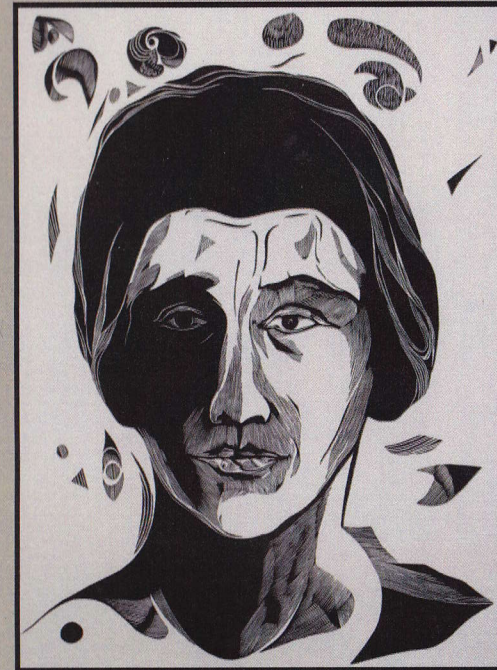


BERTA GOLAHNY



8a



8b

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A Singular Vision
Foxdale Community Gallery
January 13 - March 12, 2013
State College, Pennsylvania

BERTA ROSENBAUM GOLAHNY

(Detroit MI 1925 - Newton MA 2005)

Vision as a response to the human condition -- that is the theme of these works, which span over four decades, from 1950 to 1994. The paintings and prints demonstrate a range of expressive achievement in various media: oil on canvas, intaglio and engraving on copper and zinc, monotype, woodcut, and wood engraving. Golahny studied at the Art Students League in New York City, The Art Institute of Chicago (B. F. A.), and the University of Iowa (M. F. A.). She received many awards, including the prestigious Tiffany Fellowship. From 1959-2001 she taught at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She exhibited nationally and internationally in several hundred juried and invitational shows. Her work is in numerous private and public collections. For the Penmaen Press, she created the wood engraving *Passion*, and her work has been included in various publications.

Combining the figurative and the abstract, Golahny has consistently explored humanity, nature, war, daily life, and the transcendent realm. Her expressive tones are similarly broad: themes include despair, contemplation, hope, and joy. Her earliest work reflects city life: people on buses or trains, factory workers, and the rhythms of childhood. Many works respond to global tragedy such as World War II, the Korean War, famine in Biafra, and the nuclear age. Other imagery examines the earth's landscape and the wider realm of the cosmos: nebulae, galaxies, and black holes. In each theme, the artist explores various media to achieve diverse pictorial and expressive effects. Yet her constant focus is the role of humanity in an often turbulent time and place.



2b, detail

1. Children at the Fair

A visit to a mid-west state fair was the starting point for the design of the early print, made in 1950, which was reprised in a woodcut and a painting of 1987 [1a, b, c]. These three depictions of the whirly-gig, a common ride at state fairs and amusement parks, demonstrate the early and later styles of Golahny's work. Her early work has a painterly affinity to expressionism, while her later work shows a harder and finer delineation of forms. The earlier fluidity and soft edges have been replaced by an assertive figure-ground pattern in the woodcut, and large bold areas of color in the painting.

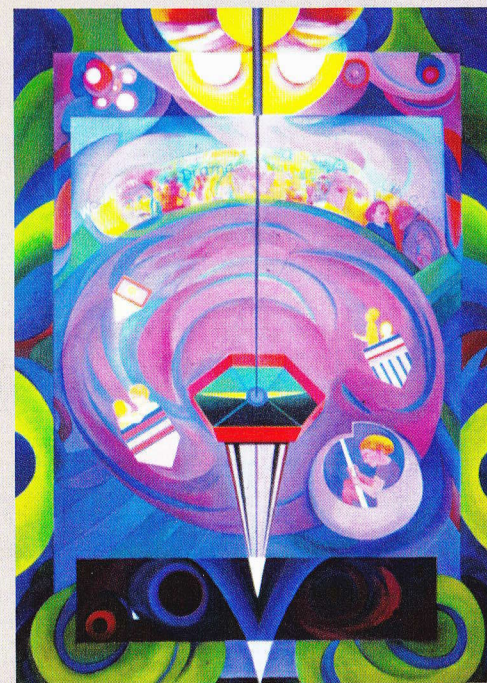
The 1950 print belonged to Golahny's portfolio while she completed her M.F.A. at the University of Iowa, where she studied printmaking under Mauricio Lasansky. The printing process involved two stages: first the etched design in black, and second, the color plate as a monotype. Such a separate printing of the two



