
Obituaries



Ismond Rosen

Ismond Rosen was one of the most remarkable figures of recent British psychiatry; through boundless energy and dedication to his crafts, he achieved equal distinction both as a psychoanalyst and an artist. An interview that I did with him a few years ago appears in *Talking About Psychiatry* (edited by Greg Wilkinson, Gaskell, 1993).

Ismond was born in Johannesburg in 1924. His parents had emigrated from Russia and his father had spent some time as a photographer, which perhaps suggests an artistic inheritance. By the time of his birth, they were running a hotel in the city, and he grew up in that unusual milieu. As he was born prematurely, his mother had to stay in hospital for the first three months, so that in a sense they were both fighting for survival at the same time. Later, he believed that "this early maternal deprivation, together with a compensatory intense closeness and overprotection, contributed to a sensitivity in me to the quality of relationships which also influenced my judgment and expression of aesthetic propor-

tions in art". Similarly, he felt that life in the hotel, where he encountered and had to deal with all sorts and conditions of people, was a good preparation for psychiatry.

His artistic awakening was at the age of six, when he saw African boys making figures out of clay and began to copy them; he also started carving in wood. He was fortunate that an eminent artist, Walter Batts, was a teacher at his high school and gave him much encouragement, but it was made clear to him by his parents that academic work came first and he qualified for admission to the Medical School when barely 17. While at university, he also had to look after the hotel at times, and this may well have served as the introduction to the punishing schedule he often observed a few years later. At the university, his anatomy teacher was Professor Raymond Dart, the distinguished palaeontologist, who persuaded him to model the head of *Australopithecus Prometheus*, an ancestor of man, from skull fragments. This is now a well-known technique, but it was not at that time. An illustration of this sculpted head appears in Dart's book, *Adventures with the Missing Link*. After qualifying, he worked for some time at a health clinic in the poorest white part of the city.

Next, in a move which was to be very significant for him, he became a junior registrar at Weskoppies, near Pretoria, the country's principal mental hospital. At that time, before psychotropic drugs existed, he showed an unusual ability to empathise with the mentally ill and found a fascination with mental and emotional mechanisms which drew him towards psychoanalysis. He also worked at his sculpture, doing many portrait heads of both patients and staff; some of these were exhibited at one-man shows in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Like most South African doctors who wished to specialise then, he came to England – in the post-war austerity of 1951. However, he remained ambivalent about the main direction of his career, and when he was interviewed by Aubrey Lewis at the Maudsley, said that he would like to postpone his start there for a year, so that he could pursue artistic studies. Characteristically, perhaps, Lewis agreed to a postponement, but only for six months. Ismond then went to Paris, studying stone carving at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and then travelled south to Nice, Florence, and Rome – "reading Freud in the winter sunshine". In Rome, he had a dream

which resolved his dilemma, indicating that medicine was to be his first priority. In this, he retraced a journey of Freud himself, who also had a significant dream there.

During six years at the Maudsley, he wrote an MD thesis on obsessional symptoms in schizophrenia and also completed a full psycho-analytical training. He was in independent practice as an analyst while still a senior registrar. At the same time, he produced a striking head of Henry Maudsley, which was placed in a prominent position in the hospital. This training was followed by a consultant appointment at the Portman Clinic, where he specialised in problems of delinquency and sexual deviation. Subsequently, he was appointed to the Camden Clinic, which was later amalgamated with the West End Hospital for Nervous Diseases and the Paddington Hospital to form the Paddington Clinic and Day Hospital. Ismond became medical chairman of the combined unit and held that post for 13 years. In 1964, his edited book *The Pathology of Treatment of Sexual Deviation* was published and was to go into two further editions, the later one appearing just before his death.

This considerable workload, together with a busy analytical practice, did not result in any slackening of his rate of artistic productions. He produced and presented to the Royal Society of Medicine a bronze head of John Hunter, an abstract carving in marble on the theme of human love, and a work in stainless steel representing Civilization. Two more psychiatrists commemorated by sculpted heads were Erwin Stengel and Henry Rey, and at other hospitals there were portraits of Dorothy Stuart-Russell and Dame Betty Patterson. In addition to sculpture in a variety of materials, Ismond was prolific in producing pictures, etchings, lithographs, drawings, and cartoons, though many were never seen publicly. In 1974, a major exhibition of his work was held at the Camden Arts Centre under the title of "Genesis: the process of creativity", with 113 items. The illustrated catalogue, with extensive comments by Ismond on his work, concludes, "creativity and the adaptation necessary for healthy survival depend on very complex cycles and levels within the personality and the life of the artist and society. The process of integration of the earliest experiences in the mind together with the creative potential of the unconscious being made manifest by the artist, reveals insights and provides good experiences for ego growth for us all". His work was acknowledged by the Fellowship of the Society of Portrait Sculptors.

He was also active in the media, particularly in relation to the borderland between art and psychiatry. He wrote papers for the Tate Gallery on the psychology of Richard Dadd and Otto Dix,

and spoke there on the work of Constable. He took part in *Lifeline* with David Stafford-Clark, and in a *Horizon* programme on sex education. He played a major part in the production of a programme on Freud's Rat Man case, which won a special award, and both wrote and presented for television a programme on dreams (*Fantasies of the Night*).

However, Ismond's most important sculptural work was the Holocaust Triptych, in which he both returned to his religious roots and reached out to a universal level of expression. This consists of three abstract figures: the first depicts Christ as a Jew, who would himself have been a victim of the Holocaust; the second is a symbol of Nazi atrocity, and the third represents the need for universal religious tolerance and reconciliation. It was completed in 1992 and exhibited in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral, London (see photo). However, its permanent home was to be, most appropriately, in the recently restored Kreuzkirche in Berlin, though Ismond did not live to be present at its dedication. His final creative act was to design an altar, in steel and marble, which will stand near the Triptych. The ceremony of dedication was performed by Bishop Wolfgang Huber on the German Protestant Church's Day of Repentance in the presence of the President of the Brandenburg Government, the Mayor of Berlin, and a packed congregation. It was accompanied by an orchestra composed entirely of German doctors and a choir singing in both German and Hebrew. There could not have been a more fitting commemoration of the passing of a unique man. Some years ago, he had said, "If we can't survive, we must create things that will. It is a sort of immortality".

A man with such gifts might have been forgiven for being well aware of them, but that was not so. Ismond was warm, generous, hospitable, deeply humane, and always ready to praise others; he had a remarkable gift for friendship. In 1991, he presented re-worked copies of the heads of Henry Maudsley and Erwin Stengel to the College.

Ismond married Ruth Abramowitz in 1963; she is a talented actress who has worked particularly in South Africa. He is survived by her and by their son and daughter.

HUGH FREEMAN

Norman Boyce Le Couteur, formerly Consultant Psychiatrist, Broadmoor Hospital

Boyce was born in Melbourne, Australia, his mother being a teacher and his father a school inspector. Scholarships brought him to Melbourne University to study medicine but characteristically a year later he volunteered for the