

1988

Mark Rhodes/Ephraim Rubenstein: Sculpture, Painting, and Drawing

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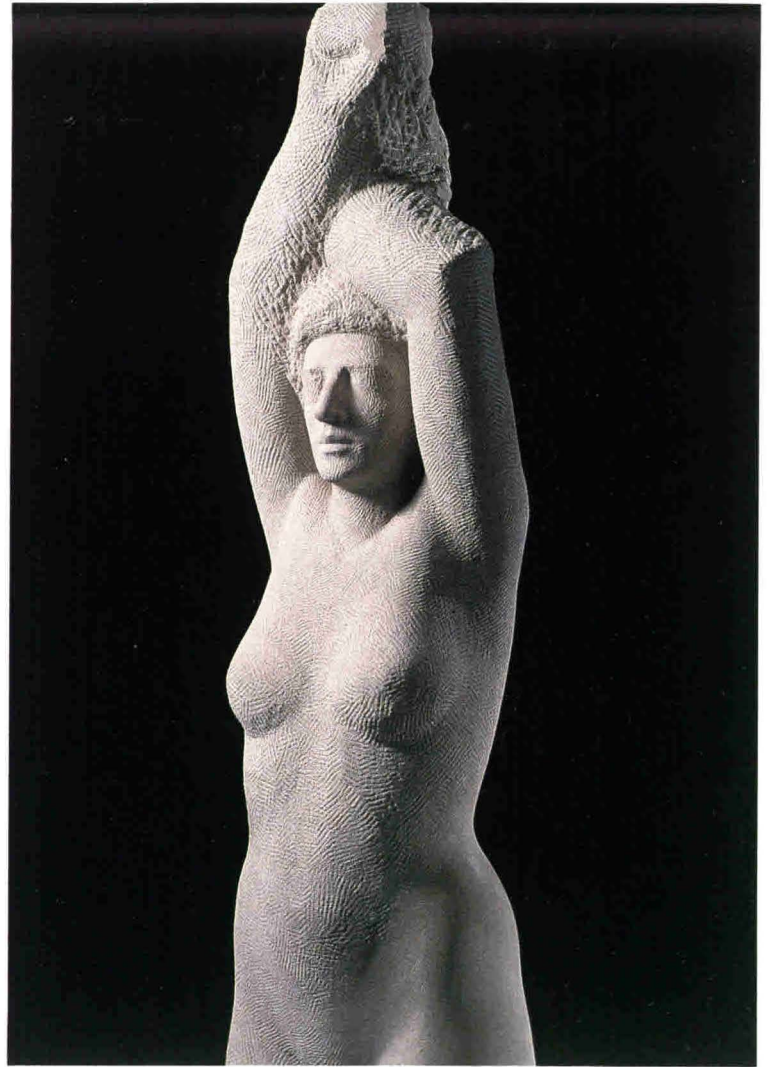
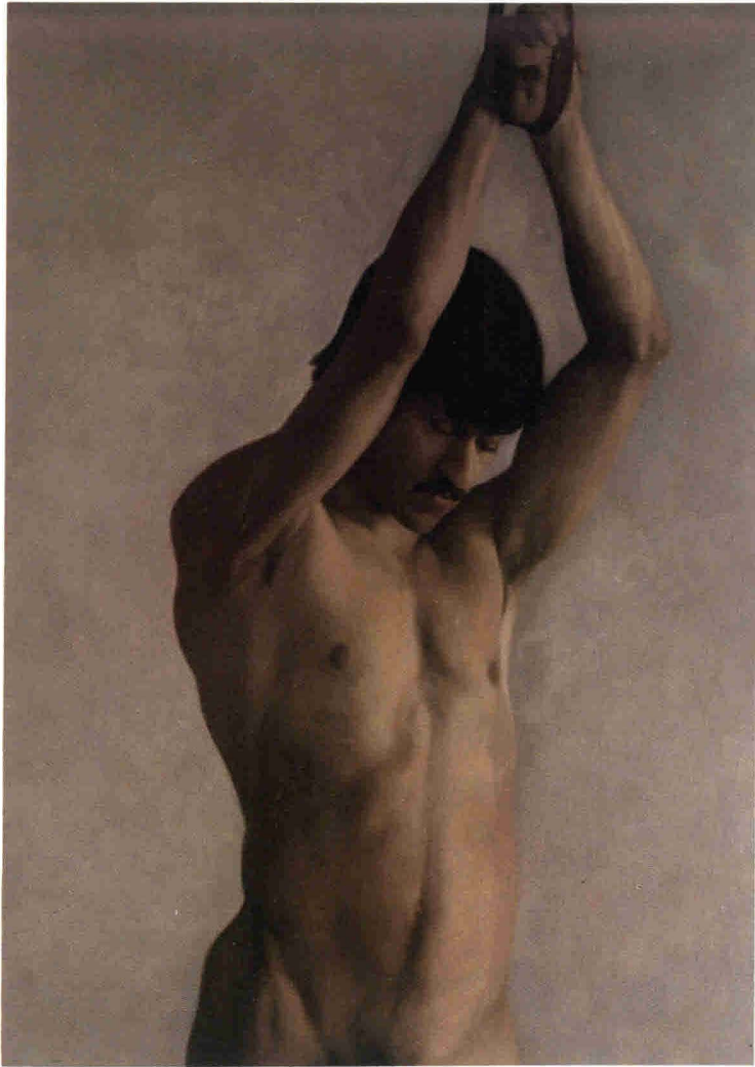


