordinated publicity; Joyce Ashley and Nicole Hauser provided administrative support; and Clayton Montez coordinated security.

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Jacob Berenstein, *Barbar*, 1984-85
Steel with iron scraps
16 x 7 5/8 x 5 in. (base 1 3/8 in.)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani

JACOB BERENSTEIN SCULPTURE

Curtis L. Carter

Sculpture has been characterized as the art of representing observed or imagined objects in solid materials and in three dimensions (Encyclopedia Britannica 1958: Vol. 20, 198). Understood in this traditional sense, sculpture is one of the oldest art forms, encompassing works found in prehistoric caves as well as classical and modern forms. Traditional sculptors use such materials as wood, stone, clay, marble, and metals including bronze. Modern and contemporary sculptors use these materials and a wide range of others including kinetic motion, light, and sound. Industrial technology has provided plastics and other fabricated materials including discarded industrial products. The techniques of classical sculpture include carving, modeling, and casting. Assemblage which requires dismantling existing objects, and reassembling the components is one of many techniques employed in making sculpture in the twentieth century.

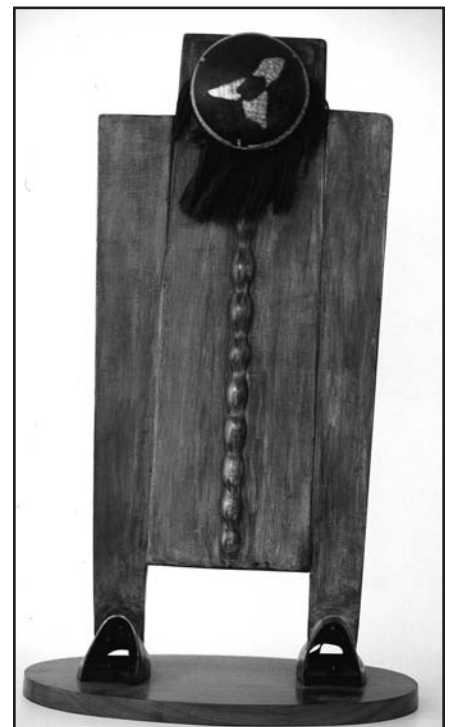
From the beginning of the twentieth century, the new industrial products of the Machine Age have had an important place in sculpture. Particularly in America and Europe, the machine functioned as a symbol in art, sometimes replacing the human form. This development occurred as the machine helped define a non-traditional culture based on production, consumption, and most importantly change. These changes have been documented in exhibitions and catalogues, most notably Alfred Barr's 1934 Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *Machine Art*¹ and *The Machine Age in America* at the Brooklyn Museum in 1987.²

Machine-produced and inspired artifacts are celebrated in the works of the Futurists for their manifestations of speed, energy, and rebellion against traditional forms. For the Dadaists' machine objects are associated with conceptual statements, often laced with wit and irony. Francis Picabia's object portraits, as illustrated in his *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité*, 1915 features a spark plug as its main feature. Morton Schamberg mounts a plumbing trap on a miter box and labels it *God*, ca. 1918. In Surrealist art, these objects are metaphors of the unconscious and of dream states.

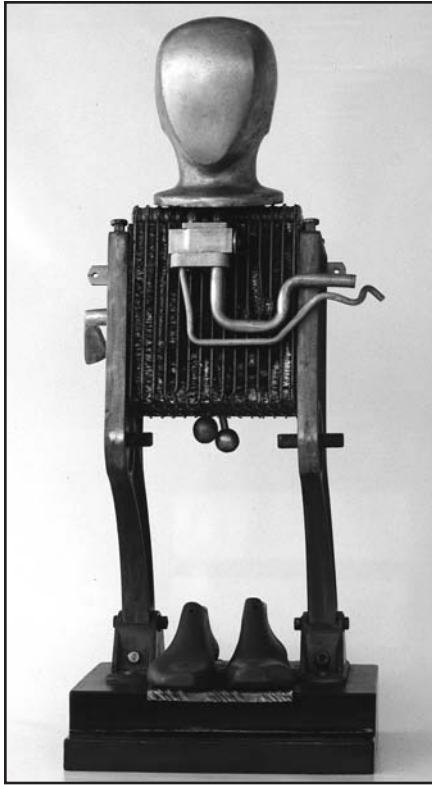
With industrial production aimed at consumption comes waste in the form of obsolete, discarded machines and other industrial products. The result is a new source of materials for making art. This circumstance provided new opportunities for



