

## **The Jerusalem Post Sunday, July 12, 1998.**

France Lerner's works on paper and in bronze- deal unflinchingly with man's on going inhumanity t his aown species.

Calling upon her own family history as well as the present unrest in the middle East, Jerusalem-based Lerner exhibit two works- an etching and a life-size bronze sculpture- which take as their subjects matter in the brutality of the human condition, a theme which as old as time itself. The first is a large diptych entitled "*No Man's Land*" (etching, 96.5 on 65.5 cm). On the right panel, the Parisian born artist display in graphic detail man's utter depravity.

Figures writhe all over the large crowded space in carnal and violent attitudes. Romantic embraces. Romantic embraces have been reduced to pornographic flailing; figures bite instead of kiss, grope instead of caress and express anguish instead of endearment.

Her theme is firmly placed within the mainstream of western art- recalling the folly of Hieronymus Bosch's primitivistic forms as well as the superhuman agony of Michelangelo's last judgment sufferers.

Closer to the present, they resonate with the pulse of post- worked War II German Expressionism. Lightly sketched, reminiscent of the most egregious Jewish suffering.

The tortuously incited figures are wiry created by an etching tool that not so much defines them as scars them to impress upon the viewer the pain and shame which they endure, a grief which, lamentably, they bring upon themselves.

The results of this grotesque carnival of sadomasochism are expressed on the left panel of the diptych.

Devoid of human form, the space represents earth and sky separated by a fence like object, which runs the width of the page. This horizontal form also resembles an imperfectly stitched-together scar.

The artist's voice is clear, the animalistic behaviour on the right panel forever disrupts the continuity of heaven and earth.

That which might have been seamless universe expressing the marvel of creation has been transformed into a jagged compartmentalisation of the terrestrial and spiritual, separate and antagonistic.

The unrelenting pessimism of the etching is softened somewhat, however, by the sculpture "*Light and skin*". At first glance, the 2,8 meter bronze piece leaves us aghast at still more human carnage; Flayed skin has been draped over a T-shaped bar which could pass for either a tree.

The town flesh appears to blow aimlessly in the wind like so much laundry hung out to dry.

What appears to be continuation of the unrelieved pathos of humanity alters its face, however, with the changing of the light.

The bronze surface has been covered with a phosphorescent patina, which glows in the dark. What strikes us a desolate during the day takes on a redemptive quality in the fading sunlight.

Skin metamorphoses into light; the darkness of the human condition dissipates as natural light gives way to its mystical kin.

This transformation from skin to light is immediately apparent to the Hebrew speaker because of the similarity of pronunciation and spelling of the Hebrew word for skin and light (both are pronounced “ Or “ with the slightest gutturalisation of the former the only difference).

The resurrection of the spirit is also implied in the concept of the letting go of one’s skin, literally, as in a molting reptile, but figuratively as well, as a casting off of the shackles of human limitations.

On side of the T-Shaped support a tiny stone dangles on a string; from a compositional point of view, its small density balances the large, but weightless skin, But it is also weighty with symbolic meaning.

Dr Joseph Hoffman