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RUBENSTEIN / RHODES

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Sarah E. Rennie

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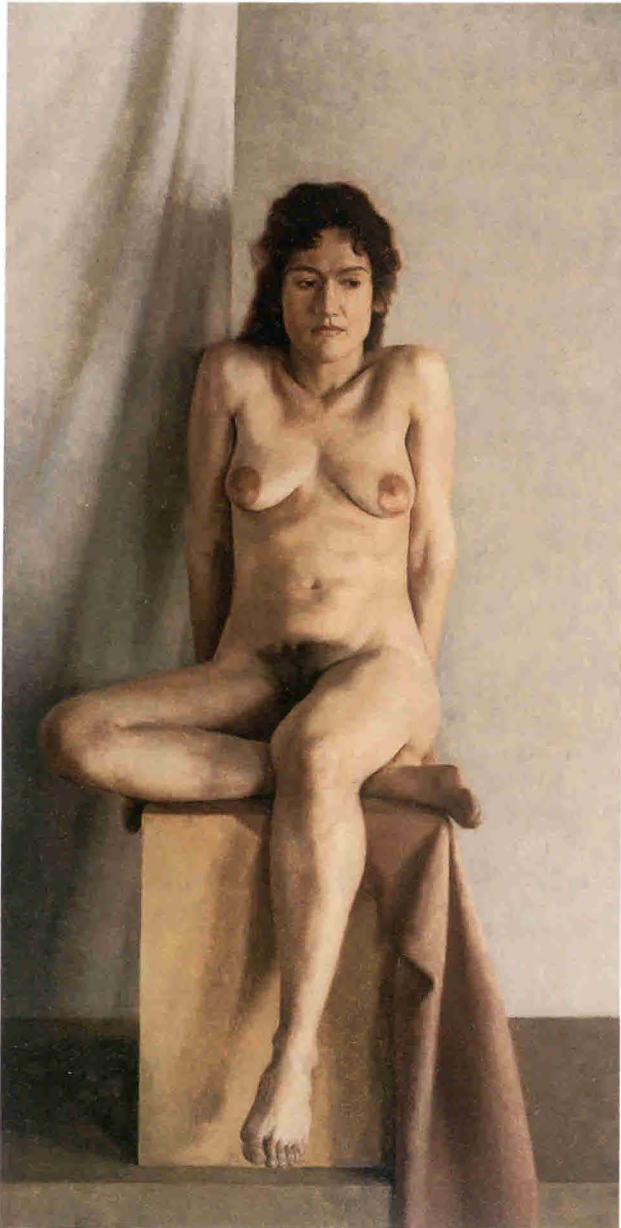
Cover: *Standing Male Nude* (detail), 78" × 36", 1982, Ephraim Rubenstein
Large Statue, Arms Up (detail), 91" × 17" × 13", 1986, Mark Rhodes.

MARK RHODES
EPHRAIM RUBENSTEIN
Sculpture, Painting, and Drawing

November 29–December 18, 1988

With an Introduction by
Charles W. Johnson Jr.

Marsh Gallery
Modlin Fine Arts Center
University of Richmond



Paulene Noguera, oil, 64" × 32", 1983

INTRODUCTION

by Charles W. Johnson Jr.

