

# HERMAN WALD SHUNS THE LIMELIGHT

The fact that he has had to battle to become a sculptor has inspired Herman Wald, an ex-Serviceman, of the U.D.F., to follow doggedly his own idea of Art and not to court popular approval. The results are spirited, living studies which compel admiration.

by  
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HERMAN WALD is neither well-known nor prominent. Perhaps that is because he has religiously shunned the limelight or perhaps because he has been away for five years on active service. Be that as it may, Herman Wald is one of the best sculptors we have in South Africa to-day.

His studio, unauspiciously situated somewhere in Pritchard Street, Johannesburg, is crammed with recent works—carvings in bronze and wood of all sizes and descriptions and touching on a multitude of subjects. The first thing that strikes you about Wald's work is its great versatility. He has no prescribed style and every work is the result of a passive mood. Each sculpture is a symbolic expression of something very real. Mr. Wald is a realist-idealist who believes in keeping one foot in heaven and the other solidly on the ground.

A free morning the other day gave me an opportunity to admire Mr. Wald's work. It was a refreshing change to find here none of those mystical distortions which artists usually explain away by using highbrow terms like "impressionistic" and "futuristic". Mr. Wald approaches his art with a good understanding of people—a study which he has vigorously pursued all his life—and thus his sculptures are carved in the language of ordinary man. Mr. Wald does not, like so many other artists, imagine himself above the people whose lives he tries to express in his art, and thus each work conveys its message simply but forcefully. His symbolism is deep, but because it is garbed in the feelings of mortals, is fully understandable.

The first work that caught my eye was a monumental work entitled "Kria," which towered nearly 10 feet. It was the figure of a prophet rending his garments and mourning for all men on earth. Yet the work is not one of total despair. The head of the prophet is held high in defiance and hope for the last chance of a better world to come. The sculpture has been cast in bronze and possesses outstanding detail. Wald manages here to express the highest form of drama with the least movement and seems to embody the whole spiritual endeavour of man in this one colossal work.

Next to "Kria" stands a tiny sculpture called "The First Consciousness," which shows the crouching figure of a man. It interprets the awakening of man from his deep sleep in the pre-evolution era. Half of the body has been carved in a reclining position, reminiscent of the docile animal, whereas the upper part of the body and the head are held erect—symbolic of man's striving towards the desirable state of homo sapiens. In this work, as in most of his others, Wald has concentrated on symbolism, but at the same time has not neglected form. Brilliant technique helped him to blend both



qualities into a harmonious whole. Although this work is so very small in size, it took six years to complete, whereas the gigantic "Kria" took only four months. Eut, explains Wald, "it is the psychological approach that takes the time, not the execution."

Among the first works that Wald tackled when he came back from the war was "Unknown Soldier"—an impressive study in bronze. It shows a fallen soldier with one hand resting peacefully on a cross and the other hand nervously tensioned with the sword still ready to strike. Wald, no doubt, found his inspiration



## His fine sculpture is well known

for this work from the proverb which says that the sword and the cross are as similar to one another as war is to peace. Noteworthy about this sculpture is that Wald depicts the heart-rending sadness of war rather than the stark horror. A reproduction of this piece of sculpture was published on page 5 of the June, 1945, issue of "The Women's Auxiliary"—in commemoration of V.E.-Day.

Herman Wald was born in Kolozsvár, one of the most cultured cities of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was, no doubt, the majestic and beautifully sculptured mountains surrounding his native city, that inspired him with the desire to become a sculptor. "My first attempts at sculpture," says Wald, "started with carving pieces of rubber that I stole from my school mates in the primary school—a material which my school-friends used for wiping out things instead of creating from it something that remains for ever . . ." Wald's parents were against their son's ambitious to become an artist—something which they considered both sinful and wrong. Thus he was forced to do sculpture in secret. He began by making a bust, three times life size, in the pantry of his home, which measured 2ft. by 4ft. "There was no space to step backward—not even the three steps of respect which are paid to art or for general surveying."

Wald's first work, considering the circumstances, was an overwhelming success. He felt, however, that he had to get away to study and to live if he was to do any justice to his artistic temperament. Thus his vagabond career started. He went to Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, Paris and London studying at the academies or under the supervision of great masters. He learnt much of what there is to know about art and about life.

His many wanderings finally brought Mr. Wald to South Africa. The country appealed to him, because,

**HERMAN WALD** (right) uses no futuristic symbolism in his sculpture. Moses hurling the stone tablets (opposite page) and the three feminine heads below, depict vigorous life inspired by Wald's own vivid spirit.



unspoiled as it is by civilisation, it possesses a very talented urge for culture. "By emerging from Bushmar's art," says Mr. Wald, "and by leaving behind the heritage of Europe, this country enters now the broadness of her sunlight landscapes and of other cultural expressions . . . the culture that was the twilight of European decay, is now becoming the daylight of South Africa's awakening!"

While on active service, Mr. Wald managed in his spare time to complete a book on sculpture which he has entitled "Carved Thoughts." The book has been sent to America, where it is being published.

