

**PAINTINGS BY MAUREEN DRDAK**

# **EX VOTO**



**UPPER GALLERY 9.1.04-10.31.04**

© Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art at Ursinus College, 2004  
601 E. Main Street, Collegeville, Pennsylvania 19426

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Exhibition funded in part by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.



Cover Image:  
**THE KILLING OF LIONS**  
Dying Lion  
Detail

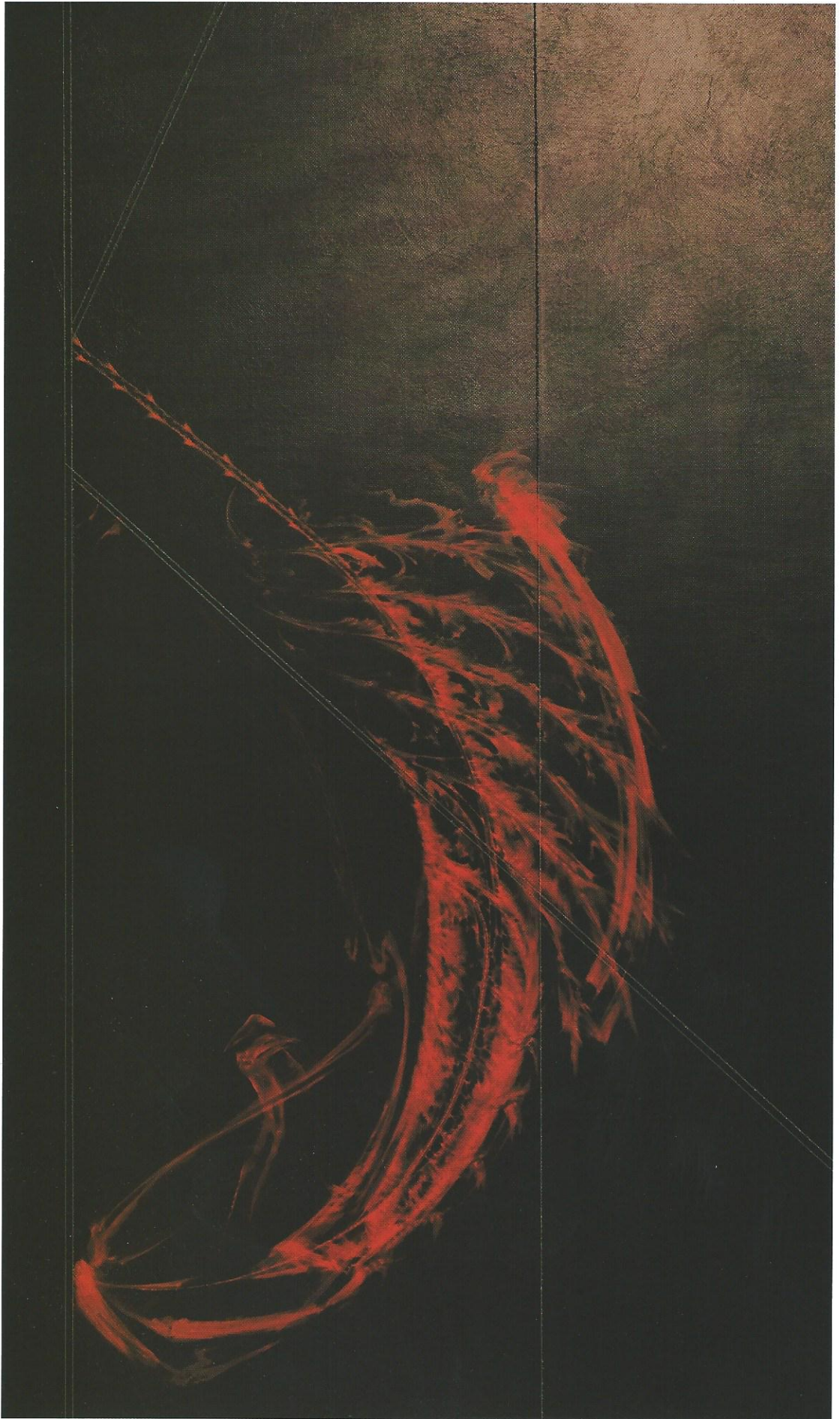
# EX VOTO

PAINTINGS BY MAUREEN DRDAK

THE PHILIP AND MURIEL BERMAN MUSEUM OF ART AT URSINUS COLLEGE UPPER GALLERY 9.1.04-10.31.04



**THE KILLING OF LIONS**  
Dying Lion  
Detail



## FOREWORD

Maureen Drak and I started our journey together in the year 2000 when she shared images with me of *Four Djinn* followed by studies in preparation for *Ashur 2*. Complementing these images was a narrative of how ancient visual texts from Mesopotamia and Sumer, and a deep sense of connection with both the aesthetic and historical context of these cultures, guided her own investigation of subject and medium. This kind of intellectual inquiry was substantiated when I made a studio visit. The artist is well-read, articulate, and the tangible compositions I experienced had a power that mirrored her passion. The surfaces are controlled yet the painted strokes exuberant. You feel the force of the animal and the piercing of his strength in *The Killing of Lions* and *The Akedah Triptych* has a resplendent quality constrained by it's black cocoon. Both of these series were initiated and completed specifically for this exhibition.

Scholars in the visual arts and literature have read the current series of paintings that comprise the *Ex Voto* installation and they do so with specific references to texts and the antecedent imagery that have inspired the artists

interpretations. Their response to the impact of these compositions is immediate, vivid, and also measured as they contemplate the literal and metaphorical layers of the surface and subject. We appreciate the contributions they have made to this document and in their dialogue with Maureen as she made her own journey synthesizing her studies and imagery to capture that one element that would speak to her viewing audience.

I am grateful to Maureen for sharing many hours of conversation and visual delights that form this cohesive investigation of ancient cultural and religious icons that have relevance to contemporary issues. We celebrate with her this coming together of years of work and appreciate the lessons she shares with us through this focused and powerful installation.

**LISA TREMPER HANOVER, DIRECTOR**

September 2004



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to Lisa Tremper Hanover, Director of the Philip and Muriel Berman Museum, and President of the Association of College and University Museums and Galleries. Her ardent appreciation of my work and intellectual attentiveness to my creative process was experienced by me as nothing less than providential. In her energy, devotion to the arts, and talent for aesthetic nurturance, not to mention her considerable personal élan, the Berman Museum possesses an invaluable asset.

