

# Fine Art On A Fine Scale

By Naomi Kellman

**LOUIS ROSENTHAL** is known as the man who carries a museum around in his vest pocket.

That pocket may hold, for instance, the entire "Story of the Deluge," a sculptured epic containing nineteen figures.

For Sculptor Rosenthal specializes in miniatures. His statuettes range in size from half an inch to eleven inches. His "Deluge," with all its nineteen figures, measures but two inches.

The Baltimore artist draws his subjects from mythology, folklore, history, science and happenings of the day. "Bacchante" is a fantasy; "Benjamin Franklin" is a portrait; "Lindbergh" is a work with 85 figures celebrating that aviator's historic flight.

**ALL** of these little sculptures are first carved in black wax—with a pearl-handled penknife—and then cast in bronze, silver or gold by a process that the sculptor himself worked out.

Rosenthal has been compared to Cellini for the delicacy of his work, to da Vinci for the multitude of his subjects. He has had exhibitions at the Gibbs Gallery, the National Galleries, the Corcoran Art Gallery and the Greek Embassy in Washington. He is the only American mem-

## A Baltimore Sculptor Is Noted for Expressive Figurines that Are As Little As 3-8 Inch Tall

ber of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters, Sculptors and Gravers of England.

Visitors from all over the world come to Baltimore expressly to pay tribute to Rosenthal. Once a Frenchwoman stopped by at his studio, which is at 313 North Charles street. She was particularly attracted to his satire showing the God of War auctioning off Napoleon's clothes and horse.

"She wanted to know why I had picked on Napoleon," the sculptor recalls with a smile. "And do you know what I said to her? I said, 'Madame, I choose only the greatest for my little jokes.'"

One of Rosenthal's most savage diatribes against war is his "Victory"—1½-inch likenesses of Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon holding aloft a dead woman, Victory, with her wings outstretched.

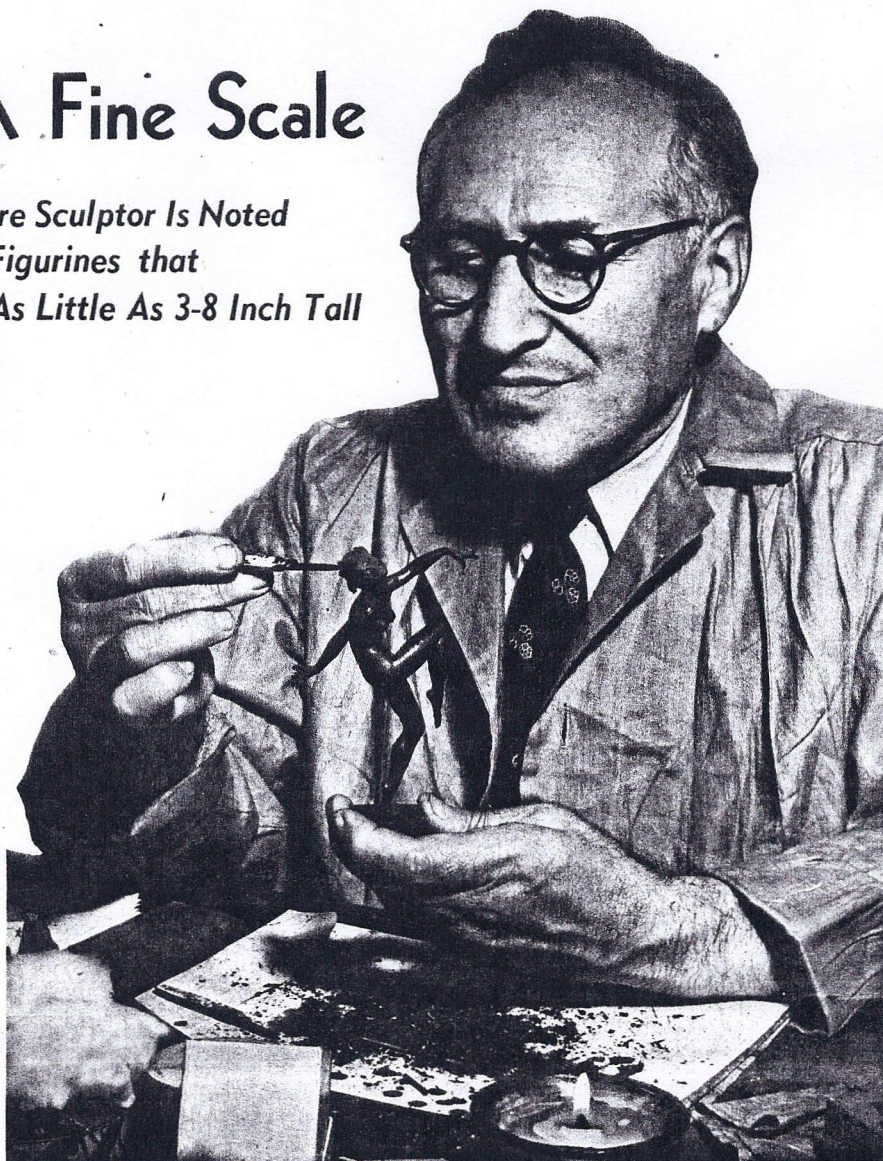
**THIS** Baltimorean is probably the only sculptor who works directly in his medium, without first making a rough sketch. He says he doesn't like to draw.

