

### *Sculptor stresses ideas in his ceramics*

By Celia Bergoffen

The mid-1970s saw a major exodus of Russian artists to Israel, France and the United States, fleeing the strictures imposed on artistic expression by the Communist Party which culminated in the infamous "Bulldozer Exhibition" of 1973, a show of outsiders' art in a park in Moscow literally levelled by government forces.

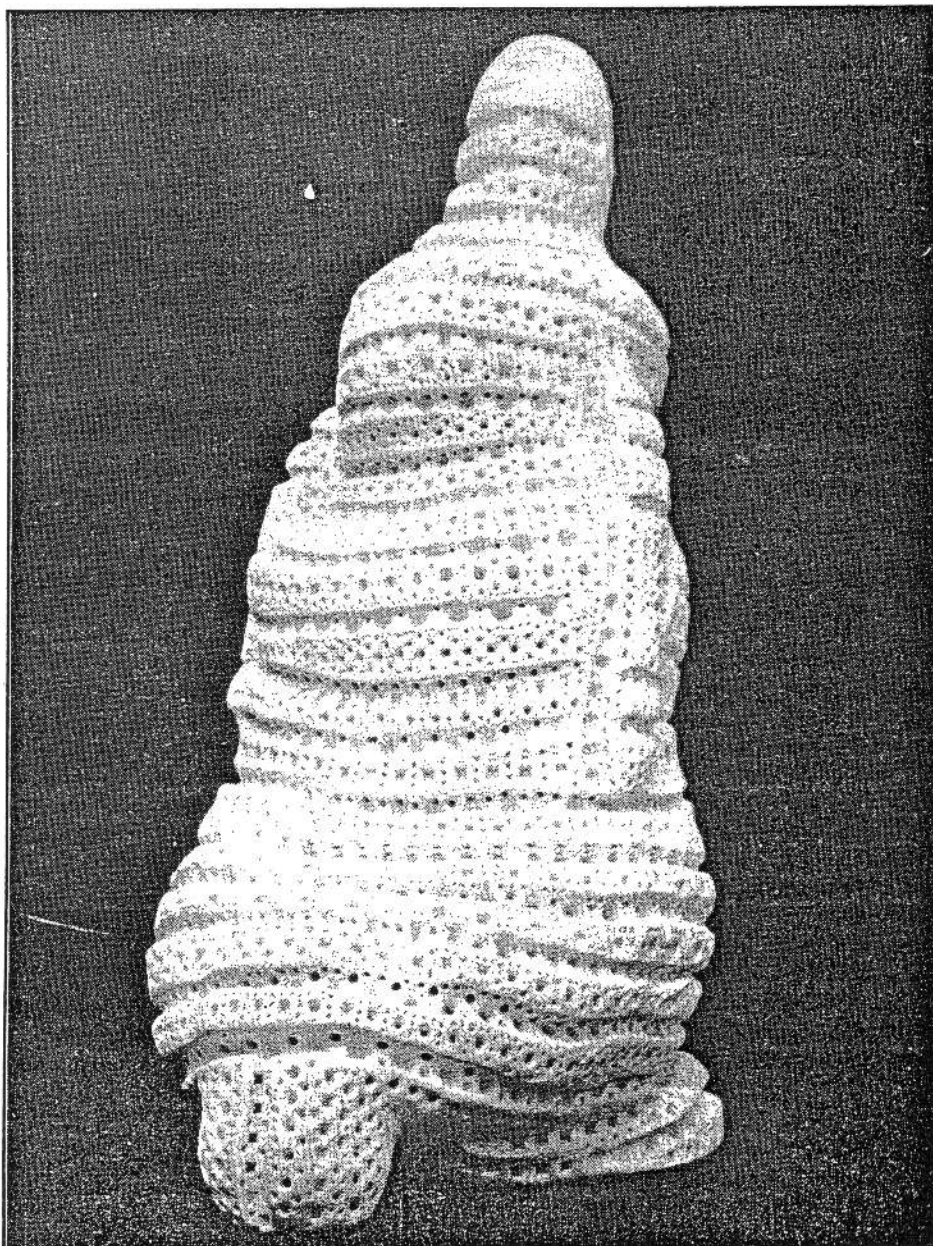
Russian artists had to belong to the Union of Artists, an arm of the Communist establishment. Although he became a member of the Young Artists' section of the union, Alexander Ney and his work did not adequately fit the Social Realist mold and he was persecuted along with many of his friends. But Ney is now a well-established American artist of 55, and prefers not to dwell on that part of his life.