1a



1b



1c

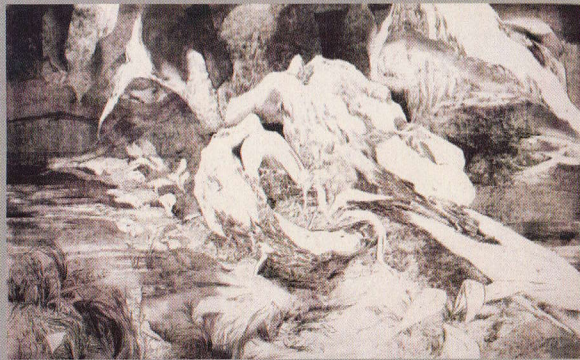
components, black lines and color, was highly unusual in intaglio. The experiment indicates the artist's interest in the monotype, an inked image on a plate, so that each impression is unique.

In the first version of the composition, the four buckets carrying children are attached to the pole; in the later versions, the buckets float freely, without physical support. The whirly-gig has become a metaphysical situation. Golahny wrote about the later painting: "The *Children at the Fair* expresses the feelings and emotions inherent in some stages of life. The rigid mechanism supporting the children in their fun-fling through space contrasts the fragility of life with the inevitability of fate." Abstract cosmic shapes surround the central subject and become an inner frame in dialogue with the graphic image. Golahny captions the painting with a phrase adapted from Niels Bohr: "We are at the same time actors and spectators in the great drama of nature."

2. Tree Roots

The densely forested landscape of New England fascinated the artist. Natural regeneration of leafy plants growing in a decaying tree stump provided the theme of a painting and its related copper plate. In the painting, from 1959, the artist applied the oil pigment with different consistencies, thickly with a palette knife and thinly with a brush, to approximate the unevenness of bark and leaves. In the print, she achieved subtle textures with etching and softground, and sharp outlines of some plants with the burin [2a]. She also varied the wiping of the ink tones in the printing process. Early impressions are in black ink, while later impressions are in pale blue and red ink. Golahny found a “harsh decay” in the early black impressions, and a “soft lyrical wispieness” in the color.

The copper plate reveals subtle textures and sharp lines [2b]. The artist’s small and heavy manual press could not accommodate a plate of this size, so the artist printed it at George Lockwood’s Impressions Workshop, Boston.



2a



2b

3. And Death Shall Have No Dominion

Often poetry reinforced Golahny’s ideas. “And Death Shall Have No Dominion,” a 1933 poem by Dylan Thomas alluding to Paul’s epistle to the Romans, provided the title for this 1953 print. The poem and the print concern the human potential for transcending mortality. The running woman and the violinist symbolize triumphant escape from death, which is indicated by shadowy corpse-like shapes [3a, b]. Golahny first printed in brown ink [3a], then reprinted the copperplate in 1993 with red and blue ink [3b], colors that enhance the redemptive and joyous qualities of the nude and musician.



3a



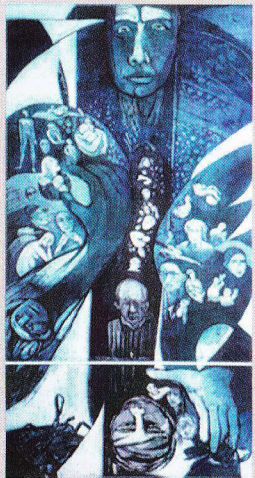
3b

4. Landscape of Man and Related Works

The series *Landscape of Man* is Golahny's evolving response to the devastation of World War II. During the late 1950s, the artist began a series of woodcuts titled *Thoughts on Man*. When she acquired a lightweight, motorized Meeker-McFee press in 1968, she had the opportunity to print large plates and immediately experimented with the monumental two-plate intaglio, *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age* [4a]. This etching, measuring 34 by 18 inches, was the largest size that the press could handle. But it proved unwieldy to print, so Golahny pulled very few impressions in blue-green ink. She later cut down the plate, reworked it, and printed it in brilliant color [4d].