My great appreciation to the Berman Museum for its very generous fiscal support.

Kudos to Dr. Carol Delaney, for her brave and original scholarship into the Abraham myths; her penetrating insights greatly enhanced my creative response to my subject.

Thanks to Dr. Ann Priester, dynamic scholar and speaker, for her sensitivity to the wider cultural significance of the sacred in art, and the pleasure of her collaboration.

My personal gratitude to Augusta Read Thomas, Mead Composer-in-Residence, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, for the very special honor of her artistic fellowship.

Thanks to my serendipitous Muse, Linda Reichert, Director of the Network for New Music, for her aesthetic and intellectual fertility, and her spirited support and friendship.

All praise to Prof. John Russell, Massachusetts College of Art, and Senior Advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of Culture for his profound appreciation of ancient Iraqi art, and his dedication to its preservation. His enthusiasm for my work is inspirational capital.

My acknowledgement goes to Ted Fullerton, my perennially patient photographer, for his talent and professional generosity, and to Steve Crosset, for his digital finesse.

Cyber laurels to my webmaster, Vincent Matvi, for his creative vision and stamina. And thanks to Shirley Epps and her staff at Epps Advertising for their pain free professionalism.

Affectionate appreciation for dear friends, Karl Middleman, Director of the Philadelphia Classical Symphony, whose brains, heart, and aesthetic smarts are always completely at my disposal, and to Dolly Schulman, emotional mentor, enlightened woman, and my steadfast friend for all seasons.

A special blessing to my faithful friend of thirty years, Zafriya Berkowitz, for our fervent, challenging, and frequently torturous midnight inquests into religion and metaphysics. Her head, heart, and home in Israel constituted my base of departure into that mysterium which is the Middle East.

A kiss for my daughter Alexis Schultz, who properly grounds my ego with her often irreverent analysis of my work. And loving honor to my husband, Peter Horodowich, who continues to climb the mountain with me.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

People who first saw the works in this exhibit, particularly *The Akedah Triptych* and *The Killing of Lions* - the black paintings - wanted to touch them. This happened so often that Lisa Hanover suggested that we exhibit the Test Panels primarily for this purpose, and to avoid potential damage of the paintings themselves. So I feel a few words will be welcome and in order about process and intent.