The art of Ephraim Rubenstein and Mark Rhodes is art about the human figure, born out of personal experience and nourished by the great tradition of the figure in western culture. Indeed, the persistence of the human form in art from prehistoric times into the 20th Century, demonstrates not only the infinite variety of interpretations and expressions possible through the body, but our consistent need for self-realization and re-creation through the figure. The particular pieces in this show convey a remarkable cumulative visual and technical force. They are manifestations of a process of private and technical concentration which exert a compelling strength and beauty.

Particularly impressive is their treatment of the nude, one of the most enduring of all subjects in western art. Whether inspired by historical masterpiece, the model, or the artist's wife (as in several of Rubenstein's works), the nude can be a source for the study of form, a meditation on the nature of art, a demonstration of love of the anatomical truth of the body, or an expression of a particular emotional or psychological state. On a personal level, the nude can be a celebration of love and intimate personal affection, or of the beauty and natural fecundity of the body relative to the hope and joy of progeny.

In the art of Ephraim Rubenstein, there are a variety of personal insights expressed. On a trip to Italy in 1982, the Rubensteins were especially drawn to works by the Renaissance masters Piero della Francesca, Fra Angelico and Andrea Mantegna. These painters provided Rubenstein with the syntax for the working out of ideas of immense personal value. He was able to abstract their syntax, while not bearing their historical or philosophical carriage. One can make many connections between historical masterpieces and Rubenstein's work. Fra Angelico's *Madonna (Annunciation)* 1438–45, Monastery of S. Marco, Florence) alludes to 'birth,' 'parenthood,' 'responsibility,' 'nurturing' and 'growth;' the ostrich egg that hangs so conspicuously above the Madonna's head in Piero della Francesca's *Madonna and Child with Saints* (1472–74, Brera Gallery, Milan) alludes to the miraculous processes of growth and regeneration, but also to the risks a mother must take in bearing children. All of these

ideas are present in Rubenstein's painting, *Annunciation*, 1984, which was inspired by the birth of their first daughter, Amelia. When looking at Rubenstein's *Standing Male Nude* 1982, one cannot help thinking of Mantegna's *St. Sebastian* (c. 1455–60). It alludes not only to a specific anatomy and contrapposto, but also to space, time, distance, disease, and decay, those ideas and realities that inevitably lie at the opposite end of the cycle that begins with birth and regeneration. But whatever the degree of Rubenstein's response to this larger tradition, he remains a decidedly 20th Century artist. Ephraim Rubenstein is a painter in the American tradition, and as such he has embraced its central currents of realism and the contemplation of the close-at-hand. He paints both the figure and the landscape in these terms. His art bears its own witness to our age's introspection and even isolation in those private spaces that people so desperately need in the late 20th Century. His landscapes tend to be places of calm, quiet reflection, while many of his figures are seen alone, stilled in meditation and thought. His art is a rich amalgam of several primary types of subjects long treated in the development of American art—the portrait, nude, landscape and still life.

Mark Rhodes' wonderfully sculpted figures are like poetry—abstract, with nuances that connect to various levels of meaning. But in place of words, Rhodes employs the language of living bodies. Rhodes expresses in his work the joy of his craft, of modeling forms, and of observing and creating beautifully made surfaces that at once can express body and spirit. His craft is at the service of his artistic vision. This vision is a distillation of important historical mentors like the Egyptian and Greek ancients, Michelangelo and Rodin, and the repeated sight of the model and the emerging sculpture. His art is a process of self-discovery, where, by working through the medium, art becomes a means of self-revelation. The concerns are not so much with the associative or suggestive ideas that lie outside and beyond the work, but with the figure itself as a vehicle for discovering meaning in the form. In these works the subject matter is sculpture. Thus, this is pure art in the sense that it is the shaping of the form from the raw material that becomes the "subject" of the work. Rhodes presents us with a language of form which sculptors have understood for centuries. In looking at these works we are reminded of what

might be Rhodes' subtle paraphrasing of a rich variety of past and present mentors. In his *Gray Statuette*, for instance, one thinks of the Praxitelean esthetic of the human nude, slender in proportions with emphasis on exquisite modeling that reproduces the tones of resilient flesh as seen in the famous Hellenistic copy from 100 B.C., *Aphrodite of Cyrene*. Rhodes' work, however, is not in any sense 'Neo-Greek'—there are no mathematical formulas for proportion, and there is no idealization by improving on the physique of the model. These works do not mimic rules or counterfeit outdated attitudes. Rhodes' *Seated One Leg* (Bronze, 1984) reminds us of certain qualities found in the work of the 20th Century sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbruck: lean attenuation, subtle angularity of the sparse frame, movements of the body that are instinctive and credible or even touching. The emphasis in these works is not so much on what the figure does, but what the artist does, what he expresses through his language of form.