He came to the United States in 1974 after two years in France: first basking in Nice -- his "best memory" -- then steeping himself in the encyclopedic modern art exhibitions in the Grand and Petit Palais in Paris, where he was a resident artist at the Maison des Artistes.

He spoke French adequately but found the little English he had learned in Russia was "not useful" in America. Luckily, he had found an influential patroness who helped him to make his way in the New York art scene. Elaine De Kooning and Robert Motherwell -- acting as her interpreter -- had visited Ney at the Cite des Arts in Paris and given him a great deal of encouragement. Once in the United States, Mrs. de Kooning introduced him to gallery owners and invited him to studio parties.

Politics aside, it's clear that Ney had an excellent education in Russia, both in art history and in technique. He is currently producing ceramic sculptures -- and a show of these works will open at L.M.G. Gallery on Feb. 1 -- but he has also worked in bronze, papier-mache and mixed media as well as in oil on canvas. He is particularly proud of the 1976 show of his papier-mache sculpture at Andre Emmerich Gallery, which drew praise from Alexander Liberman. Many New Yorkers have probably seen Ney's works in Tiffany's windows, where he has exhibited 11 times since 1978.

Ney learned how to make ceramics in art school in 1954 but has been developing his



**"Day Dream," terra cotta, 19 x 10 x 10 ins. 1989**

technique for the past 20 years, experimenting with a variety of clays. He uses a white stone ware, custom-made to his specifications which he leaves in its pristine state, neither painted nor glazed.

Speaking rapidly and excitedly in heavily accented English, Ney struggles to explain the theory and influences which inform his art,

*Continued on page 10*

## *Sculptor stresses ideas*

*Continued from page 9*

directing his remarks to Micha Gerchik, the owner of L.M.G. Gallery.

"The philosophical basis is more important than making things," he insists. "I brought something which was not in United States art but which contributes. American artists made the jump from realistic to abstract without a step-by-step explanation. If you are searching for something new, a new way of expression, however distant from the 'Classical' one, it still has to have a basis in the real world. The Classical artists found rules in nature and established certain truths. Abstract art must find rules too. I have a set of rules."

Gerchik hastens to clarify: "The ceramics are like white paper. It's like drawing in black and white. Drawing is the base of the masterpiece, the beginning of creation. The white color shows purity, the forms are geometric, simple."

Most of the works are female heads, strongly reminiscent of Brancusi's egg-shaped, marble head, "Mlle. Pogany." Some have weird, bulbous hairdos, others, pointed tiaras like the Statue of Liberty. Why does he favor the human head as a subject?

"I cannot be outlandish," Ney explains, "I must do things which relate to my environment. We have to be in contact with everyday reality."

A number of the heads and some of Ney's standing figures are attired in a manner suggestive of folk costumes, possibly Russian.

"Or it could be French, anything in a rural

country," he says. "In my next step, there will be more American dresses, but I wait success of this exhibit."

The heads also show the influence of African and Egyptian art, both of which he says had a impact on his work.

"I am studying tribal art," he says. "I would like to bring a new Classicism to help us survive in our present intellectual situation. We are not restricted. We have whole perspective of human creation. I don't want to focus on just one culture, but understand how all were created. How is tribal art useful for us? Why is New Guinea or African art not 'Classical?' Why must we stick to Greece?"

Most appealing is the treatment of the surface of the sculptures, which is punctured by round and square or rectangular holes of various sizes, closely and rhythmically spaced like a net over the pieces. Ney speaks of the "cultivation" of the surface, its organic quality:

"There is something natural in it, like the stone is breathing. But why holes?" he asks, rhetorically. "I heard a composer of bossa nova on the radio. The announcer asked him, what kind of music he likes to hear? 'I like silence,' he says. For me it's an important explanation because silence is the basis of music. As in harmonics, the hole, the absence of form, gives the basis of form, emphasizing the difference between the existence and the non-existence of form. I believe I allow my imagination to run with more freedom but I have a realistic imagination."

---