Israel Sculptors in England

Charles S. Spencer

As Paris is for the painters so post-War Britain has become the lodestone for Israel's aspiring young sculptors. Charles Spencer, a writer and art critic, is a frequent contributor to *Ariel*.

There are at present five Israel sculptors working in London—superficially diverse in their personalities and styles, so that to attempt generalizations about their work would prove impossible.

Their presence in England is not surprising. To many young sculptors throughout the world the British scene since Henry Moore appears a rich, creative vein. The post-war artistic image of Britain has been one of constant bubble and ferment, from the solid achievement of Henry Moore, the refined poetry of Barbara Hepworth, the attempts at tragic humanism of the Chadwick-Armitage-Butler school, the more detached abstract forms of Adams-Wall-Caro and many other diversions, until we reach the large painted, plastic forms of the younger generation. None of this is meant as evaluation; indeed few of the artists concerned are likely to be of lasting importance, but collectively they represent an impressive continuity of talent and experimentation.

Thus an Israel student who manages to obtain a scholarship to study in England will find a range of schools and teachers where the seriousness of purpose, the quality of the equipment and the opportunity to exchange ideas with leading artists can be taken for granted.

Three of the Israelis in London—Kadishman, Yardeni and Orion* received scholarships from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation; Buky Schwarz, now back in Israel, who exhibited in this year's Venice Biennale,

* These three were recently commissioned to create permanent works for the sculpture garden at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

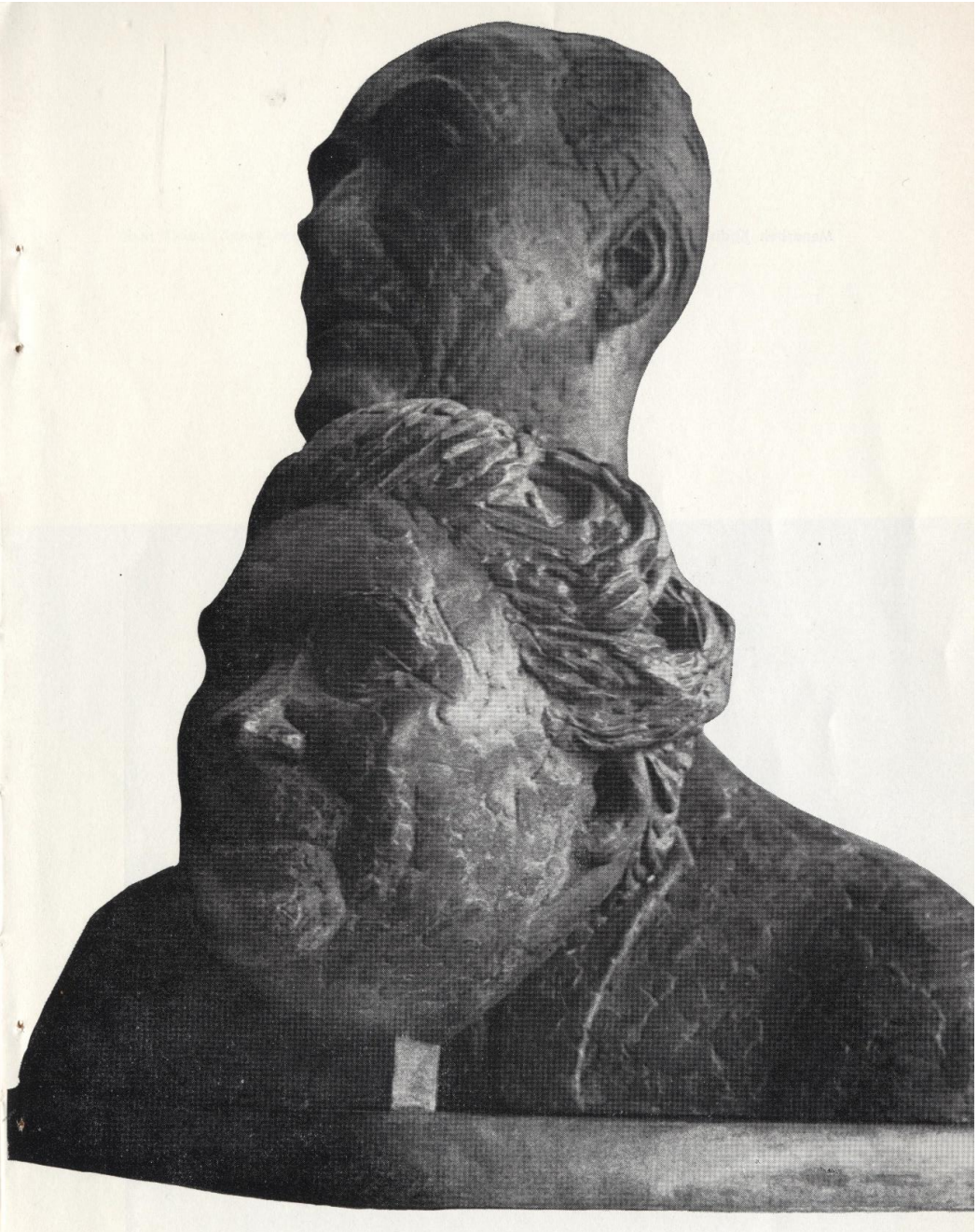
was another such recipient. Zvia, the only woman artist of the group, is in a different category, as I shall later explain, and there is also in England Nehemia Azaz, an older, more experienced artist whose connection with Britain dates from an earlier stay and who returned to execute a series of commissions.