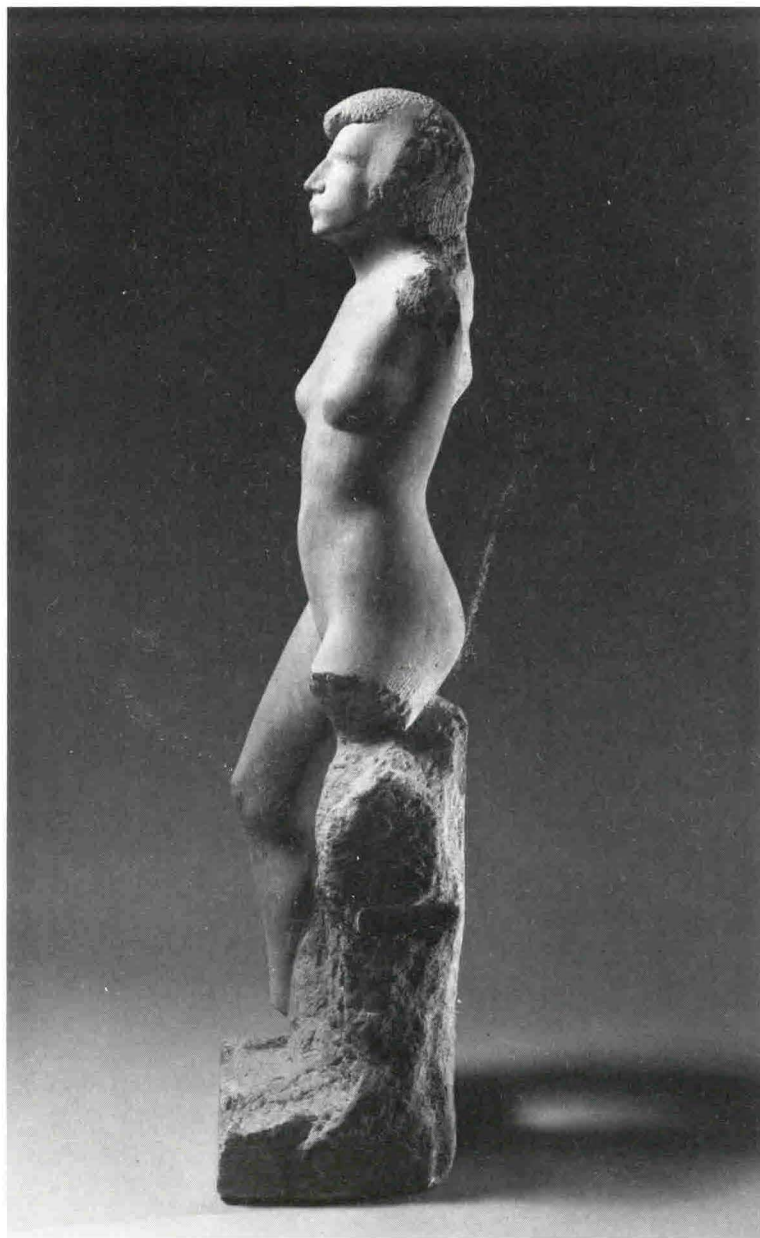
In Rhodes' work, we are aware of the intervention of art and of the imposition of intelligence, feeling and sensibility on nature and matter. And, like Rubenstein, Rhodes is an avowedly native artist of his own time. Like many sculptors in this century he chooses to make art from private values and feelings, making art itself the subject of his art. Ultimately, Rhodes' art is, in the 20th Century, a heroic effort of the Pygmalion dream of re-creating life and the self according to personal rather than public norms. Although the heroic is not depicted, it is enacted by the artist himself.

It is precisely that act of courage and even faith in the human condition that I find so rewarding in the art of Mark Rhodes and Ephraim Rubenstein. In a century in which so much cynicism and even hopelessness has been expressed through the body, these artists express an affirmation toward self and humanity. Indeed, this art is about life—the wonder of it, the joy of it—and the exquisite range of expressions about it through art and the human form. These works represent the many strengths that Rubenstein and Rhodes draw from—strengths that have been vitalized in visual expressions. They are, in effect, manifestations of the artists' life forces. Enjoy them!

