

An abstract painting by Berta Golahny. The composition is dominated by vibrant, swirling colors: deep blues, bright greens, fiery oranges and reds, and soft pinks. Several faces are depicted in a stylized, almost cubist manner, with some rendered in shades of blue and others in white or grey. The faces are integrated into the colorful, flowing forms, creating a sense of movement and emotional intensity. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and human expression within an abstract framework.

Berta Golahny: The Human Abstract

Amy Golahny and Emily Kopley

Lycoming College Art Gallery
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Professor Amy Golahny
Lycoming College, February 2018

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Biography

The oeuvre of Berta Golahny (née Bertha Rosenbaum, 1925-2005) interprets the devastations and the joys of the twentieth century, and reflects the period's artistic scope. At the same time, Golahny's oeuvre explores what is constant across time and space, and so reaches backward to biblical sources and outward to the universe beyond earth. Trained in the traditional techniques of painting, printmaking, and sculpture, Golahny used these media to express her empathy for people affected by man-made catastrophe and to explore humanity's place in the cosmos. In her lifetime, Golahny's work was widely shown, in the United States and abroad: she had eighteen solo exhibitions and participated in over 100 group shows. Her work is in private collections in the United States, France, the Netherlands, Canada, and Israel, and in museums including the Library of Congress, the Wichita Art Museum, the Williams College Art Museum, the Palmer Museum of Art at Penn State University, the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, and the Ackland Art Museum at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Golahny was born in Detroit, Michigan, to Gad and Fannie Rosenbaum, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Golahny's work reflects her parents' concerns: social justice, care for the needy, and artistic and intellectual liberty. Her father exerted an aesthetic as well as humanitarian influence on her: he designed wrought-iron railings and gates for the company he founded, Liberty Ironworks, which later expanded to become Acorn Iron Works. Her mother modeled social engagement and women's empowerment: she had been active in labor unions in New York City, and in Detroit she organized Yiddish reading circles to promote literacy among women.

Golahny's originality was evident and encouraged during her student years. As a senior at Detroit's Cass Technical High School, in 1943, she designed the triptych mural *The Four Freedoms* for a Detroit storefront (Figs. 1 and 2; mural now lost). The central panel illustrates the four freedoms



Fig. 1: Golahny (on right) and two Cass Tech students in front of the mural *The Four Freedoms* (now lost), 1943, Detroit. Golahny/Kopley family archive, Newton, Massachusetts.

codified by Franklin D. Roosevelt in his 1941 State of the Union address, which tried to persuade Americans to come to Britain's aid by joining the world war. The freedom of worship is suggested by figures of various denominations in prayer, the freedom of speech is represented by a woman reading a lecture and a man with open mouth and gesticulating arm, and the freedoms from fear and want find expression in a woman tenderly holding a baby. But Golahny extends Roosevelt's list: freedom of education seems implied by the several men holding books or reading, and by the young woman holding a diploma, while freedom of the press seems indicated by figures holding newspapers.

Norman Rockwell's 1943 series *The Four Freedoms*, created in the same period as Golahny's mural, interprets Roosevelt's speech literally.



Fig. 2: Golahny's *Four Freedoms* mural, 1943, Detroit. Golahny/Kopley family archive, Newton, Massachusetts.



Fig. 3: Ben Shahn, *The Four Freedoms*, 1940-1, egg tempera on canvas, 8 feet 6 in. x 16 in., Woodhaven Branch Post Office, Jamaica, Queens, New York. Courtesy The Stephen Lee Taller Ben Shahn Archive, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University.

Perhaps Golahny, in depicting also freedom of education and the press, took inspiration from artists whose versions of the theme pre-dated Roosevelt's speech. In 1939, Ben Shahn—who later recognized Golahny's talent—painted a one-panel mural of *The Four Freedoms*, commissioned by the Public Buildings Administration, for the post office of Woodhaven, Queens, New York (Fig. 3). Shahn's vision features at its center the torch of the Statue of the Liberty, next to which a man collects just-printed newspapers. Shahn painted below the torch the words of the First Amendment, which identifies certain freedoms not noted by Roosevelt, including that of the press: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances."¹ This language prompted sculptor Leo Friedlander's interpretation of *The Four Freedoms* for the 1939 World's Fair, in New York City: massive blocky nudes represent the freedoms of speech, press, religion, and assembly (Fig. 4).

In a departure from her artistic predecessors, Golahny emphasizes freedom by portraying the present challenges to it: the narrow flanking panels of her triptych show what Roosevelt's America, by 1943, is fighting against. On the left, a soldier with a swastika on his armband extends a whip towards emaciated bodies. On the right, a Japanese soldier brandishes a sword against children who resemble him—Golahny implies that it is not only the freedom of America and her allies that is at stake. Roosevelt had said that the four freedoms he mentioned should exist "everywhere in the world." Golahny's triptych makes the same point. The juxtapositions of freedom and oppression, comfort and suffering, recur in Golahny's later imagery, as for instance in the 1946 painting *After the War* (Fig. 5). Golahny understood that even as many postwar Americans felt relief and release, many others, including newly arrived refugees, felt grief and deprivation.

At Cass Tech, Golahny was awarded the National Scholastic Scholarship to attend the Art Students League in New York City from 1943 to 1944. There she met two influential instructors, George Grosz and Ossip Zadkine. Grosz encouraged



Fig. 4: Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. "Art - Sculpture - Four Freedoms (Leo Friedlander) - Freedom of Speech." New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed Jan. 17, 2018. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/5e66b3e9-100b-d471-e040-e00a180654d7>.