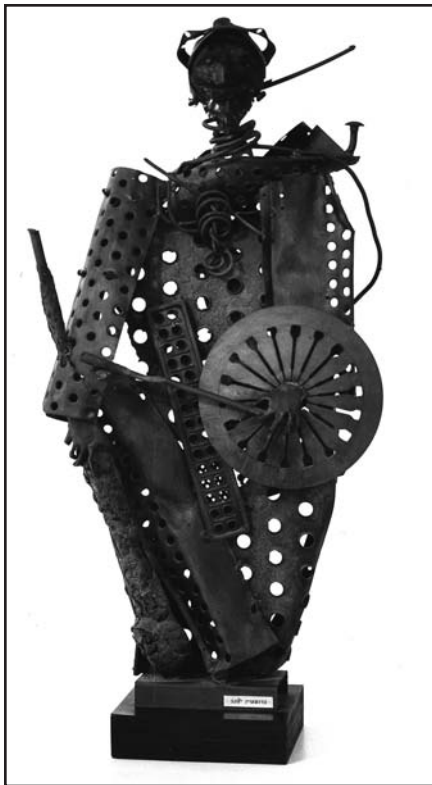
Jacob Berenstein, *The Key Man*, 1995-96 (front view)
Wood, cloth, found objects
26 3/8 x 15 1/4 x 7 1/4 in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani



Jacob Berenstein, *The Key Man*, 1995-96 (rear view)
Wood, cloth, found objects
26 3/8 x 15 1/4 x 7 1/4 in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani



Jacob Berenstein, *The Spectator: After DeChirico*, 1999
 Cast aluminum, found objects
 36 x 15 1/4 x 12 in.
 Collection of the Artist



Jacob Berenstein, *Gallant Warrior*, 1984-85
 Iron (bent and cut)
 33 1/4 x 17 1/4 x 10 3/4 in. (base 2 x 2 x 8 in.)
 Collection of the Artist

artists such as Israeli sculptor Jacob Berenstein. (Early in the twentieth century, Kurt Schwitters also drew inspiration from refuse materials for his collages.)

Like many other present day citizens of Israel, Berenstein is an immigrant. He emigrated to Israel from the Ukraine, in 1950 at age 13. His ideas concerning sculpture initially grew out of his understanding of the materials based on studies in technical school and subsequently from working with metals in the foundry and the machine shop. (Berenstein still spends three days each week working in a machine shop.) Later, he mastered the classical techniques of casting, but his most successful works are achieved through cutting, welding, and assemblage. His training and work as a graphic designer perhaps contributed to the strong sense of design that presides throughout his sculpture.

Berenstein's appreciation of the beauty of machines and industrial objects found in every day life forms an important element in his aesthetics of sculpture. His intent is to recycle the remains of discarded objects and create sculpture that expresses the beauty of the objects. He uses found objects, for example a car radiator forms a torso in *The Spectator*, 1999 (cat. no. 15) which also includes parts of an old seat from a movie theater and a pair of shoes. *Gallant Warrior*, 1984 (cat. no. 11) is constructed from bent and cut iron, and shows especially well the artist's facility with metals.

Refuse objects and scrap metals thus form the sculptural vocabulary assembled by the artist for his own expressive purposes. As with all art, the raw vocabulary selected by the artist is shaped by its cultural context. This is certainly true of Berenstein's sculptures. While some are no more than abstract assemblages, icons of the industrial age, others go much deeper into the culture that Israel now shares with the world. Without any hint of didacticism, Berenstein draws upon the rich historical symbolism of the Holy Land and Jewish heritage. *King David*, 1985, cut and welded iron, (cat. no. 2) unmistakably celebrates the Biblical character so important in the history of Israel. A figure called simply *Roman Warrior*, made of copper, iron and bronze, marks the presence of the Romans (Not in the exhibition). There is perhaps a reference to the Medieval crusaders who once battled on soil that is now modern Israel in *Gallant Warrior*, 1984-85 (cat. no. 11) made of bent and cut iron.