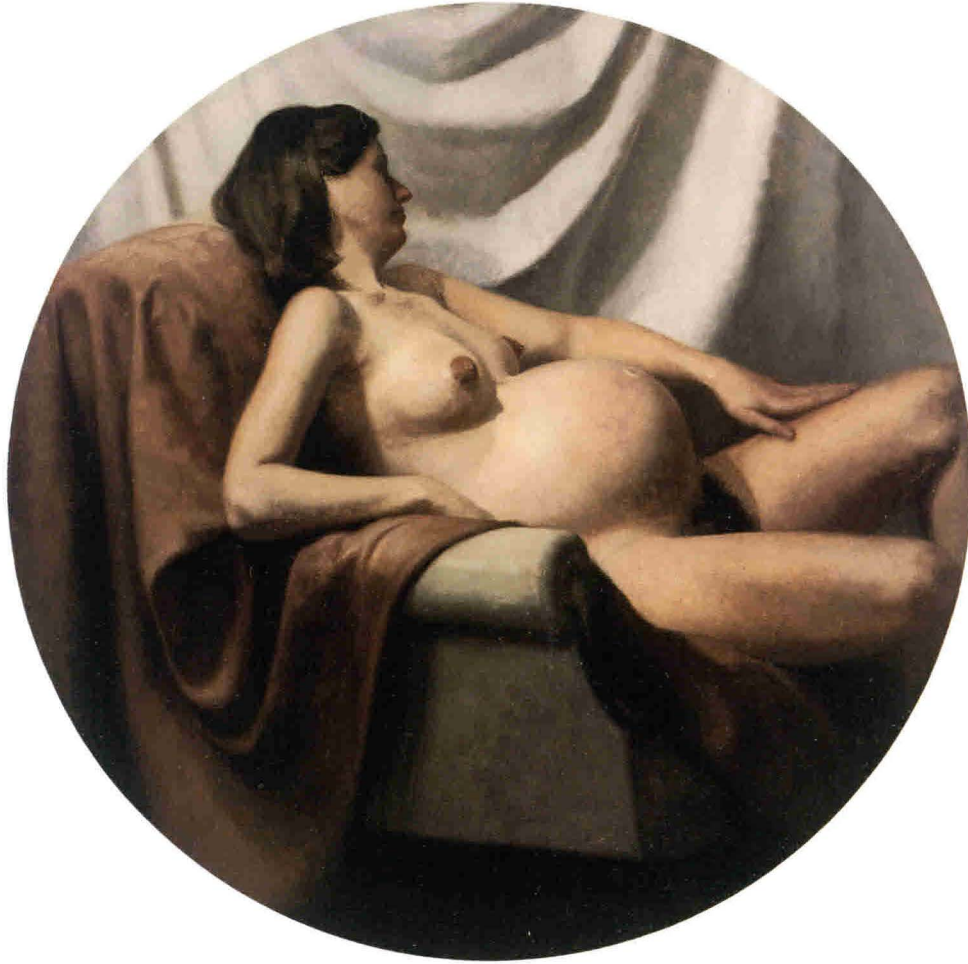
Charles Johnson Jr. is chairman of the Art and Art History Department of the University of Richmond.