The tactile sensuality of the surfaces of my black paintings is achieved through an exacting procedure, which is lengthened by their large dimensions and the visual fatigue of working black on black. Layers of black gesso, customized black acrylic mixture, and hand sanding achieve the effect of a texture analogous to slate with subtle refractive characteristics. This contrast of light refraction and chromatic density can be seen as symbolic of the reflective aspects of the Questioner and the dark of the Unanswered Question, to borrow from Charles Ives. The power of the sacral element in art is transcendence; to take the viewer within to themselves to a clear void, a sacral place. What I'm after is the Void.

The mineral/stone threads of the works are then laid down. I refer to the resulting form of mineral threads as a "panjara", a Sanskrit word meaning cage, denoting a diagram, grid, or framework for structure and action. A panjara is essentially a cage to contain, restrain and direct dynamic forces. It can also be understood as a temporal expression of the universal order contained in the microcosm of the psyche and the macrocosm of the world. I love the conceptual poetry of the panjara.

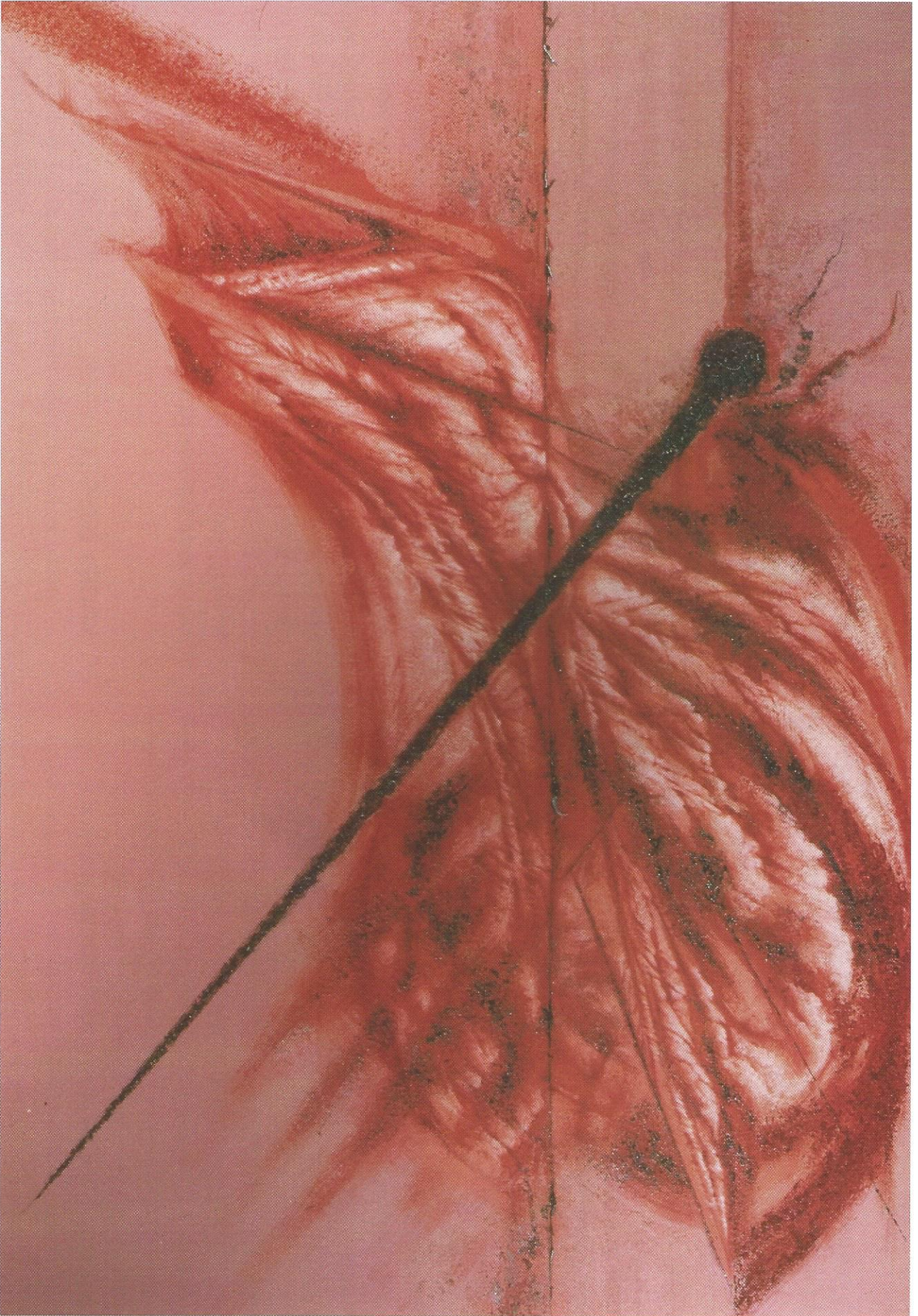
Panjaras contain and restrain the sacrificial dynamic in *The Akedah Triptych*, inviting introspection. Akedah, meaning The Binding, represents

