

HOSTLER  
BURROWS



**RICHARD FILIPOWSKI** (Canadian, 1923-2008)

*Three Waves*, ca. 1960-65

Phosphor bronze and silver

51" H x 28" W x 5" D

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Richard Filipowski (1923-2008, Canada) was a United States based artist who worked across multiple media in the New Bauhaus style. Filipowski, a teacher by vocation, held positions at the Institute of Design in Chicago and The Harvard School of Design; he also served as professor emeritus at MIT. Many of his teaching roles were contemporaneous with those of Marcel Breuer, Walter Gropius and Laslo Moholy-Nagy. Filipowski's close working relationship with these men, and with Moholy-Nagy in particular, places him at the center of modernist art and design circles in America, and among the foremost Bauhaus artists active in the mid twentieth century.

Filipowski was born in Poland in 1923 and immigrated to Canada in 1927. His family described him as an avid draughtsman in his youth. In 1938, Filipowski's discovery of a MoMA exhibition catalog of Bauhaus artwork inspired him to pursue a formal education in the arts. Consequently, Filipowski wrote Moholy-Nagy, a founding member and teacher at the New Bauhaus, appealing to him for his mentorship. Moholy-Nagy was so impressed by Filipowski that he invited him to join his program.

Filipowski's relationship with Moholy-Nagy evolved over time from student to collaborator and peer. Moholy-Nagy instructed Filipowski across multiple media, including painting and metalwork in the Bauhaus style. As a testament to his admiration of Filipowski's body of work, Moholy-Nagy featured several of Filipowski's works in his seminal text *Vision in Motion* (1947), and Filipowski was the only student Moholy-Nagy called upon to join the New Bauhaus faculty. He taught there from 1946-1950, joining the ranks of Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer.

Moholy-Nagy was not the only Bauhaus artist to have validated Filipowski as a talent. Gropius later invited Filipowski to partner with him to teach a fundamentals course at Harvard. He championed Filipowski both as an artist and theoretician with a comprehensive understanding of the function of space, light and color, and the experimental application of these elements to innovate form. Gropius and Filipowski collaborated on the coursework and its implementation from 1950 - 1952, which culminated in what both described to be a successful student exhibition.<sup>1</sup> Due to conflicting interests between Gropius and Dean Joseph Hudnut, the program at Harvard was halted in 1952, and in 1953 Filipowski moved on to serve as the Associate Professor of Visual Design in the Department of Architecture at MIT, where he taught for 36 years.

Filipowski used his income from teaching to pursue what he called the "art of the psyche", abstract paintings and sculptures that he considered a process of self expression and exploration, and a personal endeavor not to be subject to criticism or commercialization. This inclination towards privacy perhaps explains why Filipowski gained less notoriety than his Bauhaus counterparts.

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<sup>1</sup> Alfosin, Anthony. *The Struggle for Modernism: Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and City Planning at Harvard*. New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2002. Pages 230, 231.

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In the 1940s and 50s, Filipowski's paintings were characteristically of the Bauhaus style and evocative of artworks by Moholy-Nagy, though they clearly represent Filipowski's individualized interpretation of the constructs of Bauhaus philosophy. They showcase distinctive geometric themes emphasizing different iterations of the sphere, frenetic linework, and the use of bold, primary colors. In 1954 Filipowski began to experiment with the use of bronze and silver alloys to create additive sculpture. For a time, Filipowski abandoned painting entirely, though he returned to working across both mediums before his death in 2008.

Filipowski's sculptures appear to be more naturalistic than his Bauhaus style paintings, but the principles of design remain tied to the tenets of the Bauhaus, as they too are an exploration of the motion of line and experimentation with process, and they exemplify the integration of art, architecture and technology.

Many of Filipowski's sculptures relate directly to a particular commission created in conjunction with Pietro Belluschi. In 1962 Belluschi, the Dean of Architecture and Planning at MIT and frequent collaborator with Gropius, asked Filipowski to submit a 3D model for an Ark to be featured in the Temple B'Rith Kodesh in Rochester, NY. It took Filipowski almost a year to construct the sculpture, using bronze and silver alloys to weld it. The piece was wonderfully intricate and dynamic, a master work which Filipowski described thus: "All metal surfaces are textured - no square inch is alike. Each surface is unique. The result is a glowing visual quality."

Most of Filipowski's smaller sculptures are iterations on the form of the Ark. Some are tall, attenuated and majestic like trees, some are squat and bushy like undergrowth; each one embodies the same spiritual message that the Ark does, which according to the temple's literature represented an affirmation of human potential and development, and in taking the abstracted form of forestation, conveyed the idea of "seed pods for future growth."

Towards the end of his life, after he retired from MIT, Filipowski returned to painting and drawing. He created a series of 345 "Pub Drawings" over a period of two years, aptly named for the motel pub in Burlington, Massachusetts where he created them. The pub drawings represent a culmination of Filipowski's early and late styles, a combination of energetic line work and the bold use of primary color, with the more naturalistic and even figurative aspects of his sculptures.

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Filipowski, as a result of his training by Moholy-Nagy and his own enhanced understanding of Bauhaus principles, is not only significant but exemplary as a Bauhaus artist, and his early works are stylistically the epitome of Bauhaus training. His later works, too, represent a wonderful evolution in style reflective of Filipowski's own unique trajectory.

For his entire body of work, Filipowski garnered the respect and admiration of the Bauhaus elite; he was highly regarded despite his tendency to create his works in a private manner.

During his lifetime, Filipowski's works were exhibited mostly in Chicago and Boston, and his artworks are now a part of several prestigious collections including The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, The De Menil Collection Museum and the Walter Gropius House Museum. Filipowski was the recipient of the Alfred P. Sloan Award, The First Prize for Sculpture at the Boston Arts Festival and the Aleck and Ruth McClean Award.

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