Seated Empty Leg, bronze, 28" × 16" × 13", 1988



Small Stone One Leg, limestone, 46" × 14" × 10", 1984



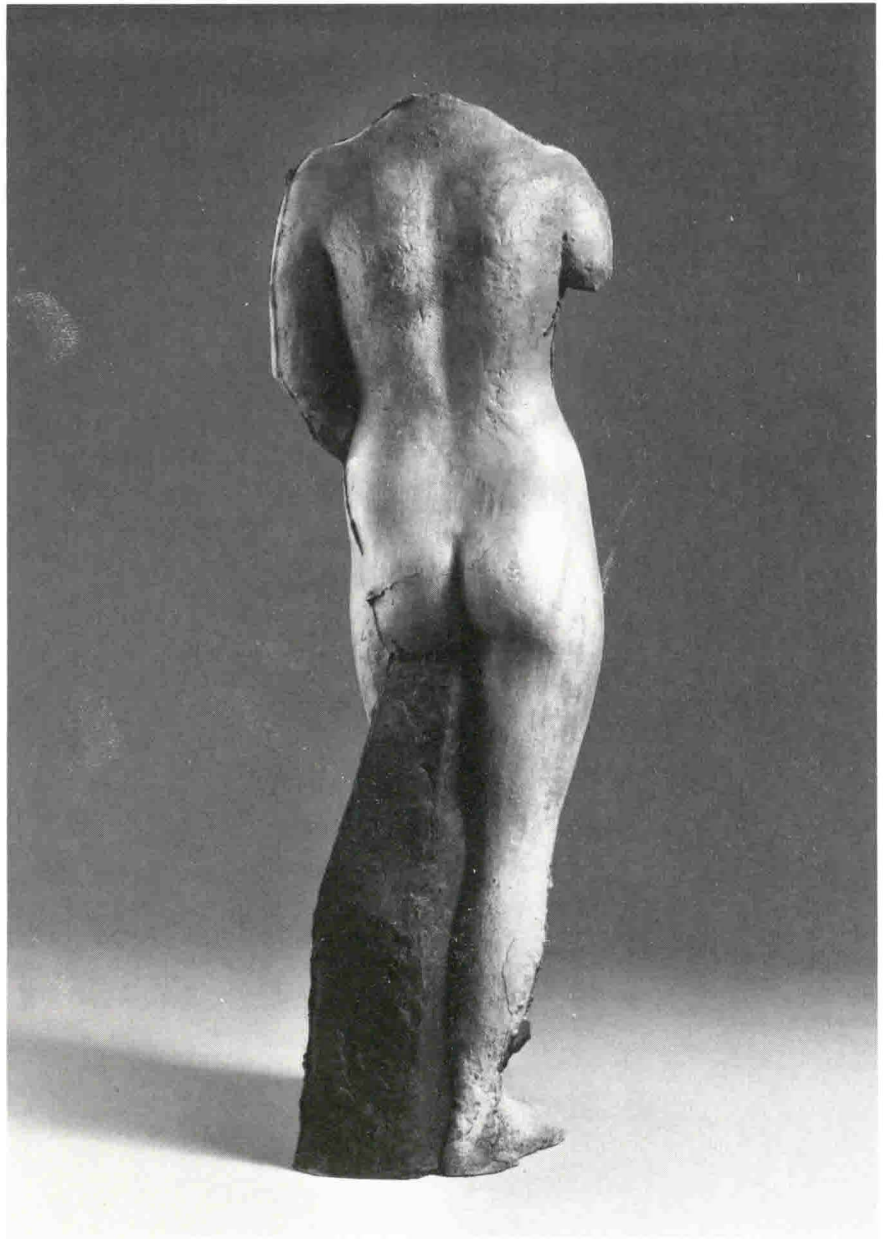
Sarah Pregnant, oil 48" diameter, 1985



Sarah and Madeleine, oil, 24" × 31½", 1987



Bronze Mass on Shoulder, bronze, 41" × 16" × 12", 1987



Iron White Legs, iron, 35" × 13" × 9", 1987



Anne Kinneman, oil, 48" × 53", 1987–88



Bronze One Arm, bronze, 48" × 18" × 13", 1984



Stone Bust, limestone, 24" × 16" × 15", 1983

BIOGRAPHY

EPHRAIM RUBENSTEIN is a painter from New York City. He received his B.A. in Art History from Columbia University and his MFA from Columbia University's School of the Arts in 1987. In addition he attended the Brooklyn Museum Art School, The New Brooklyn School of Life Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture, and participated in anatomical dissections at a New York medical school.

Mr. Rubenstein is represented by the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York. He has exhibited at the National Academy of Design, the Butler Institute of American Art, the Nicholas Roerich Museum, New York, and is represented in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Mutual Insurance Company of New York. He is currently Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Richmond.

MARK RHODES is a native of Louisville, Kentucky. He received his BFA in ceramics and sculpture from Murray State University, and an MFA in sculpture from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in 1987. He also studied ceramics in the MFA program at the University of Montana, and was studio assistant to Beverly Pepper in 1982.

Mr. Rhodes has exhibited widely and is represented in the permanent collections of Murray State University and Southern Illinois University, as well as in several prominent Midwestern public and private collections. He is currently Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Richmond.

CATALOGUE CREDITS

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PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS

T.K. Rose, cover, (*Standing Male Nude*)
Adam Reich, p. 7
Katherine Wetzel, all others



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