the continuum of religio-mythic memory so very alive in our post-modern world. In *The Killing of Lions* the stone threads are a condensed expression of the prevailing forces of the King in their opposition, engagement, and penetration of the Lion. The inhabitants of these force fields are the pulsating vestiges of the life force. Veinous connections from tongues to genitals write the thread of life; the permeable path of unconscious drives and actions and thoughts. The forces of King and Lion, the conscious and unconscious, the sacred and profane, the modern and archaic, exist in perpetual engagement and conflict within us all.

A summary reflection on these works; as a child my earliest aesthetic moments were filled with pleasurable gazing in my art book at the repros of Assyrian bas reliefs, *The Lion Hunts*—men, horses and lions engaged in great silent dramas. In retrospect, I speculate that my Catholic upbringing only heightened my interest in the imagery of the forbidden Other, the discarded Ones. My fascination with near eastern imagery has never abated, but segued into history, psychology, and religion. Freud had his collection of antiquities available for his personal communion; they were his guides into the Deep. When we reflect on the global theatre today, we must wonder at the strength of these reemerging forces on stage and ask ourselves what they portend. And where we will find our Guides.

**MAUREEN DRDAK**





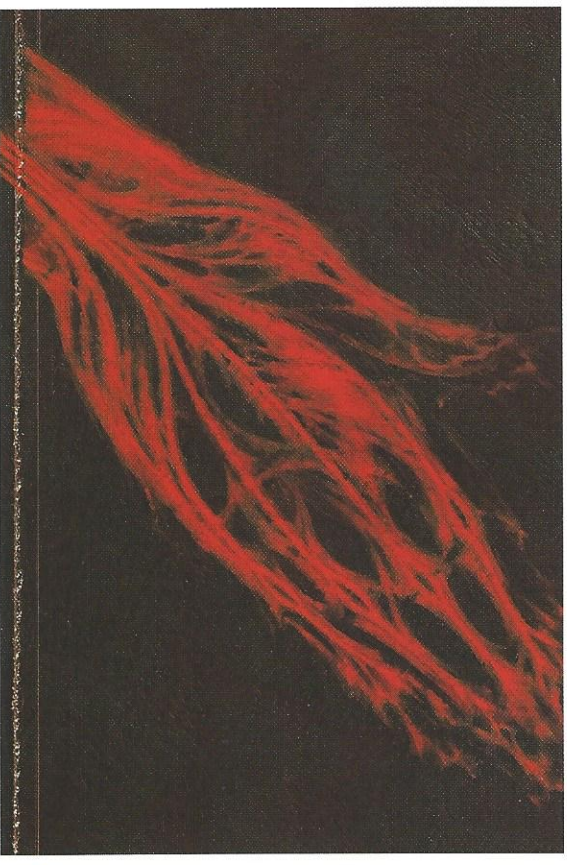


To me a word was brought in stealth and my ear received an inking from it. In disquieting thoughts from visions of the night when the god-sent deep sleep falls upon humans, dread summoned me and trembling. It filled all my bones with dread. A spirit swept by my face and the hair of my flesh bristled. Something stood by but I could not recognize its appearance. A form was in front of my eyes. There was silence; then I heard a voice. **Job 4:12**

**“Maureen Drdak’s ambitious art is rich in meaning and formal nuance.**

**Informed by her own very personal and simultaneously highly cerebral understanding of history, myth, and religion, her paintings resonate with universal themes of life and death, sacred and profane, the sacrificial and the sacramental. And in their combination of boldness of conception and design with an execution that is delicate and exacting, they are also ravishingly beautiful.”**

Ann Priester, Ph.D., Princeton  
Art Historian and Lecturer, Lehigh University



**THE KILLING OF LIONS**  
Attacking Lion  
Detail



**THE AKEDAH TRIPTYCH**  
Isaac  
Detail



**THE AKEDAH TRIPTYCH**  
Jesus  
Detail





### THE AKEDAH TRIPTYCH

Ishmael  
Detail

“Maureen Drdak’s *Akedah Triptych* strikes the viewer with visceral impact. The blood-red strokes incised on expansive black fields cut to the core of the Abraham story. Like ancient wounds reopened, they powerfully invoke the question of why the willingness to sacrifice rather than protect the child became the model of faith and martyrdom in the three Abrahamic religions, an interpretive dilemma that demands urgent reflection and examination today.”

