

---

**RUTH ZARFATI, by ETHEL S. COHEN**


---

"I sometimes ask myself — what have I done with my life?" This self-probing question seemed irrelevant when one considers Ruth Zarfati's achievements. Painter at 14, she has been creative in a variety of media, covering the wide scope of sculpting, painting, illustrator of books and the authorship of one, *The Hamster*, textile designer for Rikma and Maskit (she also designed the wrapping paper for the latter), designer of street signs for old Jaffa and designer of jewelry. Her latest enterprise is designing the playground equipment for a garden park in the slum area of Tel Aviv.

And of no less importance, she is married to the well-known sculptor Moshe Sternschuss and is the mother of a 15-year-old daughter who has apparently inherited the artistic genes from both parents.

Her sculpture was exhibited in the Ofakim Gallery (New Horizon) in Israel and in the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, and her jewelry at the Israel Pavilion in Milan.

As we talked, I was drawn to her beautiful sculptured face, her keen brown eyes which are penetrating, almost magnetic, in their concentration, and her quick friendly smile. She was dressed in a multi-flowered blouse and long, loosely-woven skirt, her own design for Rikma.

She began to study painting during her high school days and after graduation at the famous Avni studio. Her father, an amateur "but very good" painter was her guide in painting. She and her sister used to accompany him on his painting field trips and on visits to museums when they were very little girls. It seemed inevitable that she should marry her teacher at the Avni studio, Moshe Sternschuss.

Sculpting is the art closest to her heart and hands. And sculpting of children is the deepest expression of her innermost feeling. For the uninitiated, a first glance at the wooden sculptures of children is likely to elicit a shock. These figures seem a distortion of reality. They are strange and seemingly unattractive. But look longer and the sculpture comes alive. You are drawn

to these figures, made of wood, painted in muted, medieval colors, doll-like in appearance. Without realism, and certainly not abstract, she conveys the flesh and blood existence of the child. Usually in a seated position, the legs down, or outstretched, the proportion of the body distorted, the limbs foreshortened, parts of the body omitted—"imagined."

"I try to convey the child's inner feeling, the emotion, the mood of the moment. If I made a realistic piece, it would be a reproduction of a baby. Through foreshortening, or omitting limbs, I call on your imagination, and hope that you find what I am trying to express — the essence of the child's joy, or anger, or wonder." Miss Zarfati has recently completed a variation of the doll. It has only four movable parts, which can be taken apart and put together, "manipulated, like a doll."

She speaks of her child-sculpture as an expression of her profound love and insight into children's behavior. She began to sculpt and paint children when her own little girl was born. Year after year, as the little girl grew, she continued to be Ruth's model. "I really feel the constant changes in my

daughter." What emerges from her hands is inward, an almost instinctual expression. "I have no preconceived plan. The sculpture emerges under my hands. I love to sculpt children; their forms are soft and pliant.

"Sometimes, I am afraid of the results," she continued. "Why did I do it like this, I ask myself?" She cited an example of a sculpture of a young man she knows well. When she showed a photograph of this sculpture to a psychoanalyst, the woman exclaimed: "This man is deeply disturbed. You have revealed his problems in your sculpture." "It was a shock to me," Miss Zarfati said.

Still another example of her particularity as a sculptor were the portraits she and her husband made of a famous Israeli actor. The results were completely different. His was an abstract piece. Hers, "I felt the inner life of the man and I tried to portray this — his humaneness, his humor, his tragic quality." Not realistic, but the inner reality.

Her latest project is a design for a sculpture for the park in the Mansheah area of Tel Aviv. The designer of the park is Hillel Omer, the poet, whose pen name is Ein Hillel and for whom the park will be named. Ruth Zarfati's sculpture will be in the form of a huge whale whose movable parts will depict sea-life, sea-horses, shells, turtles, octopuses and others, into whose forms children will climb and romp and slide down. "In and out of Jonah's Whale," smiled Mrs. Zarfati. The architect calls her whale *shashu-yam*, a play on the Hebrew words *shashua*, meaning games, and *yam*, meaning sea.

A woman of multiple talents, Ruth Zarfati spoke of her dilemma of choice. "It is difficult for me to make the transition from one medium to another. I am constantly drawn to work in all of them. I must force myself to the discipline of choosing the particular medium. For me, it is like climbing Mt. Everest. But I am happy with myself in whatever I am doing. The important thing is to be yourself." A woman more fulfilled is rare to find. ■



RUTH ZARFATI