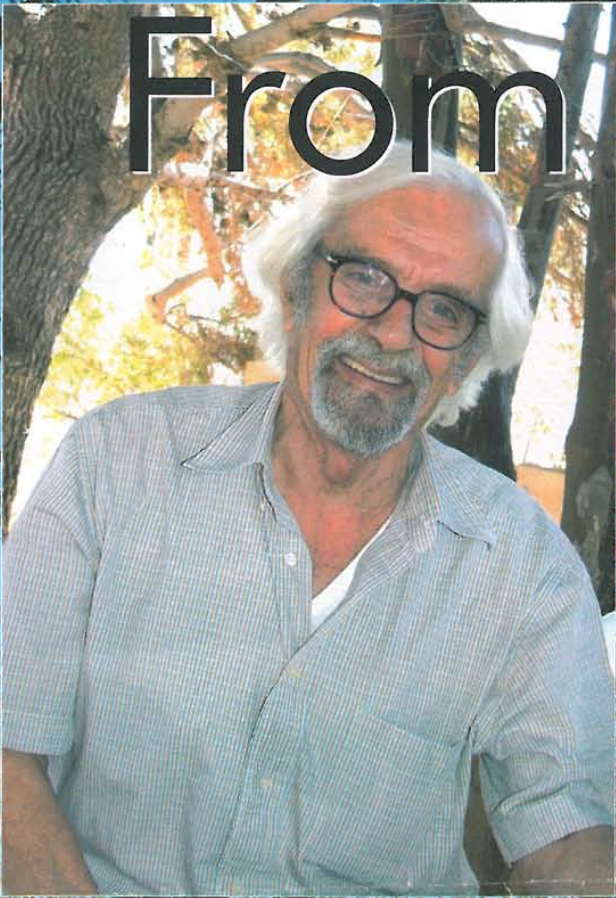


From

Rachana
with love

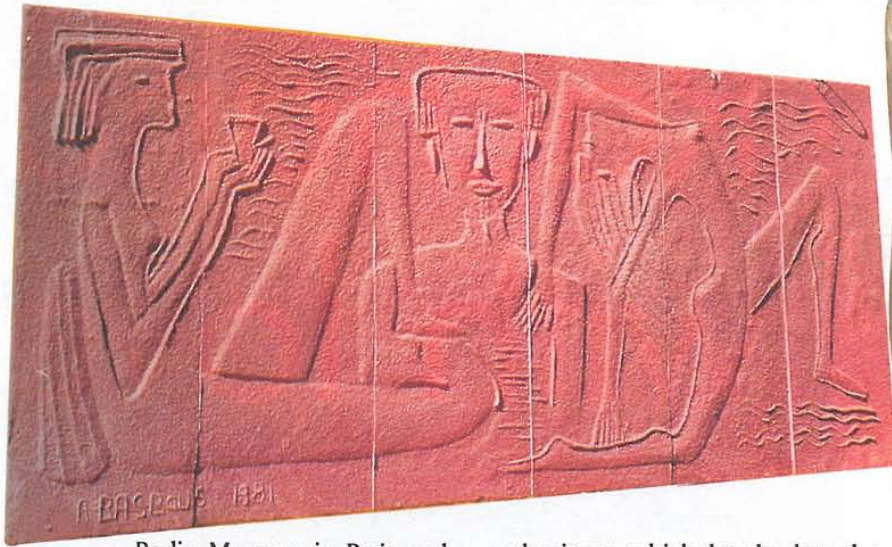
Sculptor Alfred Basbous and his brothers have carved out a name for their village as a showcase for their work and that of other artists

He was described as the second Rodin after his first exhibition and has managed to achieve a dream of turning his birth village into an international showcase for exhibiting sculptors and a meeting place for artists from around the world. A far cry, fortunately, from the warning Alfred Basbous was given by his older brother, fellow sculptor Michel, that his chosen path could leave him discouraged and penniless. But it was never to be an issue for Basbous. At his first exhibition in 1958 at the Alecco Saab gallery, all the pieces sold on the first day and several newspapers gave him the 'second Rodin' nickname. Elation for the young man who had begun by watching his father, a priest and calligrapher, carving in bamboo

wood, and had then been taught the art of sculpting with stone, together with his younger brother Joseph, by Michel.