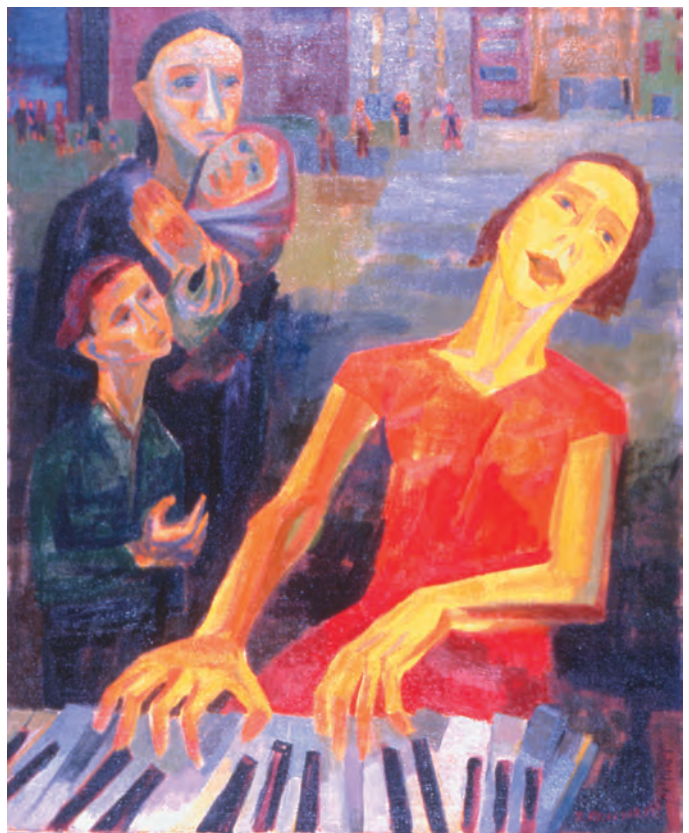


Fig. 5: Golahny, *After the War*, 1946, oil on canvas, 32 x 26 in.

¹ For more on Shahn's mural, see Linden.

her drawing, while Zadkine introduced her to sculpture (Fig. 6). In New York she also met the anarchist writer Rudolph Rocker, his wife Millie, and their son Fermin, also an artist. Like Golahny, Fermin Rocker carried the progressive political views of his parents into his socially conscious paintings. The two artists enjoyed a lifelong friendship.

Golahny continued her studies at the Art Institute of Chicago (BFA 1947), where the city itself instructed her: she sketched faces on the subway and children outside, and turned these sketches into paintings. *Children on the Steps* (Checklist 2), for example, shows children of various ethnic backgrounds playing together. Groups of diverse faces often feature in Golahny's later canvases, too, such as *The Striving, 9/11, & History* (Checklist 7). These canvases portray a harmony often elusive in reality.

In her last year at the Art Institute, Golahny received the Painting Prize from Shahn, visiting juror, for her thesis painting *The Resurrection* (Fig. 7). This work reads from left to right: at the top, the tangled bodies of concentration camp victims in the upper



Fig. 6: The Art Students League, Ossip Zadkine's sculpture class, 1943-44. Zadkine is seated at center with pipe; Golahny is in second row, standing, third from left. Golahny/Kopley family archive, Newton, Massachusetts.

left corner yield to figures holding hands, flowers, and finally a circle of dancers. Below this sequence, in the main part of the canvas, the grey faces of sad boys give way to a girl adorned with an oversized bouquet, a woman playing with a baby, a stroller-



Fig. 7: Golahny, *Resurrection*, 1950, oil on canvas. 36 x 48 in.

seated baby fingering a toy, and, more mysteriously, a small quintet of figures in which a girl holds flowers. As in *The Four Freedoms* and *After the War*, Golahny explores the poles of human emotion.

In the summer of 1947, Golahny attended the newly established Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, in rural Maine (Fig. 8). After graduating from the Art Institute, she attended the University of Iowa (MFA 1950), where she studied printmaking under Mauricio Lasansky, art history under William S. Heckscher, and painting under Eugene Ludins. At Iowa, she received an award for her printmaking from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation. The intaglio *Children at the Fair* is one example of her Iowa print work (Fig. 9).

As Golahny completed her formal training, her personal life found direction. In the summer of 1948, Golahny taught art at a Michigan summer camp. The teacher of Hebrew was Yehuda Golahny, an engineering student who had recently come to America after living in Latvia and Israel (then Palestine). The two married in 1949. The couple soon moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, so that Yehuda could study at MIT. After he received his Master of Science in Electrical Engineering in 1954, the couple settled in nearby Newton.²

In the culturally lively community of Boston, Golahny participated as artist and as teacher (Fig. 10). She regularly exhibited with the Boston Printmakers Association, and she taught painting at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education (CCAЕ) from 1959 to 2001. Her students included landscape painter Rachel Gordon Bernstein; Gary Goldstein, a physics professor at Tufts University; Flynn Warmington, a professional cellist; and Jerry Ackerman, a freelance writer who reported on her retirement for the *Boston Globe*. Of Golahny as a teacher, David Kelley, an electrical engineer who took her class for three years, said, “She takes everyone seriously. You know she cares deeply about what you are doing. Some teachers don’t push you much. With her it’s the opposite.”³ In 2016, the Center recognized accomplished CCAЕ teachers and students with the first annual Berta Golahny Awards.⁴



Fig. 8: Golahny in Skowhegan, Maine, 1947. Golahny/Kopley family archive, Newton, Massachusetts.