Maintaining the three-headed columnar structure of this intaglio, Golahny continued to explore the theme in the various media of copper engraving, wood engraving and painting until 1988. Each image includes a central head with closed eyes which "embodies man's inability to extricate from surrounding evil," according to the artist.

A wood engraving and a copper engraving demonstrate the variability of the media. In black ink on white paper, these prints explore, in the artist's words, "vital negative space." The wood engraving emphasizes the juxtaposition of solid black and white areas [4b]. The copper engraving exploits the tightly controlled, directly incised lines [4c]. Both were begun at about the same time in 1981, but the copper engraving took two years to complete, and



4a



4b



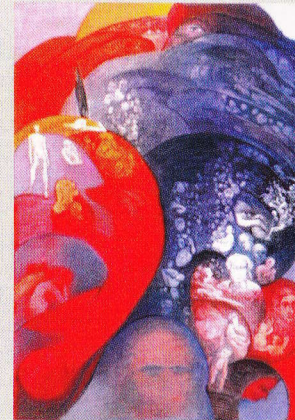
4c

was not considered finished until 1983. Golahny made a related series of paintings and pastels that vary this composition.

Concurrently, Golahny made several intaglio prints that evoke other tragedies. One of these is *Auschwitz* (1964) [4e], which includes a child's poem written on the concentration camp wall:

From tomorrow on I shall be sad, not today
Today I will be glad
And every day.
No matter how bitter it may be,
I shall say,
From tomorrow on I will be sad, not today.

Another intaglio confronting tragedy is *Biafra* (1972) [4f], prompted by the 1970 famine, and a third is *Rising Tolerance to Inhumanity* (1972) [4g].



4d



4e



4f



4g

5. Psalms

A series of six wood engravings, made over the years 1968-1973, illustrates a selection from the Psalms of the Old Testament. Three from the series are: *Night Shineth as the Day* (Psalm 139), *Thou Hast Tested Me* (Psalm 17), and *Youth is Renewed* (Psalm 103) [5a, b, c]. Two of these prints, *Thou* and *Youth*, are made of two blocks, printed in different colors. These are closely related in theme and execution to the two wood engravings that form part of the Genesis series, *Day Five* and *Day Six*.

The small wood engraving *Youth is Renewed* and the large woodcut, *The Embrace*, developed from figure studies of a couple. [8a] In *Youth*, the man and woman merge into one soaring form to escape a turbulent earth below, as in the words of Psalm 103:

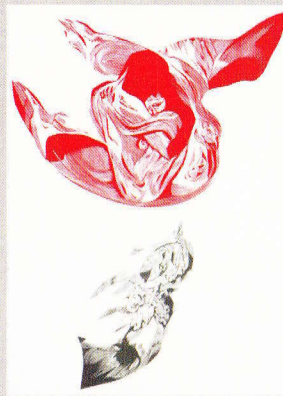
“Bless the Lord... who redeems you... so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s....”



5a



5b



5c

6. Genesis

In the western tradition, the story of the creation of the world is related in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. This narrative has often compelled artists, most famous among them Michelangelo. Sprawling majestically on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (1511), Michelangelo’s God is a hoary, bearded, powerful, man. An admirer of Michelangelo, Golahny portrayed a very different vision of the first seven days of the world. Present and effective as light itself, Golahny’s God permeates her paintings of Genesis but never assumes human

form. Between 1977 and 1997, Golahny worked on three series of seven paintings each, one for each day of the creation story, following the biblical narrative. The first series tends to have more muted colors than the second and third series, and less specific plants, animals and celestial bodies. Several of the compositions in the first series are templates for the next two. Each painting may be viewed as an individual work, a part among the seven in each series, a version of three representations of the same day, and as a component of the whole series of twenty-one paintings. Each of these canvases measures 36 by 30 inches.

