

ART

20 Photographic Portraits Denote a Generation of Artists

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

RIVERDALE
 HE exhibition of 20 portrait photographs by Richard Leslie Schulman is titled "Generations of Artists," but the emphasis is heavily on the older generation, which is appropriate, for it is at the Hebrew Home for the Aged here.

From his portfolio of artist portraits, which he has been accumulating since 1982, Mr. Schulman selected well-known and influential artists whose background is Jewish, but as the news release says, "The content of their art is not necessarily religious."

Very little of their content is, but Mr. Schulman has given almost every portrait a religious aura through the use of a dramatic and pronounced chiaroscuro. The mix of sections of intense light and dark is further enhanced by a golden gleam in which he has framed many of his subjects. Viewers might be reminded of Rembrandt, which is fitting, since a significant part of his art has a Jewish theme.

Susan Putterman, who is the curator at the Hebrew Home for the Aged, said that Mr. Schulman's portrait of the sculptor Reuben Nakian, who is depicted striding across the floor of his Connecticut studio, helped to defuse a minor crisis. Mr. Nakian is known for his lively sculptures of mythological scenes, some of which have a Baroque sweep and also a sexual frankness.

One of these was donated to the collection and, not surprisingly, there was much objection to displaying it. But when Mr. Schulman's photograph revealed the artist, who wore his gray hair especially long, to also be an elderly person, the uproar quieted.

Another Connecticut-based sculptor is Alexander Liberman, who died recently and was most widely known as an editor of *Vogue* magazine. Mr. Schulman captured Mr. Liberman's nattiness and polish in what turns out to be the most uniformly bright picture in the exhibition. Mr. Liberman and his surroundings are all in shades of silver and gray, which is a marked contrast to the most typical of his abstract steel sculpture, which is painted lipstick red.

Louise Nevelson and Lee Krasner, who is often identified as the widow of Jackson Pollock, are approached



The portrait of the sculptor Alexander Liberman, above, is among the 20 photographs of artists on exhibition in Riverdale.

roughly the same way by Mr. Schulman. Both were strong, powerful women, and the emphasis is on the physiognomy while the background is subdued. The faces of each woman are bathed in an especially fiery glow. Their personalities, however, differed markedly, something Mr. Schulman's treatment reflects. Ms. Nevelson looks exotic and mysterious while Ms. Krasner, though she is plainspoken by comparison, radiates capability.

Mr. Schulman obviously had fun with some of his subjects. The French artist known as Arman, who is best known for his sculptures, which are beguiling accumulations of common objects, is nevertheless portrayed standing in front of a colorful canvas. Almost the same buoyant palette of colors has accumulated on his white jumpsuit.

George Segal signature pieces are plaster sculptures of people placed in real-life environments. Even though they are blatantly artificial, they can look surprisingly alive. Mr. Schulman caught Mr. Segal in a doorway, near some of his works, and the effect is reversed: the artist at first appears to be a sculpture.

In reality the realist painter Raphael Soyer was diminutive in stature and at times could look like a beleaguered elf, but the artist whom Mr. Schulman portrays as the most



Photographs by Richard Leslie Schulman

Lee Krasner, above, was the widow of Jackson Pollock. In the center above is a photographic portrait of the painter Alex Katz. George Segal, left, was photographed in a doorway near some of his plaster sculptures. All of the portraits are at the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale.



boish is the Pop Art pioneer Roy Lichtenstein.

That Lichtenstein wears a T-shirt amplifies his appearance as a mildly rebellious adolescent. Appropriately enough, Lichtenstein, who was also small in stature, is posed with a couple of his early comic book-based paintings.

The portrait of Alex Katz is both mysterious and informative. Why he sits in front of a window from which a red balloon hangs is a conundrum, but behind him is a figure drawing in charcoal; it's a revelation to those who wonder how he begins his serene paintings.

Mr. Schulman included a couple of younger artists who have nevertheless been major players in the art scene for a couple of decades. David Salle was considered an enfant terrible in the 1980's for his controversial figure paintings. The painting he is photographed with here seems almost traditional.

Ross Bleckner, who is often credited with bringing back romanticism to contemporary painting, sits in front of a window through which floods pale blue light. With this picture a viewer does not think of Rembrandt but Vermeer.

Other artists' portraits in the show include Karel Appel, Hannelore Baron, Jim Dine, Michael Goldberg, Leon Golub, Sydney Goodman, R. B.

Kita), Larry Rivers and Nancy Spero.

Another art highlight at the Hebrew Home for the Aged is the restoration of an enormous painting that used to hang in the cafeteria and is now installed more honorifically in a communal room, which can easily be transformed into a synagogue. Painted by a Russian artist, Moses Miron, in 1893, it is an epic dramatizing the persecution of Jews during the Spanish Inquisition.

A seemingly endless file of soldiers is coming through the door of a house in which a large family is surrounded — especially now after the cleansing — by almost immaculate whiteness as they celebrate their Seder. The bearded patriarch is telling the leader of the invaders to wait until after the ritual is over before arresting the family. Formally, the painting might be divided in two: the family portion is white and light, but the soldiers are in shadow, their contours blurred and thus more frightening. Like many of Mr. Schulman's portraits, this 16-foot-long painting is, among other things, a masterly example of chiaroscuro.

"Generations of Artists" is at the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale through Jan. 31. The phone number to call for information is (718) 548-8700. ■