Although quietly expressed, a recurring theme in Berenstein's sculptures is the political strife and military threat facing modern day Israel. A military helmet whimsically positioned on top of a cricket made of copper and steel in *Cricket*

with Helmet, 1990 (cat. no. 8) appears in several other works. Dog tags from an Israeli soldier occupy a central place in *Lebanon*, 1990. This work recalls an incident involving military conflict within the Middle East. Constructed from recycled gas masks, *Compression of Time*, 1992 (cat. no. 5) contains unmistakable references to the Gulf War crisis of 1990-1991.

Not all of the sculptures bear such weighty symbolism. *The Key Man*, 1995-1996 (cat. no. 12) offers a satirical look at the pressures on contemporary world leaders. It is constructed with a finished wood block representing a human torso and adorned on the front with keys inserted in locks with a recycled gauge at the top measuring smoke detection. Attached to the back of *Key Man* is a yarmulke, linking the piece to a culturally specific setting. *Madonna*, 1993 (cat. no. 6) comprised of iron scraps and bronze, alludes to the pop singer, Madonna. The *Photographer*, 1999, is perhaps a reference to the paparazzi mania of our times. Together these works attest to the artist's humorous take on the icons of popular culture.

Berenstein's work is unfettered by complex art theories. Rather, his work is guided by a love of materials and a desire to transform the waste of the Machine Age into positive forms of human energy. He is endowed with a love of beautiful things and the talent to transform abandoned machine parts into objects of beauty. In accomplishing this, he reminds us of what is, after all, essential to art.

¹Alfred H Barr Jr. *Machine Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1934) n.p.

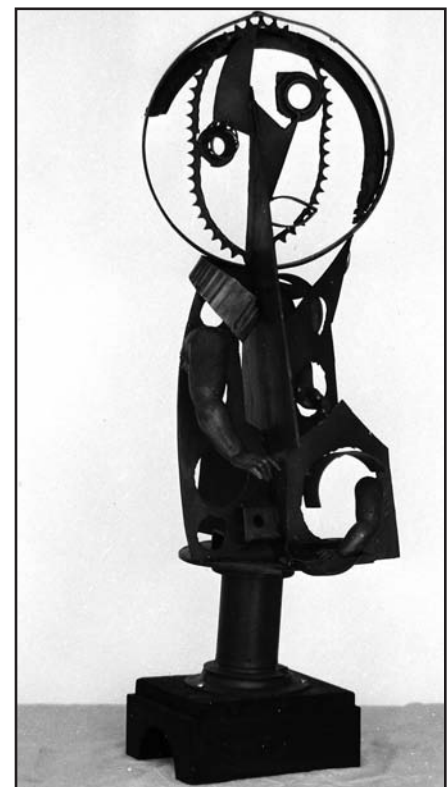
²Richard Guy Wilson, Dianne H. Pilgrim, and Dickran Tashuian, *The Machine Age in America, 1918-1941*. (The Brooklyn Museum and Harry N. Abrams, 1987).



Jacob Berenstein, *Compression of Time*, 1992
Recycled gas masks (Gulf War)
32 x 8 3/8 x 8 in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani



Jacob Berenstein, *Cricket with Helmet*, 1990
Copper and steel
30 x 15 1/4 x 15 1/4 in.
Collection of the Artist



Jacob Berenstein, *Madonna*, 1993
Bronze casting with iron scraps
26 3/8 x 10 x 8 3/4 in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani



Jacob Berenstein, *The Photographer*, 1999
 Aluminum, copper, found objects
 30 3/4 x 8 x 4 1/4 in. (base 1 5/8 x 9 1/4 x 5 5/8 in.)
 Collection of the Artist



Jacob Berenstein, *Leipzig*, 1994
 Brass scraps
 20 x 5 5/8 x 4 in. (base 2 1/4 in. high)
 Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani



Jacob Berenstein, *Acrobat*, 1987
 Scrap iron, mixed media
 10 3/4 x 8 x 2 3/8 in.
 Collection of the Artist



