

SOREL ETROG: BIOGRAPHY

Sorel Etrog was a Canadian artist, writer, philosopher (born 29 August 1933 in Iași, Romania; died 26 February 2014 in Toronto, Ontario). For more than half a century, Etrog was one of Canada's most renowned contemporary sculptors. A Member of the Order of Canada and a Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France, Etrog's work is included in museum collections around the world, including the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Gallery of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, the Hirschorn Museum, Washington, DC, and the Tate Gallery, London. In 1968, Etrog was asked to design the Canadian film award called the Genie. A career-spanning retrospective of Etrog's work was mounted at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2013.

Born in Moldavia in what is now northwestern Romania, Etrog, who was Jewish, managed to survive the Second World War and immigrated along with his family to Israel in 1950. In Israel, he studied drawing, painting, sculpture, graphic design, and theater set design at the Tel Aviv Art Institute. His first exhibit in 1958 in Tel Aviv helped win him a scholarship to study at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. In 1959, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum purchased one of his early sculptures. It was during this period in New York that Etrog met his long-standing collector and patron, Samuel Zacks, leading to his first solo exhibition in Canada at Gallery Moos in Toronto. Etrog moved to Toronto in 1963 and became a Canadian citizen. He was one of the three artists who represented Canada at the 1966 Venice Biennale, alongside Alex Colville and Yves Gaucher.

Etrog's mature style is deeply indebted to both surrealism and Pablo Picasso's work of the 1930s, as well as to major 20th century sculptors such as Romanian-born modernist Constantin Brancusi and American abstract-expressionist David Smith. While much of Etrog's work appears abstract, it invariably alludes to the figure and more specifically to the human form. Etrog's overriding theme is the integrity of the human body in an industrialized world, and thus his sculptures typically consist of elaborately interlocking parts that resemble the elements of a machine.

While Etrog's finest work is sculptural and in bronze — he worked directly with plaster models, which allowed him to give even large sculptures an intimate sense of detail and texture — he was also an accomplished painter and draftsman. Etrog typically used painting and drawing as a testing ground for ideas he then developed into larger sculptures.