In a previous article on sculpture in Israel *(Ariel* No. 12, 1965), I referred to the large-scale character of most of it, to its idealistic vitality, its contribution to the wholeness of society—public monuments, sculptures for town-centres, parks, an involvement with town planning. This is evident in the work of such established artists as Danziger, Haber and Eloul.

A similar pattern can be seen in Buky Schwarz, who returned to Israel in 1963, after four years at the St. Martin's School of Art, London, where he twice won the Sainsbury Prize for young sculptors. In England his work was similar to that of his friend and contemporary Kadishman, reflecting the simple monumentality of Haber's stone compositions. In this respect they were totally different from and uninfluenced by the British art around them.

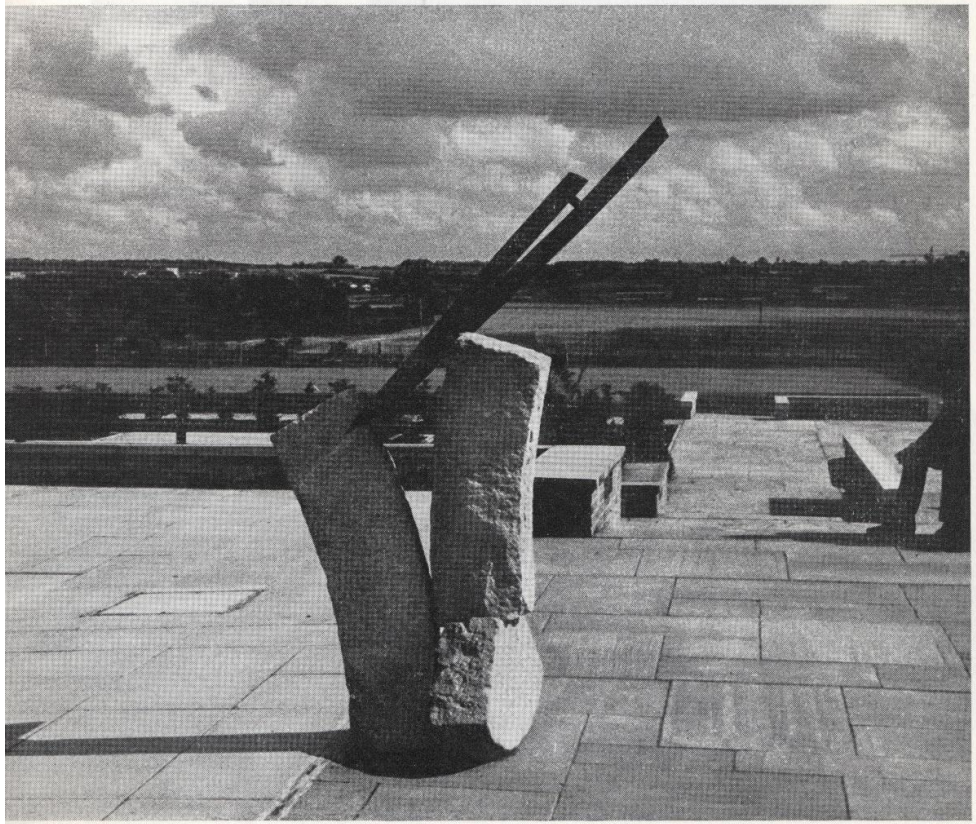
In Israel Schwarz has been largely involved in public works—a sculpture garden at the Weizmann Institute, a concrete fountain at Elath and a work for the Hilton Hotel, Tel Aviv. Few English sculptors of his age could expect such patronage. But an even more interesting change has taken place, which might be described in terms of national psychology. What in London were typically Israel characteristics seemed to disappear in Schwarz once he returned home. I can myself vouch for the fact that whilst in London I sometimes feel alien to many aspects of the English character, abroad I somehow become representative of my country and find myself regarded as typically English. Whatever the reasons, Schwarz in Israel has become far more adventurous and individual—as evidenced in the piece which won him the Dizengoff Award in 1965, and his elegant structures in aluminium at the Venice Biennale.