Fig. 9: Golahny, *Children at the Fair*, 1950, intaglio, 18 x 13 in.

² “Yehuda Golahny (1922-2017).” [Obituary.]

³ For information on Golahny’s teaching at CCAЕ, see Ackerman.

⁴ See Hansen.

Golahny experimented with painting, woodcut, and engraving. In her earlier paintings, the pigment is usually applied thickly, to achieve texture and soft contours, as in *Hiroshima: Bird of Fire* (Checklist 6). With later paintings, Golahny applied pigment more thinly and without blending. This approach facilitated defined edges and intense color, as in *Landscape of Man #1* and *#2* (Checklist 13 and 14). Her palette also shifted from darker tones to lighter ones. In printmaking as in painting, Golahny moved towards cleaner lines. Her early woodcuts take advantage of the grain to emphasize a rough texture, and were often printed without a press: she would press the paper to the inked block, then rub a wooden spoon over the paper to transfer the image. Two examples of work using this technique are *Korean War: Mother, Soldier, Wife* and *Thoughts on Man #2* (Checklist 5 and 8). With wood engraving, a medium Golahny took up in 1967 and in which she was prolific, she always printed on a press. In contrast to her early woodcuts, her wood engravings have a clean finish and abound in fine detail. These traits are exemplified in the 1975 *Portrait of the Artist* (Checklist 3). With intaglio, Golahny used softground and engraving to achieve a variety of patterns and lines, as in *Genesis: Day Five*, a copper engraving printed with multiple inks as a monotype (Checklist 33).

The progression of Golahny's artistic style can be seen by comparing her earlier and more traditional paintings, like her *Self Portrait at 18* (Checklist 1) to her later paintings, such as *The Human Abstract #1* (Checklist 17). A lifelong practitioner of Cézanne's oblique realism, Golahny came to blend this realism with various kinds of abstraction. In her mid-career, people in her paintings sometimes recall the heavy, monumental figures depicted by Max Beckmann, Otto Dix, and Pablo Picasso. Her several canvases of purely abstract shapes, usually in ecstatic colors, such as *Space Womb* (Fig. 11), have affinity with the work of Franz Marc, Wassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee. Consistently concerned with the human form, Golahny embraced the many directions of earlier twentieth-century art.



Fig. 10: Golahny in her painting studio, next to *Genesis: Day 1, Series 1, 1979*. Photo credit: Phyllis Giller of the *Newton Tab*, for Marjorie Bernstein's article.



Fig. 11: Golahny, *Space Womb*, 1978, oil on canvas, 10 x 10 in.

Analysis of Works Exhibited

A central tension in the development of modern art was that between realism and abstraction. Golahny reconciled this tension. She was at ease with both approaches and regularly combined them in a given work, particularly in her portrayal of people. Her portraits of herself, family, and friends honor the individual, even as her deconstructions of the human form hint at the idea of a universal humanity. Golahny repeatedly illustrated William Blake's poem "The Human Abstract." Her works by this title, together with her union of realism and abstraction, give this exhibition its name. Many of the works here have never been exhibited. This show focuses on five of the artist's themes or series: war, *Landscape of Man*, poetry, *Psalms*, and *Genesis*.

Reaching maturity in the period of World War II and the subsequent Korean War, Golahny conveyed the damage of these conflicts in her art. Here, a painting and a print respond to the Korean War in diverging ways. The painting *Korean War* (Checklist 4) exploits the Christmas season to contrast those removed from conflict with those in its midst. In bright colors, a Christmas tree shines, new scooters await lucky recipients, a woman carries presents, and a child sits on Santa's lap. The grey background features fields of snow and a forlorn child dressed in the Korean style. Both children hold a candy cane, but presumably the one on Santa's lap will soon have many more treats. The contrast extends to the two television broadcasts: one shows the tangled bodies of concentration camp victims (as in Golahny's *Four Freedoms* mural and *The Resurrection*) while the other shows a joyful woman singing. The woodcut, *Korean War: Mother, Soldier, Wife* (Checklist 5), portrays a mother and wife wailing over their son and husband, who lies dead in their arms. The painting registers irony—that of holiday cheer while others suffer—and the woodcut, a *pietà*, registers sincere grief.

The 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki prompted the painting *Bird of Fire: Hiroshima* (Checklist 6), in which a figure gazes up in horror at a fiery burst. The figure is in fact a

mother—a child clings to her belly—but, rendered as only outline and breasts, she becomes universal. Below her are a lightly painted mother and child happily gazing into each other's eyes—they do not see, or need not fear, the fiery burst. But what is this burst? The title helps us see that it is both atomic bomb and the phoenix who rises from his own ashes. At the base of the "bird," where the ashes should be, is a finely featured baby. Perhaps the destruction will lead to rebirth.

Golahny would continue to represent war and related tragedy. Among her last paintings is a response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York and elsewhere. Titled *The Striving, 9/11 & History* (Checklist 7), the painting balances historical tragedy, namely the Holocaust, on the left, with contemporary tragedy on the right. The number "9" on the larger player's jersey, together with the falling towers, may be read as "9/11." Using the Hebrew word for Holocaust, Golahny wrote, "I saw the 9/11 tragedy as a continuation of man's inhumanity which had a climax in the Shoah. I turned to basketball for some measure of optimism." Rendered with paint and gold leaf, the basketball appears to glow, a sign of hope and achievement.