Jacob Berenstein, *Untitled*, 1999
 Aluminum
 15 7/8 x 7 5/8 x 3 1/4 in.
 Collection of the Artist



Jacob Berenstein, *King David*, 1985
Iron
36 x 24 x 8 7/8 in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

SCULPTURE

1. *Barbar*, 1984-85
Steel with iron scraps
16 x 7 ⁵/₈ x 5 in. (base 1 ³/₈ in.)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani
2. *King David*, 1985
Iron
36 x 24 x 8 ⁷/₈ in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani
3. *Untitled #1*, 1985
Metal scraps
14 ³/₈ x 6 ³/₈ x 5 ¹/₄ in. (base 1 ⁷/₈ in. high)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani
4. *Untitled #2*, 1987
Found objects
25 ¹/₄ x 8 ³/₈ x 4 ³/₄ in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani
5. *Compression of Time*, 1992
Recycled gas masks (Gulf War)
32 x 8 ³/₈ x 8 in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani
6. *Madonna*, 1993
Bronze casting with iron scraps
26 ³/₈ x 10 x 8 ³/₄ in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani
7. *Leipzig*, 1994
Brass scraps
20 ³/₄ x 5 ⁵/₈ x 4 in. (base 2 ¹/₄ in. high)
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani
8. *Cricket with Helmet*, 1990
Copper and steel
30 x 15 ¹/₄ x 15 ¹/₄ in.
Collection of the Artist
9. *The Last Drop*, ca. 1989
Patinated bronze
9 ¹/₄ x 9 ¹/₄ x 5 ⁵/₈ in.
Collection of the Artist

10. *Acrobat*, 1987
Scrap iron, mixed media
10 ³/₄ x 8 x 2 ³/₈ in.
Collection of the Artist
 11. *Gallant Warrior*, 1984-85
Iron
33 ¹/₄ x 17 ¹/₄ x 10 ³/₄ in. (base 2 x 2 x 8 in.)
Collection of the Artist
 12. *The Key Man*, 1995-96
Wood, cloth, found objects
26 ³/₈ x 15 ¹/₄ x 7 ¹/₄ in.
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Max Lahyani
 13. *Untitled*, 1999
Aluminum
15 ⁵/₈ x 7 ⁵/₈ x 3 ¹/₄ in.
Collection of the Artist
 14. *The Photographer*, 1999
Aluminum, copper, found objects
30 ³/₄ x 8 x 4 ¹/₄ in. (base 1 ⁵/₈ x 9 ¹/₄ x 5 ⁵/₈ in.)
Collection of the Artist
 15. *The Spectator: After DeChirico*, 1999
Cast aluminum, found objects
36 x 15 ¹/₄ x 12 in.
Collection of the Artist
- ### RELIEFS
16. *Untitled*, 1992-93
Assemblage-leather, wood, nails
36 ³/₄ x 24 ³/₄ in.
Collection of the Artist
 17. *Untitled*, 1992-93
Assemblage-circuit board, wood, tin, bolts, newspaper
36 x 21 ⁵/₈ in.
Collection of the Artist
 18. *Untitled*, 1992-93
Assemblage-wood
36 ³/₄ x 24 ³/₄ in.
Collection of the Artist
 19. *Untitled*, 1992-93
Assemblage-wood, copper, calculator
36 ³/₈ x 24 in.
Collection of the Artist

DRAWINGS

20. *Custom Transit: Tel Aviv Central Bus Station*, 1994
Graphite and blue pencil drawing
13 x 8 5/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

21. *Untitled*, 1996
Pencil and ink drawing
11 5/8 x 7 7/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

22. *White-Blue Dream* (One of two installations at the Ramatgan Museum), 1999
Pen and ink wash
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 in.
Collection of the Artist

23. *Untitled*, 1997
Pen and ink wash
11 5/8 x 7 7/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

24. *Untitled*, 1995
Pen and ink wash
11 5/8 x 7 7/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

25. *For Myself #1*, 1995
Pen and ink wash
11 5/8 x 8 1/4 in.
Collection of the Artist

26. *For Myself #2*, 1995
Pen and ink wash
11 5/8 x 7 7/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