Kadishman, who came to London at the same time as Schwarz, has stayed on—and having married and taken up teaching posts looks like becoming an expatriate. He continues to be concerned with forms and materials which mark him as specifically Israel. After attending St. Martin's School, Kadishman switched to the Slade School to study with Reg Butler, an experience which proved less valuable than he had hoped. Indeed, neither he nor Schwarz reveals any British influence, despite the fact that during their period at St. Martin's, Anthony Caro (incidentally, a Jew of Anglo-Sephardi origins) was to become one of the most influential teachers and sources for contemporary British sculpture. Kadishman greatly ad-

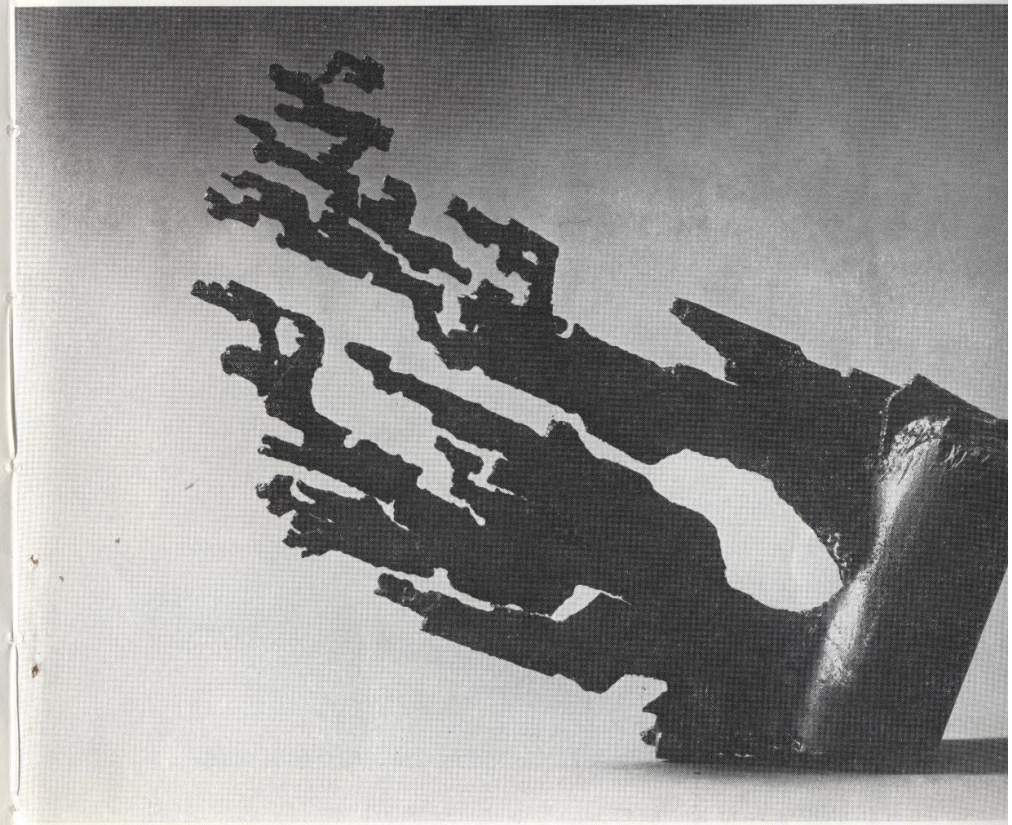


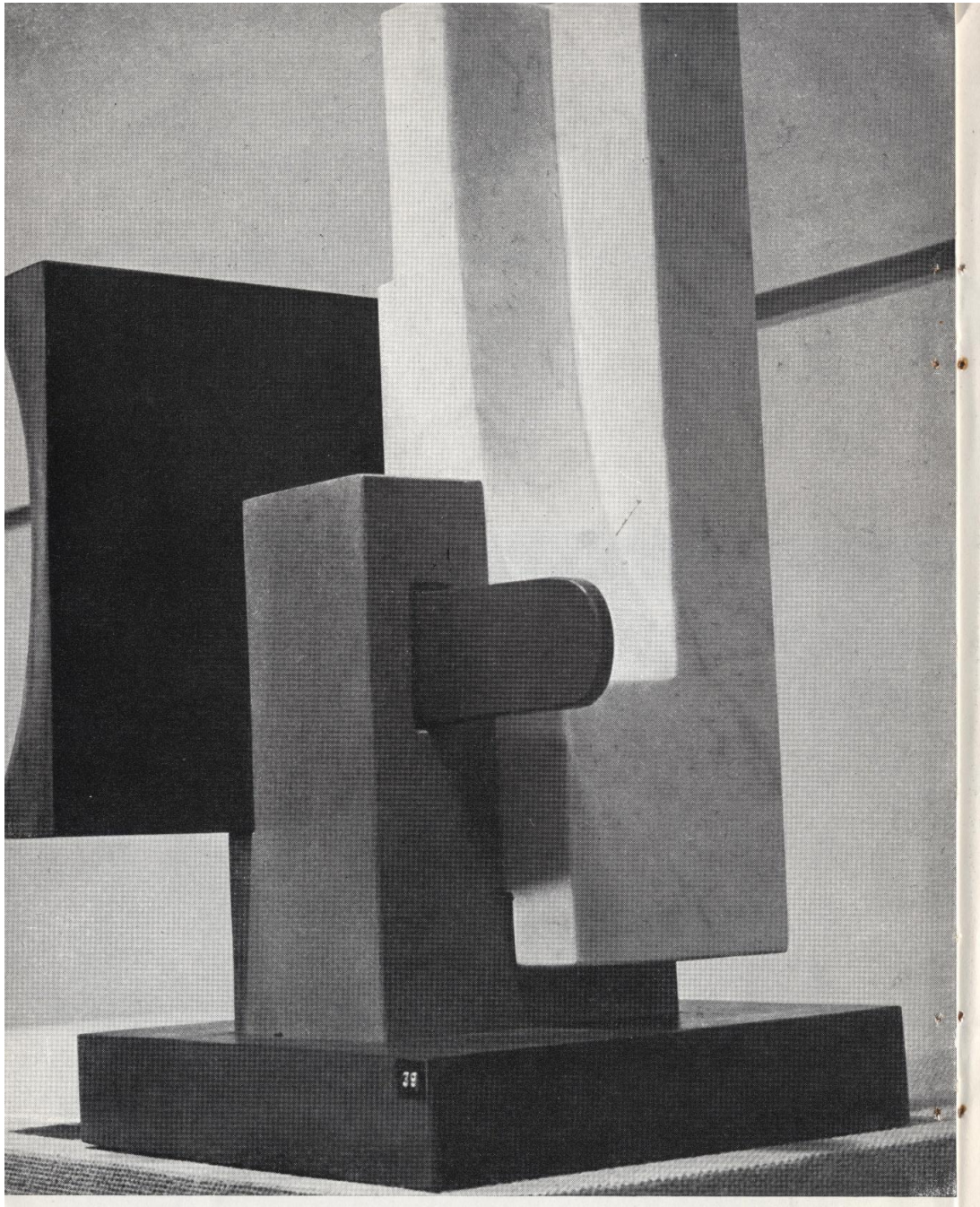
Zvia: *Matilda and Terence Kennedy* (West London Hospital)