The *Landscape of Man* series is a suite of work dating from 1957 to 1994, accomplished in many media: woodcut, wood engraving, intaglio, oil painting, and pastel (not included here). The series illustrates humanity's response to man-made disasters such as World War II and the Holocaust, the Korean War, the 1945 atomic bombings, and the perpetual nuclear threat. The series title refers to the many depicted figures, who exhibit a range of responses to catastrophe. Among the earliest works in the series is *Thoughts on Man #2* (Checklist 8), a large woodcut on pine. Here, a large, central head—a portrait of the artist, she who is having the "thoughts"—impassively confronts the viewer and what humanity has wrought. This head is flanked on the right by a smaller head with similar features in three-quarters profile, and on the left by a much smaller head. More heads, and expressive arms and hands, surround this horizontal column of faces. This horizontal column becomes vertical in the two-plate 1968 intaglio

Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age (Checklist 9), printed in blue-green ink. The three-headed core, with the lowest head inverted, is the common compositional structure of all subsequent works in the series. Here, the middle head is small, and of an elderly man—in fact, the artist’s father—and a vertical line of tiny heads above it reinforces the columnar structure. Two arms frame the column of heads. The arm on the left gathers smaller figures as if to protect them, while the arm on the right reaches toward the lower, inverted head and the three small faces near it—among them, the artist’s mother-in-law. Above this hand, the artist’s daughter appears, looking towards the right: Golahny drew on the faces of her family to portray the family of man. She also drew on untraditional materials: in the left corner of the lower plate is a tangled pile—perhaps of war victims—made by printing a lacy cloth trim used in hemming dresses.

Later works in the *Landscape of Man* explore the possibilities inherent in the 1968 intaglio composition. In 1994, Golahny reworked the upper plate (Checklist 10) and divided the whole into arcs printed in various colors. Here she keeps the upraised arm but replaces the upper head with disembodied eyes, and leaves a ghostly white arc in the space that her father, now dead, used to occupy. In the wood engraving (Checklist 11), the upper head is replaced by an eagle who can be seen as either menacing or protective: the broad wings seem shielding, like the arms, but the talons of one foot threaten to pluck up a mother and child. An eagle appears too in the copper engraving (Checklist 12), on the right rather than at the top, complemented on the left by a phoenix who rises from the ashes of dying figures, perhaps those burned in the Holocaust or in bombings (echoing *Bird of Fire: Hiroshima*). Describing the series as a whole in a document titled “Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age,” Golahny nevertheless had the 1983 copper engraving particularly in mind:

These works are structured on a central column of three heads with an embracing arm and a shielding hand. The uppermost head with blank eyes is a symbolic construct of humankind’s compliance with destructive forces. Within this series there are various

image transformations, but the central head has remained essentially the same—it holds special significance for me. This introverted head with tightly closed eyes cannot tolerate the idea of impending cataclysm. Surrounding the anxious eyes of the lower head are forms suggestive of a nuclear explosion.

But the central head did not entirely remain “essentially the same.” Modeled on her father in the 1968 intaglio, its absence from the 1994 reworking registered his absence. Far from refusing to confront disaster, Gad Rosenbaum was engaged and hopeful. Perhaps his example motivated Golahny to represent its opposite.

In the early 1980s, at the same time as she produced the wood and copper engravings, Golahny approached the *Landscape of Man* theme with brush rather than burin. The resulting three large oil paintings, of which two are exhibited here (Checklist 13 and 14), have loose and flowing brushwork in bright, saturated pigment.

The artist’s imagery was often spurred by her reading. This show features works responding to poetry, the Psalms, and the biblical account of the creation of the world. Poetry inspired the copper etching *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*, the paintings *The Human Abstract #1* and *#3*, and the wood engraving *Bird-man*. Taking his title from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans 6:9, Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) conjured in his short 1933 poem “And death shall have no dominion” an afterlife not of Christ but of all humanity, where souls merge back into the moon and stars. In Thomas’s celebration of universal resurrection, human feeling survives all: “Though lovers be lost love shall not.” Golahny’s 1953 monochrome etching acknowledges both St. Paul and Thomas (Checklist 15), featuring at its center the large torso of a running woman, at once cruciform and a possible interpretation of Thomas’s “Dead men naked they shall be one” (line 2). In the lower right corner lie a pile of limbs, Thomas’s “bones picked clean and the clean bones gone” (line 4). Elsewhere in Golahny’s oeuvre (*The Four Freedoms*, the *Landscape of Man* series) tangled bones recall Holocaust victims; here the bones represent both these victims and, informed by the words of St. Paul and Thomas, any and all of the dead. In the



Fig. 12: Berta Golahny, *The Tyger*, 1967, wood engraving, 4 x 5 in.

lifeless pile lie several fish, the symbol of Christ's resurrection. At the far right, a smiling fish ascends. Above him, a violinist plays while looking up at an emanation of light. Surrounding the violinist are lightly etched circles that may be heads, perhaps the ghostly heads of immaterial souls. Thomas writes of the dead, "Heads of the characters hammer through daisies" (line 25). The alliterative appropriation of the cliché "pushing up daisies" and the vision of people as eternal "characters" may have appealed to Golahny's sense of humor and narrative impulse. In 1993, Golahny printed the plate of *And Death Shall Have No Dominion* in blue, red, and black ink (Checklist 16). Here, red ink unites the running nude and the violinist, suggesting that both are figures of new life. St. Paul's Epistle describes Christ's rebirth,

and Thomas's poem imagines a secular, universal rebirth. Golahny's painting unites these prophecies into a sober, holistic vision: the running woman and violinist suggest that freedom and grace exist alongside horror; they do not replace or undo it.