Golahny was inspired by the grandeur of the creation of the universe. She conveyed supernatural forces creating a luxuriant cosmos, a teeming underwater world, and a dramatic terrestrial scheme of plants, animals and humans. Her transformation of the biblical text was yet loyal to the original words. This meant that she studied cosmology, ichthyology, and biology in order to render phenomena and life of the sky, water, and land with scientific accuracy. To depict the stars and planets, she consulted the faculty of the Harvard Astrophysics department and studied the cosmos through Harvard’s telescopes. To represent the plants and animals, she repeatedly visited the Harvard Peabody Museum, the Boston Museum of Science, and the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

The exhibition includes two paintings of this series: *The Fourth Day: The Forming of the Sun, Moon, Planets and Stars*, and *The Sixth Day: Man, Woman, and the Creatures of the Earth*. Several wood engravings extend this series, including *Genesis: Day Six* [6a].



6a

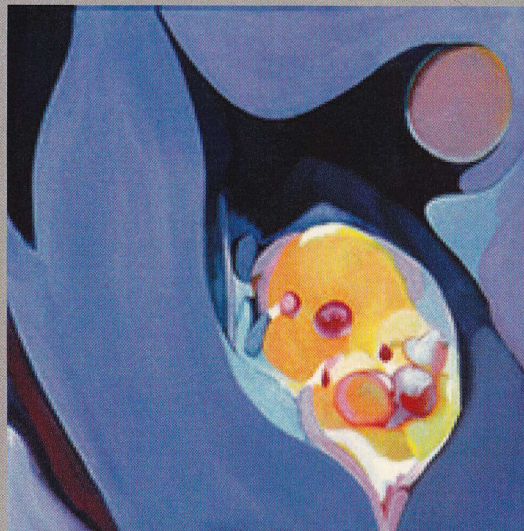
7. The Cosmos

Her investigations of astronomy for the Genesis series led Golahny to depict the formation of constellations and the exploration of space. The intaglio *Space Figures* is an imaginative evocation of “semi-formed creatures, hovering on their own turf.” [7a]. The small painting, *Space Womb* is based upon the reports of cosmic exploration [7b]. For this painting Golahny used the photographic archives of the Lamont Observatory in Cambridge. The series culminated in the *Crab Nebula* [1990; not exhibited; 7c (detail)]. Golahny evoked “myriads of tiny forms surging forth, to suggest sentient beings interwoven in swirling gasses to emphasize the unity of all existence.” As a complement to her representations of space, Golahny painted *Coral Reef* to explore the underwater life [not exhibited; 7d].

Golahny continued her study of the cosmos with the series *Being and Becoming*, consisting of eight paintings and many works on paper. Exhibited here from the series are a monotype and woodcut, both organized around a vortex illustrating the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe [7e, f]. The project was complemented by a musical performance, composed and performed by Rosalie and Paul DiCrescenzo in 1994.



7a



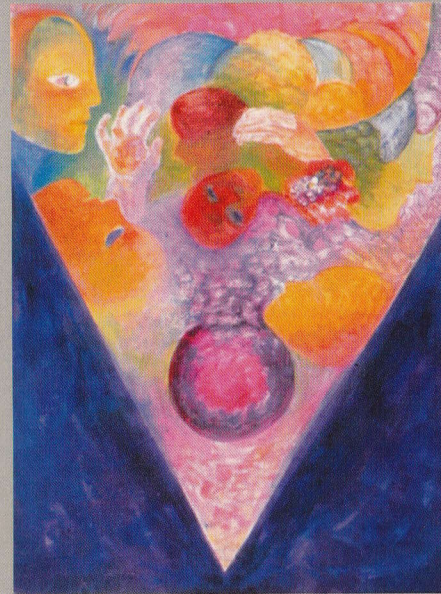
7b



7c



7d



7e



7f

8. Conclusion: Humanity

The large woodcut *The Embrace* portrays intertwined yet independent figures [8a, back cover]. Consumed with passion, the man and woman maintain their own identities.