Menasheh Kadishman: *Sculpture* (Harlow Town Hall, England)



Ezra Orion: *Space and Iron*





Nehemia Azaz: *Interlocking Forms*

mires William Turnball and it is not hard to understand why the latter's more earthy, solid, aggressive forms, based on nature, but without the sentimentality or softness of the average English artist, should be symphathetic to an Israeli.

I have long held a theory—possibly open to ridicule—that sculptors recreate their own shape. This is too involved a subject to investigate here, but certainly Kadishman fits my theory. Large, bear-like, with a heavy black beard, his shape completely belies his gentle character. His earliest works were figurative—usually animals, dogs, bears, owls, with a heavy, clumsy but lovable quality. These gradually became more and more abstract and merged with a concern for both the female torso and phallic symbolism. There then emerged a synthesis of these considerations into sculptures resembling antique gateways or altars; and more recently simplified arrangements of large pieces of stones with titles like *The Negev Desert,* a kind of sophisticated imitation of nature. Certainly to anyone who knows Israel they are imbued with both a concern for landscape and a symbolism concocted of ancient religious concepts and the evolvement of a new society. But even if these suggestions are rejected, Kadishman, now increasingly well-known (his one-man show at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1965 won critical acclaim), is an odd man out in London's current sculptural scene.

Yehezkiel Yardeni, unlike Schwarz and Kadishman, is not a *sabra* but was born in the Argentine. He was a contemporary of the other two as a student at St. Martin's School and in his case the influence of Anthony Caro is quite distinct. Like Caro he works in welded metal and makes large, abstract linear forms, which have no relationship to the human scale or to landscape. Caro, in his turn, was deeply influenced by the American sculptor, David Smith, and by hard-edge American painting. Before this he had been a figurative sculptor, making strange, bulbous female forms, *à la Richier*. He had also worked as an assistant to Henry Moore for some years and it could be argued that his revolutionary break with figuration and local tradition, was a direct—and healthy—reaction to Moore's achievement.

Yardeni, too, curiously enough, has followed Caro as one of the many assistants Moore employs, and for some time has been living in the Essex village where Moore works. More recently, no doubt with Caro's help again, he has returned to St. Martin's as a teacher. Yardeni has shown in various mixed exhibitions, but his first real public appearance was in a trio of young sculptors at the important avant-garde Kasmin Gallery—where, you will not be surprised to learn, Caro also shows. Of the three

artists, Yardeni emerged as the most restrained, and, if it is applicable, the most responsible. This may well be the Israel side of his personality. In England there is very little responsibility—to art lovers, the public or to society. This is not meant critically; our society, in a sense, has earned this disrespect, isolating the artist into a kind of luxurious, playful, addendum to life. Young artists are provoked into a spirit of revolt, wanting to disturb the complacency of a materialistic society.

Whilst it is true that Yardeni is uncompromising in his use of materials and forms which alienate the average person, there is little to outrage the conventional. If anything they tend to be dull, geometric, brightly painted exercises. As is often claimed, machines like farm-tractors or aeroplanes are also functional objects and more aesthetically pleasing. But Yardeni is still a young man; he is in the process of digesting valuable experience as a student and creative artist in an exciting but disturbing milieu.