27. *Proposal for Telephone Booth*, 1995
Pen and ink wash
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in.
Collection of the Artist

28. *Proposal for Recycling #1*, 1994
Pen and ink wash
11 5/8 x 7 7/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

29. *Proposal for Recycling #2*, 1994
Pen and ink wash
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in.
Collection of the Artist

30. *Proposal for Marina at Herzlia*, 1997
Pen and ink wash
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in.
Collection of the Artist

31. *Study for "Flutes in the Wind"*, 1995
Pen and ink wash
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in.
Collection of the Artist

32. *Untitled*, 1994-95
Pen and ink wash
11 3/8 x 7 7/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

33. *Model for Metal Relief for Bank of Hapoalim, Tel Aviv*, 1997
Painted paper collage
11 3/8 x 8 1/4 in.
Collection of the Artist

34. *Untitled*, 1994-95
Pen and ink wash
11 1/4 x 7 5/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

35. *Untitled*, 1994-95
Pen and ink wash
11 1/4 x 7 5/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

36. *Untitled*, 1994-95
Pen and ink wash
11 1/4 x 7 5/8 in.
Collection of the Artist

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

- 1937 Born in Ukraine.
- 1950 Immigrated to Israel.
- 1954 Graduated from Max Fain Technical High School.
- 1954-1958 Performed military service.
- 1959-1962 Studied graphic design at the Balfur Institute, Tel Aviv.
- 1987 First prize for *Don Kichote*, Z.O.A. House group exhibition, Tel Aviv.
- 1989 Group exhibition, Memorial Museum, Ramat Hasharon.
- 1990 Artist Promenade Fair, group exhibition, Herzlia.
Independence Day exhibition, Municipal Gallery, Kfar Saba.
- 1991 *Spring Exhibition*, solo exhibition Beit Naamat, Herzlia.
Summer Exhibition, group exhibition, Herzlia promenade.
- 1992 Group exhibition, Aked Gallery, Tel Aviv.
Independence Day group exhibition, Memorial House, Kfar-Saba.
Sharon Artists' group exhibition, Municipal Gallery, Kfar Saba.
- 1993 Holocaust Memorial exhibition, Beit Ali Gallery, Ashkelon.
Erection of *Boabab 2*, Garden of Modern Sculpture, Ashkelon.
- 1994 Erection of *Mobile*, Garden of Modern Sculpture, Ashkelon.
Tin, Can, and Cast, solo exhibition, Kfar Tavor Museum.
Art Focus, group exhibition, Kfar Tavor Museum.
Herzlia Artists' exhibition, Kfar Tavor Museum.
- 1995 *To Play with the Matter*, solo exhibition, Beit Ali Gallery, Ashkelon.
Spring of 95, solo exhibition, Beit Shapira, Petach Tikfa.
Tavor 95, group exhibition, Kfar Tavor Museum.
Modern Sculpture, group exhibition, Mofet Hall, Bat Yam.
- 1996 *To Play with the Matter*, solo exhibition, Edith Polak Hall, Kiriath Gat.
The Wink & the Metal, solo exhibition, The Israel Painters & Sculptors Association Gallery, Tel Aviv.
- 1997 *A Variant Sculpture*, solo exhibition, Radio Gallery, Hadera.
Or Castel Gallery, group exhibition, Rosh Haain.
The Flutes and the Wind, Bank Leumi Garden, Lud.
- 1998 *Sound and Color*, solo exhibition, Khan Gallery, Ashkelon.
The Blue & White Dream, group exhibition, Givataim Museum.
The World Jewish Expo., Jacob K. Javits Center, New York.
- 1999 Art Expo., Jacob K. Javits Center, New York.
Holocaust Memorial group exhibition, Bible Museum, Tel Aviv.
Herzlia Artists' exhibition, Matna's Moldovan, Herzlia.
From the Gallery Collection, group exhibition, Shai Danon Gallery, Tel Aviv.
Aco-Art, Israeli Artists' Recycled Works, Herzlia.
Saabil purchased by the Herzlia Municipality.
Jacob Berenstein: Contemporary Sculpture from Israel, Patrick and Beatrice Haggerty Museum of Art, Milwaukee, WI.