Golahny admired the poetry and art of William Blake (1757-1827). Indeed, her first effort at wood engraving was an illustration for a broadside of Blake's "The Tyger," commissioned by the Penmaen Press (Fig. 12). She owned Alfred Kazin's 1946 edition of selected Blake poems, and the 1967 Orion Press facsimile edition of *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. This work, a gathering of Blake's hand-colored copperplate etchings that united text and image, was published by Blake himself in 1793, though he dated it 1794. *The Human Abstract*



Fig. 13: Berta Golahny, *The Tapestry* (also known as *The Human Abstract*), ca. 1970, 28 x 18 in., etching, blue monochrome.

#1 and #3 (Checklist 17 and 18) are named after Blake's poem, first published in his 1793 book. Both paintings show simplified, masklike heads—humans, abstract. The faces of one painting are cut from a black-inked impression of Golahny's etching *The Tapestry*—which she sometimes called *The Human Abstract* (Fig. 13). Blake's opening stanza reads,

Pity would be no more,
 If we did not make somebody Poor;
 And Mercy no more could be,
 If all were as happy as we:

This fine irony—empathy presupposes suffering—finds recurrent expression in Golahny's work. Blake then imagines that “the human brain” houses a “tree” whose roots are “Humility,” leaves are “Mystery,” and

fruit is “Deceit.” In Blake's illustration of the poem (Fig. 14), an old man (God) struggles to break free of ropes tying him down to the ground, where he seems to be the seed of two trees. Golahny's representation is less literal, and less moralistic.

The wood engraving *Bird-man* (Checklist 19) takes its cue from the Indian writer, musician, and artist Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Golahny owned a small book of his poetry and copied his 1940 poem “Bird-man” (“Pakshi Manab” in the original Bengali, sometimes translated “Flying Man”) to share with her students at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education. The apocalyptic poem laments that “The great machine made man a bird” (line 1): the airplane allows people to challenge the longstanding rulers of the sky, birds and God. Yet



Fig. 14: William Blake, “The Human Abstract,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Plate 47.

Golahny's interpretation seems to exult in man's resemblance to birds rather than lament it. At the bottom, a man's face looks sternly out, much like heads in the *Landscape of Man* series. From the left side of the man's face sprouts a magnificent soaring bird, more like the phoenix of *Bird of Fire* and the 1983 *Landscape of Man* (Checklist 12) than the destructive airplane of Tagore's poem.

Golahny may have been drawn to Thomas, Blake, and Tagore because they, like she, were inspired by spiritual texts: the Bible, for Thomas and Blake; the Upanishads, for Tagore. The Psalms of the Hebrew Bible, in the 1917 JPS translation, supplied titles for a series of six engravings on boxwood that Golahny made in the early 1970s. The earliest print in the series, *The Measure of My Days* (Checklist 20), shares with the *Landscape of Man* series a central column composed of faces. Here, a weathered face occupies the top of the column, surveying all, while a contemplative, full-cheeked face, chin on hands, occupies the middle. The eyes and forehead of another face peek out beside her. These central figures serve as structural pivots: below them, the top half of the composition appears inverted and in shadow. In Psalm 39, the "musing" psalmist says, "Lord, make me to know mine end, / And the measure of my days, what it is; / Let me know how short-lived I am" (verses 4-5). It would seem that the central face is that of the psalmist, and the mirroring faces those of something divine, or perhaps of life and death.

The next print in the series, *Night Shineth as the Day* (Checklist 21), is likewise structured around a central column, but here the column resembles a trellis entwined with the "night" of the title. This trellis serves as the body of a glad flutist. In Psalm 139, the speaker acknowledges that God's omnipresence forbids concealing oneself from him, and that "Even the darkness is not too dark for Thee, / But the night shineth as the day" (verse 12). God's ubiquity and brightness initially unsettle the psalmist, but they then amaze him beyond discomfort: "I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; / Wonderful are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." One imagines that Golahny's jubilant flutist plays a tune to these words.

A columnar trio of faces composes *Thou Hast Tested Me* (Checklist 22). Here, the central figure,

head turned up, appeals to an apparition emerging from clouds (printed in blue while the rest is black). Presumably this figure is the speaker of Psalm 17, who declares, "Let Thine eyes behold equity" (verse 2), and further, "Thou hast tested me, and Thou findest not / That I had a thought which should not pass my mouth" (verse 3). The emerging figure may be an emissary, while the eyes at the bottom may be those of God.

A divine emissary descends too from *Joy Cometh in the Morning* (Checklist 23), strewing leaves and protecting the large downturned head whose eyes betray both sorrow and gratitude. Such eyes are appropriate for the speaker of Psalm 30, who says, "Weeping may tarry for the night, / But joy cometh in the morning" (verse 6).

Psalm 103 is the source text for *Youth is Renewed* (Checklist 24), which features two discrete images printed in different colors. At the top, printed in red, two lovers embrace, encircled by a large bird, the eagle of the psalm: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, / And forget not all His benefits; [. . .] Who satisfieth thine old age with good things; / So that Thy youth is renewed like the eagle" (verses 2 and 5). Below the lovers, printed in red, flowers wilt, symbolizing man's transience: "As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth" (verse 15). Golahny's juxtaposition implies that rich later years may be one consolation of a short life.