Carol Delaney, Ph.D., Anthropologist, Stanford University  
Author, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth*

The true hero of the Akedah was the ram

unaware of the connivance of others

It is as he volunteers to die in Isaac's place.

I want to sing a tribute to its memory

Its curly wool and its human eyes

And its horns that were so quiet on its lovely head

Which after its slaughter were made into trumpets

To the sound of their war

Or to the blast of their vulgar joy...

and behind them, as a colorful background, the ram

Caught in the thicket before the slaughter,

And the thicket was its very last friend.

The angel went home

Isaac went home

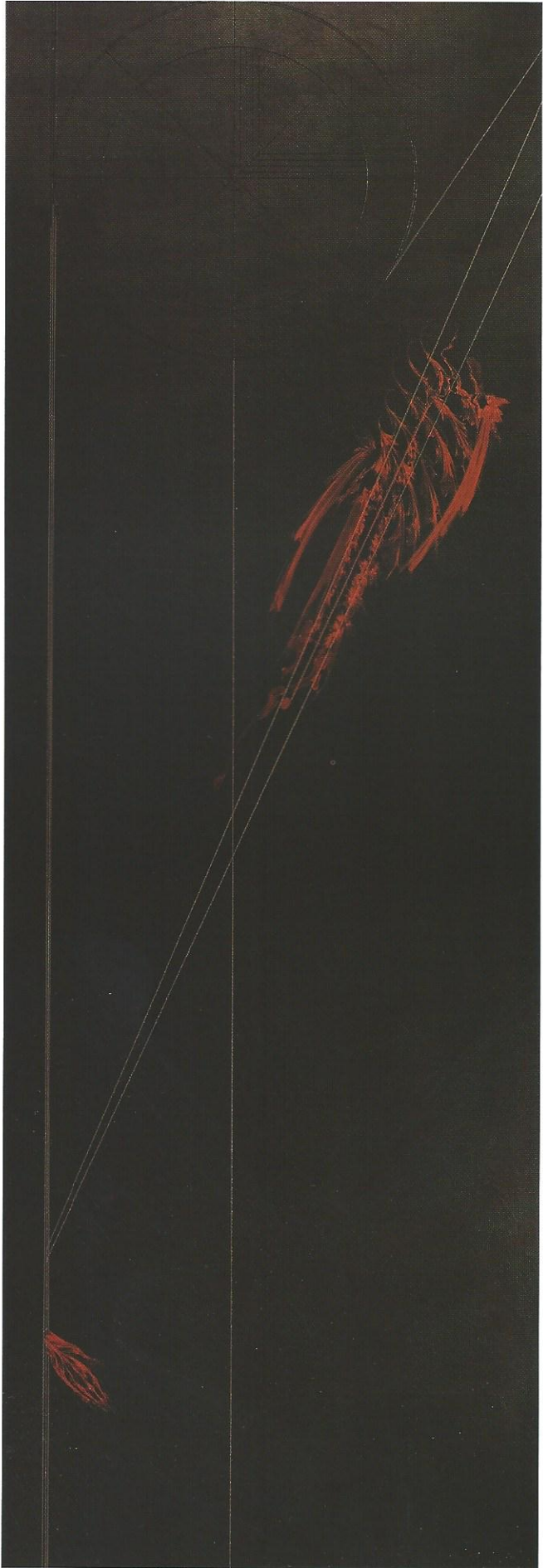
Abraham and God went a long time ago

But the true hero of the Akedah

Is the ram.

