

## Meir Ronnen

AFTER 25 years of working and exhibiting her sculpture here, Israeli-born RUTH ZARFATI has, almost suddenly, begun to emerge as a major Israeli artist; her current show of some 50 castings, mostly in bronze, now on show at the Tel Aviv Museum's Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, is a real achievement.

Zarfati's show carries the stamp of both originality and individuality. Yet it is in no way contemporary, nor pioneering. Zarfati is a highly skilled portraitist with a feeling for caricature who has lately experimented with breaking down the human figure in two different directions: firstly by reassembling limbs, secondly by gradually breaking up her torsos into two separate forms. But she is not really much further along the road than Daumier and Rodin and... Henry Moore. Yet her solutions are so striking — and often so humorous or touching — that one moves around her show with growing delight.

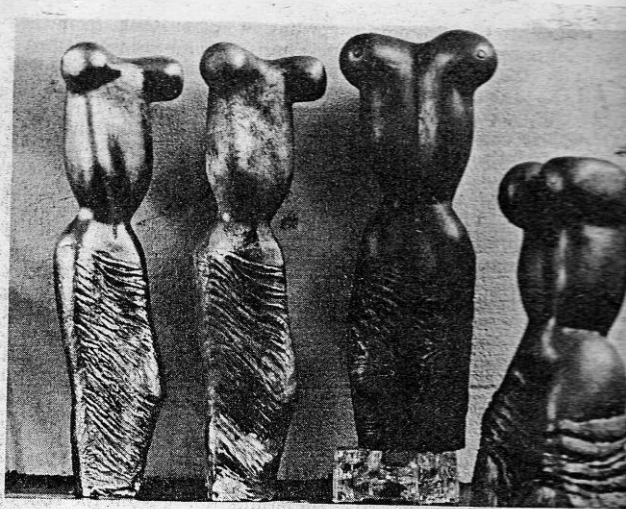
Like Rodin, Zarfati looks at a torso for its own sake. Lopping off head and shoulders, she replaces them with the breasts, which seem to function as the deltoids over the shoulders. The spinal cleft is then moved around to the front to cleave the thorax from sternum to stomach. The torso is then bound in a skirt of drapery, the whole deliberately reminiscent of Greek sculptural fragments; or split even further until the torso divides into individual trunks, each topped by a surviving breast. The transmutation of femininity into a semi-figurative abstract is very parallel to that of Moore, but the solution is strikingly original.

Zarfati's various angels are caricatures of 18th century cupids but 14 is remarkable for its verve, balance and pose. Her reassembled babies are almost cruel and consist of just head and limbs, the multiple castings being combined in different poses; they are a direct outcome of her doll-like modelling. All her highly formalized portraits project the feeling of being spitting likenesses; but in any case there is instant recognition of her graceful caricature of dancer Rina Schenfeld.

My only reservation is the almost commercial and nearly uniform finish of the bronzes, particularly of the figures of the

the presence of Zarfati's hands on the clay, and not just the spatula, particularly where the portraits are concerned.

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Ruth Zarfati: "Archaic torsos" (bronzes, at the Rubinstein Pavilion).

## Original throwbacks