The last print in the series, *Escaped* (Checklist 25), takes its title from Psalm 124, in which the psalmist thanks God for saving the people Israel from their enemies: "Blessed be the LORD, / Who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. / Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers" (verses 6-7). Golahny represents this metaphor with another one: the escaped bird becomes a nude woman, springing backwards and downwards, one hand clenched as if in defiance, the other extended to break her fall. Lurking eyes and heads, though benevolent and divine elsewhere in the *Psalms* series, here take on a sinister aspect, occupying as they do the space from which the woman has "escaped." One face does offer protection: the moon-like abstraction in the upper right, printed in red while all else is purple.

Golahny returned to the Hebrew Bible for her paintings in the *Genesis* series, composed over

two decades (Checklist 26-32). During a trip to the Sinai Desert in 1975, Golahny was fascinated by the deeply black sky, and became interested in the cosmos, and by extension in the scientific and religious accounts of the creation of the world. In order to render accurately phenomena and life of the sky, water, and land, Golahny read widely in astronomy, and repeatedly visited the Harvard College Observatory, the Harvard Peabody Museum, the Boston Museum of Science, and the American Museum of Natural History. She may have been inspired by Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling, which she visited before and after its restoration. Unlike Michelangelo, who paints a bearded, muscular God, Golahny emphasizes what is created, not the creator—though the eyes hidden throughout her work, and plentiful in *Genesis: Day Seven* (Checklist 32), may be divine. In this she observes the Jewish injunction against representing God. She painted each of the seven days at least twice, and saw the paintings as forming three sequences; the selection here is representative. Fascinated with the fifth day, when God creates creatures of the sea and air, she used the coelacanth—an ancient species of fish still around today—as emblematic of ocean life. It features in her paintings of the fifth day (e.g. Checklist 30) and the related engraving (Checklist 33). The *Genesis* and *Landscape of Man* series, and other works by Golahny, stirred Boston musicians Paul and Rosalie DiCrescenzo to write a four-movement score called *The Watchers and the Watched*. A recording of the score, together with a slide show of Golahny's work, was shown throughout the Boston area in the 1990s, and at Golahny's December 2006 memorial at the Newton Free Library.

Golahny's concern for humanity unites her oeuvre. Often eyes, heads, and faces are hidden in works from which, at first glance, people seem absent, and in works set in non-human spheres such as the deep sea or outer space. Even as the *Genesis* series celebrates God's presence throughout the universe, Golahny's body of work explores humanity's role throughout the same.

-Emily Kopley

Checklist of Works Exhibited

All works are in the collection of the Golahny/
Kopley family.

1. *Self Portrait at 18*, 1943, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 in.
2. *Children on the Steps, Chicago*, 1947, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in.
3. *Portrait of the Artist*, 1975, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

War

4. *Korean War*, 1950-53, oil on masonite, 36 x 48 in.
5. *Korean War: Mother, Soldier, Wife*, 1952, woodcut, 12 x 17 in.
6. *Hiroshima: Bird of Fire*, 1960, oil on canvas, 40 x 28 in.
7. *The Striving, 9/11 & History*, 2003, gold leaf and oil on linen, 36 x 60 in.

Landscape of Man (1957-1994; on show are works from 1957-1984)

8. *Thoughts on Man #2*, 1957, woodcut, 30 x 22 in.
9. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*, 1968, two-plate intaglio, 34 x 18 in.
10. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*, 1968-1994, color intaglio (#9 trimmed), 26 x 18 in.
11. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*, 1981, wood engraving, 18 x 12 in.
12. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*, 1983, copper engraving, 27 x 18 in.
13. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age #1*, 1981, oil on canvas, 48 x 30 in.
14. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age #2*, 1984, oil on canvas, 48 x 30 in.

Poetry

15. *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*, 1953, intaglio, 14 x 20 in.
16. *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*, 1953, printed in 1993, color intaglio, 14 x 20 in.

17. *The Human Abstract #1*, 1968, oil on masonite, 30 x 30 in.
18. *The Human Abstract #3*, ca. 1986, oil and intaglio on canvas, 44 x 34 in.
19. *Bird-man*, 1983, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

Psalms (1970-1973)

20. *The Measure of my Days*, 1970, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.
21. *Night Shineth as the Day*, 1970, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.
22. *Thou Hast Tested Me*, 1970, two-color wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.
23. *Joy Cometh in the Morning*, 1970, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.
24. *Youth is Renewed*, 1970, two-color wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.
25. *Escaped*, 1973, two-color wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

Genesis (1975-1992)

26. *Genesis: Day One (Series 2)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.
27. *Genesis: Day Two (Series 3)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.
28. *Genesis: Day Three (Series 3)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.
29. *Genesis: Day Four (Series 1)*, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in.
30. *Genesis: Day Five (Series 2)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.
31. *Genesis: Day Six (Series 1)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.
32. *Genesis: Day Seven (Series 2)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.
33. *Genesis: Day Five*, copper engraving, 23 x 18 in.



1. *Self Portrait at 18*, 1943, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 in.



2. *Children on the Steps*, Chicago, 1947, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in.



3. *Portrait of the Artist*, 1975, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.



4. Korean War, 1950-53, oil on masonite, 36 x 48 in.



5. *Korean War: Mother, Soldier, Wife*, 1952, woodcut, 12 x 17 in.