**YEHUDAH AMICHAI**

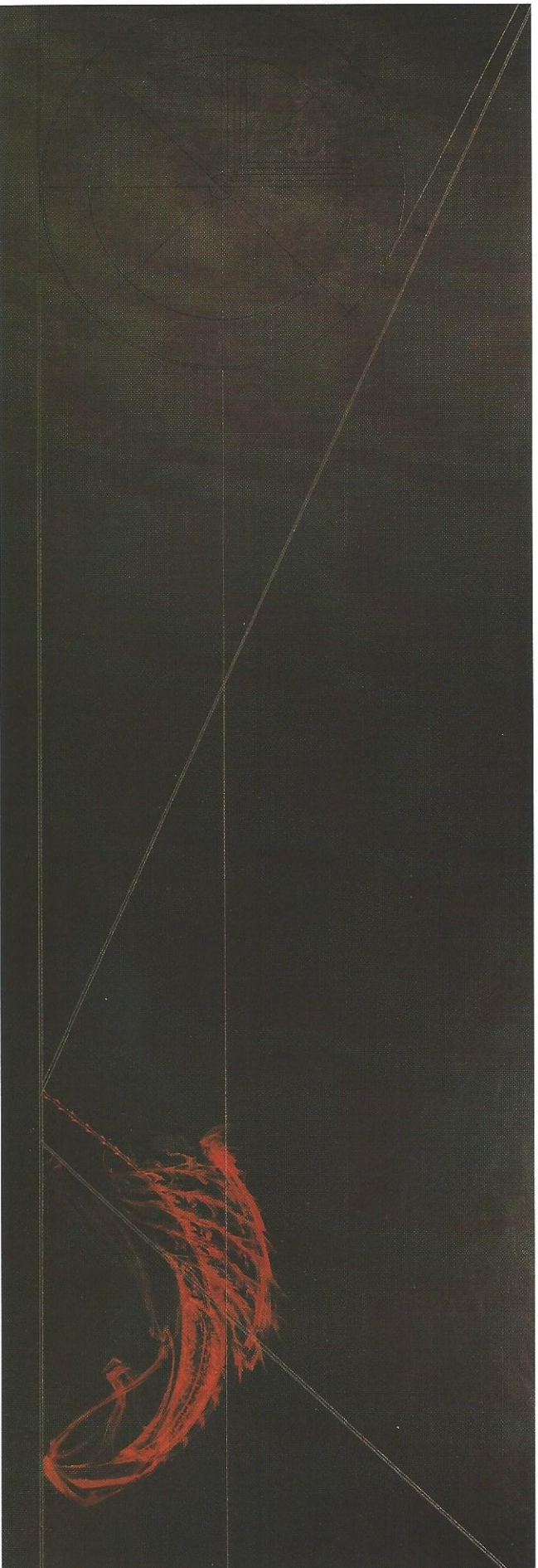
Capri, M. and Cohen, S. *The Binding and its Transformations in Judaism and Islam: The Lambs of God*. Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.



**THE KILLING OF LIONS**  
Attacking Lion



It has no water, it has no air-deep, deep, dark, dark, boundless, boundless-in which thou livest in the peace of heart of the silent land... O nobly-born, the time hath now come for thee to seek the Path in reality.... Thy breathing is about to cease... At this moment, know thou thyself-, and abide in that state...



**THE KILLING OF LIONS**  
Dying Lion

**"...racing flaming burning spirit forms, flesh-flames, stone-threads, bone-black luminosity... These works are sensitive and dazzling!"**

Augusta Read Thomas, Composer  
Mead Composer-in-Residence, Chicago Symphony  
Wyatt Professor of Music Composition, Northwestern University School of Music

# EXHIBITION CHECK LIST

All dimensions Height by Width by Depth

## **THE AKEDAH TRIPTYCH**

2004

Acrylic on Wood Panels  
with Mineral Particle Threads

Three Images: Each 4' x 4' x 2"

Isaac

Jesus

Ishmael

## **THE KILLING OF LIONS**

2004

Acrylic on Wood Panels  
with Mineral Particle Threads

Four Images: Each 33" x 95" x 2"

Lion Released

Attacking Lion

Dying Lion

Offering of the Lion

## **ASHUR 1**

2002

Acrylic with Aluminum Fragments  
and Mineral Particles on Paper

60" x 40"

## **FOUR VOTI**

2002

Acrylic, Mineral Particles, Graphite,  
Linen

Four Images: Each 6" x 6"

## **STUDY for**

## **THE AKEDAH TRIPTYCH**

2003

Acrylic on Wood Panels with  
Mineral Particles and Threads

Three Images: Each 18" x 18" x 1.5"

## **ASHUR 2**

2001

Acrylic with Aluminum Fragments  
and Mineral Particles on Paper

40" x 60"

## **TEST PANELS**

2003

Acrylic on Wood Panels  
Two Panels: Each 10" x 20"

## **FOUR DJINN**

2001

Acrylic and Mineral Particles  
on Paper

30" x 43"



O nobly-born, the time hath now come for thee to seek the Path in reality. Thy breathing is about to cease.  
...At this moment, know thou thyself-, and abide in that state... **Tibetan Book of the Dead**



PHILIP AND MURIEL  
*Berman Museum of Art*

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