Over the years, the artist portrayed her own features. Often she incorporated her portrait into complicated images, and at other times, she made independent self portraits. The wood engraving of 1970, made during the years she was most intensely involved with that demanding medium, presents her likeness in a forthright confrontation with the viewer [8b, front cover].

Works

- 1a. *Children at the Fair*. Intaglio. 1950. 18 x 11.
1b. *Children at the Fair*. Woodcut. 1987. 36 x 21.
1c. *The Ride*. Oil on Canvas. 1987. 60 x 40.
- 2a. *Tree Roots*. Intaglio. Black. 1957-1965. 15 x 23.
2b. *Tree Roots*. Copperplate. 1957-1993.
- 3a. *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*. Etching and engraving on copper, Black. 1953. 13 x 20.
3b. *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*. Etching and engraving on copper, Color. 1953-1993. 13 x 20.
- 4a. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*. Etching and softground on copper. 1968. 34 x 18.
4b. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*. Wood engraving. 1981. 18 x 12.
4c. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*. Engraving on copper. 1983. 27 x 18.
4d. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*. Etching and engraving on copper. Color monoprint. 1968-1994. 26 x 32.
4e. *Auschwitz*. Etching and engraving on copper. 1965. 23 x 17.
4f. *Biafra*. Softground on zinc. 1972. 18 x 18.
4g. *Rising Tolerance to Inhumanity*. Softground etching on zinc. 1972. 17 1/2 x 16.
- 5a. *Night Shineth as the Day* (Psalm 139). Wood engraving on boxwood. M. Darough Photographer. 12 x 9.
5b. *Thou Hast Tested Me* (Psalm 17). wood engraving on boxwood. M. Darough Photographer. 12 x 9.
5c. *Youth is Renewed* (Psalm 103). Wood engraving on boxwood. 1970. M. Darough Photographer. 12 x 9.
- 6a. *Genesis Day Six*. Wood engraving on boxwood. 1977. M. Darough Photographer. 9 x 12.

- 7a. *Space Figures*. Etching, engraving, and softground on zinc. 1974. 11 x 8.
7b. *Space Womb*. Oil on canvas. 1984. 10 x 10.
7c. *Crab Nebula #3*. Oil on canvas. 1990. Detail (not exhibited).
7d. *Coral Reef*. Oil on canvas. 1995. 42 x 50.
7e. *Being and Becoming*. Monoprint. 1992. 28 x 18.
7f. *Cosmic-mind: Being and Becoming #2*. Woodcut on basswood. 1992. 28 x 18.
- 8a. *The Embrace*. Woodcut on white mahogany. 1970. 30 x 20.
8b. *Portrait of the Artist*. Wood engraving on boxwood. 1970. 12 x 9.

Glossary of Printmaking Terms

Artist proof: The trial print made as the artist works out the final image. Each print designated as a proof is unique.

Edition: The number of prints pulled of an image at a given time. 2/10 would refer to the second print in an edition of 10.

Engraving: Incising lines in a copper plate with a special tool called a burin.

Etching: The use of acid to bite lines into a metal plate, which is usually made of copper or zinc.

Intaglio: Etching that is made more complicated by varying acid strengths, added textures, and printing techniques. Softground, which involves a waxy coating applied to the metal plate and impressing textures, belongs to this type of etching.

Monoprint: The single print achieved by applying ink to a copper plate and rolling it through the press. Each print is unique. This term may also apply to an etched plate that is inked in an unusual way, from which only one print is made.

Woodcut: Cutting out the design from a wood panel. Because the surface carries the printed design, this process is called relief printing. The texture of the wood panel may show in the printing.

Wood engraving: The use of a very fine sharp tool to cut lines into the hard surface of boxwood. The grain of the wood may not show in the printing.