Ezra Orion, born in Kibbutz Beth Alpha in 1934, came to London at the age of 30, already a well-developed artistic personality. In 1964 he joined St. Martin's School, clearly the magnet for Israelis—and then transferred to the Royal College. In his case, with a wife and three young children, there can be no doubt that he will return to Israel. A tall, tough, handsome young man, he has the slowness of gait and speech one associates with a typical *kibbutznik*. But there is nothing awkward or unsophisticated in his sculpture. Before leaving Israel he had already held one-man shows at Ein Harod and in the Haifa Museum; in London he soon found an outlet for his work, in mixed shows at the "Young Contemporaries" annual exhibition and at the Grosvenor Gallery. Later in 1965 his one-man exhibition at the Mercury Gallery was a great success. He works entirely in welded steel, not simple linear forms like Yardeni, but rather expressionistic, almost baroque, shapes. His move to England was largely based on the desire for more expertise. These technical facilities have enabled him to develop and expand an already powerful manner. He says he is not concerned with natural images; he uses shapes as dynamic investigations of space. This thrusting, demanding quality is combined with both vitality and beauty, which are not quite free from the danger of a facile decorative charm.

SUNSET STUDIES IN THE ISRAEL MUSEUM'S ROSE SCULPTURE GARDEN
Ossip Zadkine: *Orpheus*
Auguste Rodin: *Adam*
Aristide Maillol: *Chained Liberty*
Wessel Couzijn: *Rising Africa*

Buky Schwarz: *Maquette for a Memorial*

Zvia, as I have said, is less easy to categorize, except that she, perhaps more than the others I have discussed, sees herself primarily as a public artist. She attended the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London. Married, with a small child, she has had to fit in art with domestic duties. With a sound scientific education and a fascination for new materials, she began making small experiments with plastics, exploiting the qualities of construction, light, colour and space which they afforded. Her work gradual-

ly attracted attention and the Plastics Division of I.C.I. invited her to collaborate. Her two principal achievements to date are a large abstract plastic sculpture which stands in Kenwood at Hampstead, and perhaps more important in its potential the huge mobile chandelier made for the I.C.I. stand at the Lighting Exhibition in 1965. This has since been on more or less permanent exhibition at the Building Centre. More recently she has been working on commissions for the new Sussex University and a public theatre in York. Though a gifted jeweller, making exotic forms in enamelled metal, and also a portrait sculptor, one can hardly imagine Zvia as anything but a public artist. She never exhibits in London galleries and is entirely concerned with sculpture which enhances a building or performs a function. These are very un-English characteristics, but clearly not at all unusual in an Israeli.

Nehemia Azaz, as I have suggested, lies a little outside the scope of this article and I hope to write on his diverse talents at greater length in the future. He first came to England in 1954, to prepare for an exhibition of ceramics; he stayed to run a pottery in Chelsea for two years, after which he opened the Harsa porcelain plant near Beersheba. He returned in 1963 to carry out a huge commission for a series of stained-glass windows at Carmel College, near Oxford, which he has only recently completed. Since then he has had a number of other commissions, for a synagogue in Belfast, in private homes, and now for the Marble Arch Synagogue in London which will keep him here for a further period. In these three years Azaz has also been involved in a series of architectural projects for the United States, but he has found time for smaller sculpture. Like Zvia and many other Israelis, he is completely concerned with public places, so that even smaller works are maquettes for development. In October 1965 he held a one-man show at the Grosvenor Gallery in London, and as a result of this another exhibition in Zurich. His series of small bronzes, like his sculptured wall at the Sheraton Hotel, were clearly related to the shapes of the Israel scene, as well as the architectonic form of the Hebrew script. A more recent group of carvings in alabaster, marble and slate are less stylized and more satisfying enquiries into the relationship of form and space on a monumental scale.

What can be claimed for these expatriate Israelis is that they have each made a specific impression on the contemporary British scene, and on the whole have brought different and welcome qualities to both their fellow artists and the public. At the same time, if my analysis is correct, they have reflected positive aspects of their native origins.