6. Hiroshima: Bird of Fire, 1960, oil on canvas, 40 x 28 in.



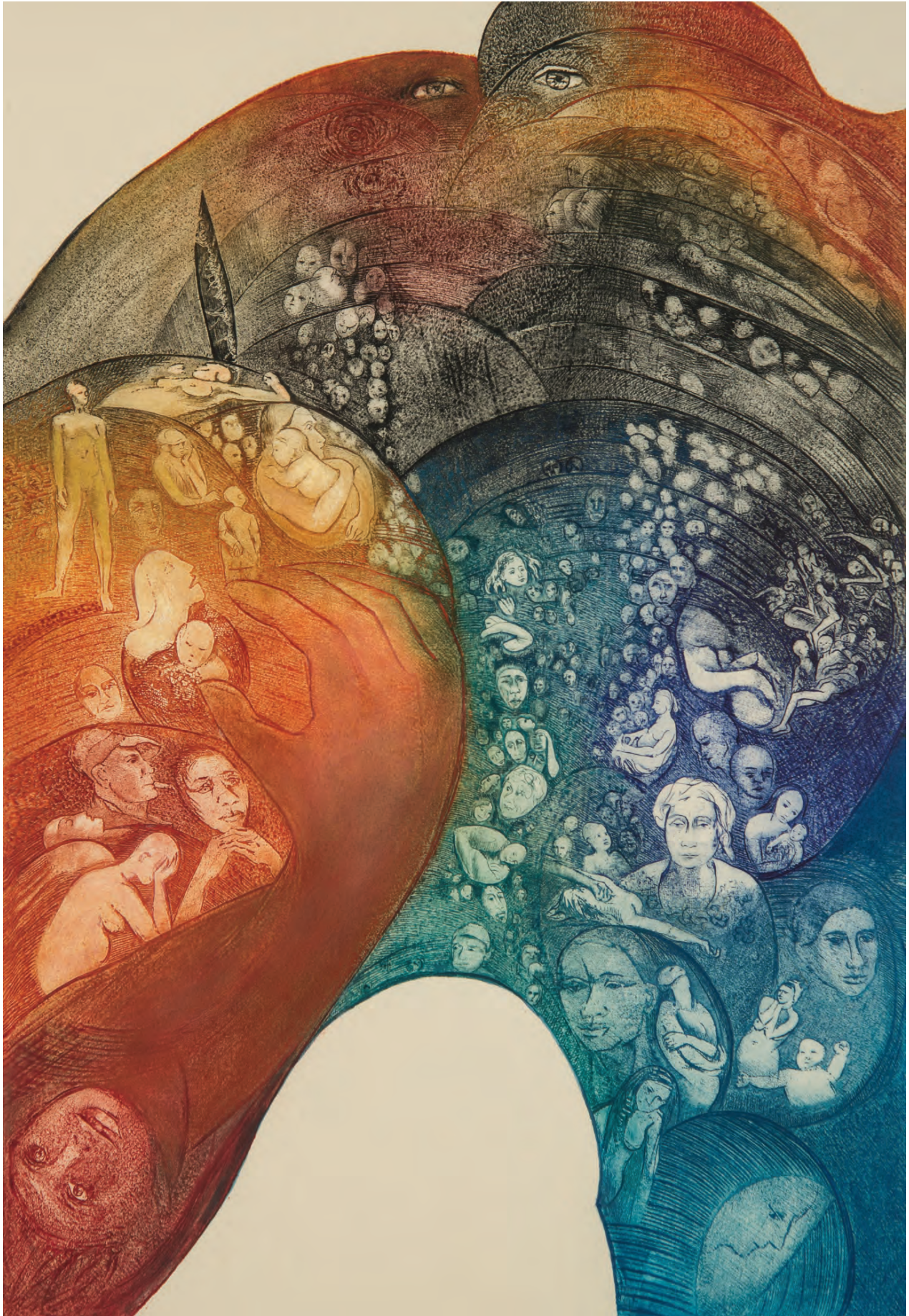
7. *The Striving, 9/11 & History*, 2003, gold leaf and oil on linen, 36 x 60 in.



8. *Thoughts on Man #2*, 1957, woodcut, 30 x 22 in.



9. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*, 1968, two-plate intaglio, 34 x 18 in.



10. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*, 1968-1994, color intaglio (#9 trimmed), 26 x 18 in.



11. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*, 1981, wood engraving, 18 x 12 in.



12. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age*, 1983, copper engraving, 27 x 18 in.



13. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age #1*, 1981, oil on canvas, 48 x 30 in.



14. *Landscape of Man in the Nuclear Age #2*, 1984, oil on canvas, 48 x 30 in.

*From St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans,
Chapter 6 (The Christian Bible, Douay-
Rheims Version)*

- 8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that
we shall live also together with Christ:
- 9 Knowing that Christ rising again from the
dead, dieth now no more, death shall
no more have dominion over him.
- 10 For in that he died to sin, he died once; but in
that he liveth, he liveth unto God:
- 11 So do you also reckon, that you are dead to sin,
but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*From "And death shall have no dominion" (ll. 1-9,
24-27)
Dylan Thomas*

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean
bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise
again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

[. . .]

Though they be mad and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
And death shall have no dominion.



15. *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*, 1953, intaglio, 14 x 20 in.



16. *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*, 1953, printed in 1993, color intaglio, 14 x 20 in.



17. *The Human Abstract #1*, 1968, oil on masonite, 30 x 30 in.



18. *The Human Abstract #3*, ca. 1986, oil and intaglio on canvas, 44 x 34 in.

**“The Human Abstract”
William Blake**

Pity would be no more,
If we did not make somebody Poor:
And Mercy no more could be,
If all were as happy as we:

And mutual fear brings peace:
Till the selfish loves increase.
Then Cruelty knits a snare,
And spreads his baits with care.

He sits down with holy fears,
And waters the ground with tears:
Then Humility takes its root
Underneath his foot.