Encouraged, Basbous enrolled at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (ALBA), where he was awarded a scholarship to Paris and trained at the Collamarini sculpting atelier. "After Rachana that was a big culture shock," he says. "I felt like I was discovering not just a city of art, but centuries of civilization. I just tried to take in as much as I could." Paris brought rewards for Basbous in the form of exhibitions – one at the





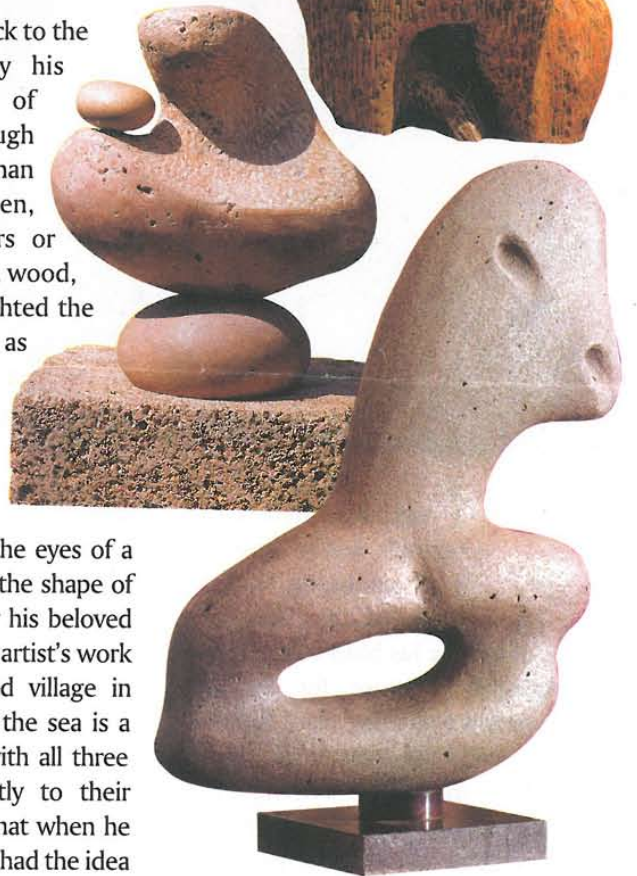
Rodin Museum in Paris and also a joint exhibition with Michel at the 'Souk des Halles'. "That felt very special, since Picasso's works were being exhibited there at the same time." Since then, he has exhibited his works locally and internationally, including London, Washington, Paris, and Tokyo, while some of his sculptures feature permanently in the Oxford Museum in London and the Modern Art Museum in Paris, as well as throughout public gardens in Lebanon.



Basbous doesn't like to pigeon-hole his style. "Granted, I moved from classical sculptures to more figurative work and eventually abstracts, but I feel that even during those phases, I had developed a style of my own," he says. "Several people have told me that my work resembles that of Henry Moore, although I mostly worked with stone, while Moore worked with bronze." Basbous's

early pieces, which date back to the 1950s, were inspired by his father's favorite subjects of birds and animals, although later, he turned to the human form, in particular women, often depicted as mothers or lovers and worked in stone, wood, or metal. Art critics highlighted the curves of his work, such as the shape of a child in its mother's womb or a woman in an embrace.

Inspiration, he says, is random. "I can be fired by the eyes of a beautiful woman, or maybe the shape of a tree," he says. And still by his beloved Rachana, where much of the artist's work stands today. The unspoiled village in North Lebanon overlooking the sea is a lynchpin for the brothers, with all three linking their success directly to their home. Little wonder, then, that when he returned from Paris, Basbous had the idea of transforming Rachana into a forum for artists and their work. Eleven years ago, his dream was realized and Rachana earned its title as an international sculpture forum attracting artists from all over the world. "I did not want Rachana to become only a local village for the arts, but an international meeting place with the aim of reviving art and sculpture,



where sculptors and art lovers from all over the world could meet," Basbous explains. The tradition looks set to continue down the generations, with Basbous's son and nephews also following in their fathers' footsteps. "It's not really surprising," muses the sculptor. "After all, they were born to the sound of the chisel."