Soon spreads the dismal shade
Of Mystery over his head;
And the Catterpillar and Fly,
Feed on the Mystery.

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,
Ruddy and sweet to eat:
And the Raven his nest has made
In its thickest shade.

The Gods of the earth and sea
Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree
But their search was all in vain;
There grows one in the Human Brain.

From "Bird-man" (ll. 1-5, 14-16, 18-30)
Rabindranath Tagore, trans. Aurobindo Bose

The great machine made man a bird.
Earth, water are prostrate at his feet,
Only the air was left.

Wings are God's gift to birds—
Their joy blooms out in line and colour.

[. . .]

To sky, forest, mountain—
From age to age they brought life's message.
But what has happened today? [. . .]
Arrogance's flag, in pride of Power,
Has spread its wings.
The god of life has not blessed it,
The forest not made it her own,
And the moon respects it not.
Shattering the winds
And roaring in a shrill voice,
It announces its alienness to the sky.

Today, in Man's poisoned history,
It claims the clouds,
And in loud laughter
Rains from the skies destruction.
I feel the end of an Age has come [. . .]



19. *Bird-man*, 1983, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

From Psalm 39

- 4 My heart waxed hot within me;
While I was musing, the fire kindled;
Then spoke I with my tongue:
- 5 LORD, make me to know mine end,
And the measure of my days, what it is;
Let me know how short-lived I am.
- 6 Behold, Thou hast made my days as hand-breadths;
And mine age is as nothing before Thee;
Surely every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.



20. *The Measure of my Days*, 1970, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

From Psalm 139

- 7 Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?
Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? [. . .]
- 11 And if I say: 'Surely the darkness shall envelop me,
And the light about me shall be night';
- 12 Even the darkness is not too dark for Thee,
But the night shineth as the day;
The darkness is even as the light.
- 13 For Thou hast made my reins;
Thou hast knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 14 I will give thanks unto Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.



21. *Night Shineth as the Day*, 1970, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

From Psalm 17

- 1 Hear the right, O LORD, attend unto my cry;
Give ear unto my prayer from lips without deceit.
- 2 Let my judgment come forth from Thy presence;
Let Thine eyes behold equity.
- 3 Thou hast tried my heart, Thou hast visited it in the night;
Thou hast tested me, and Thou findest not
That I had a thought which should not pass my mouth.



22. *Thou Hast Tested Me*, 1970, two-color wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

From Psalm 30

- 5 Sing praise unto the LORD, O ye His godly ones,
And give thanks to His holy name.
- 6 For His anger is but for a moment,
His favour is for a life-time;
Weeping may tarry for the night,
But joy cometh in the morning. [. . .]
- 12 Thou didst turn for me my mourning into dancing;
Thou didst loose my sackcloth, and gird me with gladness;
- 13 So that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent;
O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto Thee for ever.



23. *Joy Cometh in the Morning*, 1970, wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

From Psalm 103

- 1 Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.
- 2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits;
- 3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquity;
Who healeth all Thy diseases;
- 4 Who redeemeth Thy life from the pit;
Who encompasseth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies;
- 5 Who satisfieth thine old age with good things;
So that Thy youth is renewed like the eagle. [. . .]
- 14 For He knoweth our frame;
He remembereth that we are dust.
- 15 As for man, his days are as grass;
As a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.
- 16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone;
And the place thereof knoweth it no more.



24. Youth is Renewed, 1970, two-color wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

Psalm 124

- 1 'If it had not been the LORD who was for us',
Let Israel now say;
- 2 'If it had not been the LORD who was for us,
When men rose up against us,
- 3 Then they had swallowed us up alive,
When their wrath was kindled against us;
- 4 Then the waters had overwhelmed us,
The stream had gone over our soul;
- 5 Then the proud waters
Had gone over our soul.'
- 6 Blessed be the LORD,
Who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.
- 7 Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers;
The snare is broken, and we are escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the name of the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.



25. *Escaped*, 1973, two-color wood engraving, 12 x 9 in.

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. And God said: 'Let there be light.' And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.



26. *Genesis: Day One (Series 2)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.

Genesis 1:6-8

And God said: 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.' And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.



27. *Genesis: Day Two (Series 3)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.

Genesis 1:9-13

And God said: 'Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas; and God saw that it was good. And God said: 'Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit-tree bearing fruit after its kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth.' And it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, and tree bearing fruit, wherein is the seed thereof, after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.



28. *Genesis: Day Three (Series 3)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.

Genesis 1:14-19

And God said: 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. And God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; and the stars. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.



29. *Genesis: Day Four (Series 1)*, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in.

Genesis 1:20-23

And God said: 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let fowl fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.' And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creepeth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiple in the earth.' And there was evening and there morning, a fifth day.



30. *Genesis: Day Five (Series 2)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.

Genesis 1:24-31

And God said: 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind.' And it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after its kind, and the cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.' And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them; and God said unto them: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.' And God said: 'Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed—to you it shall be for food; and to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is a living soul, [I have given] every green herb for food.' And it was so. And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.



31. *Genesis: Day Six (Series 1)*, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.

Genesis 2:1-3

And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work which God in creating had made.



32. *Genesis: Day Seven (Series 2)* oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in.

Genesis 1:20-23

And God said: 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let fowl fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.' And God created the great sea-monsters, and every living creature that creepeth, wherewith the waters swarmed, after its kind, and every winged fowl after its kind; and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiple in the earth.' And there was evening and there morning, a fifth day.



33. Genesis: Day Five, copper engraving, 23 x 18 in.

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