His only tool is the pearl-handled penknife. With it, and without the aid of a microscope, he carves figures that sometimes are no more than ⅜ inch high yet are perfect in every detail—strands of hair are visible, folds in garments are exact, complete personalities are caught in the twist of a mouth or the shape of an eye.

Rosenthal can compress a great deal into two inches of wax. An example is his "Hollywood." On top of a black pillar are the figures of a man and woman, their faces smug, self-satisfied; they hold masks in their hands. "When you've reached the pinnacle of success in Hollywood," Rosenthal explains, "you have to be ready to mask your true emotions at a moment's notice."

**CIRCLING** down from that pinnacle is a staircase. And halfway down the steps is a merciless hand. Weird little figures scamper gaily up the steps, symbolizing Hollywood "as the home of freaks."

Before the crushing power of



Louis Rosenthal, Baltimore sculptor of miniatures, gives a figurine of black wax its finishing touches with a pearl-handled penknife that is his only carving instrument.

the hand is a young girl begging to be allowed to enter the dream-world of Hollywood. On the other side of the hand is a tired woman, gazing with despair at the pinnacle that had seemed so desirable just a little while ago.

Below the steps is a man. One side of his face is calmly smiling at a young girl begging for a chance in the Glamor City. The other side of his face is looking with disdain at a young girl appealing for help before she is

drawn into the abyss of frustration and disappointment that is filled with faces and uplifted arms of girls who have already succumbed to obscurity.

Rosenthal did "Hollywood" twenty years ago, after a visit to a movie studio. It, like many of his other pieces, is still in wax. He says he hasn't had time to cast these.

**THE** sculptor's unique method of hollow-casting is an example of necessity mothering invention. After discovering that the ordinary methods would shrink and distort his Lilliputian statues, he spent three years experimenting to devise another method.

Finally, he hit on one, cast his "Samson and the Foxes," then accidentally knocked his precious materials over. It took him another three months to rediscover his own secret.

Because the wax models are so fragile, they can be cast just a few times; hence the limited editions of his work.

**ROSENTHAL** started his career as a sculptor when he was just a child wandering in the forests of his native village, Plungyan, in the province of Kouvoyn. At first he carved dryads, centaurs, fauns, all the mythical inhabitants of the forest, on tree trunks. Later he used every medium that came to his hand.

His reputation grew even in that small village. He attracted the attention of the eminent Professor Turak. Turak invited him to Vienna for instruction. But the budding sculptor preferred Germany, so Turak arranged for him to get lessons in Berlin.

However, Rosenthal stayed

there just a short time, then followed his family, which had migrated to Birds Nest, Va.

Family quarrels arose soon after Rosenthal arrived in the States. The family wanted him to go into business. He wanted to be an artist. The upshot was that he left home and came to Baltimore, where he persuaded an uncle to take him to the Maryland Institute. There Ephraim Keyser, then head of the Rinehart School, recognized his ability and gave him a four-year scholarship. There, too, he met his wife, also an art student.

**IT** was not until 1918 that Rosenthal discovered his metier—black wax. While waiting for recognition, he earned a living doing inlays for dentists and working for jewelers.

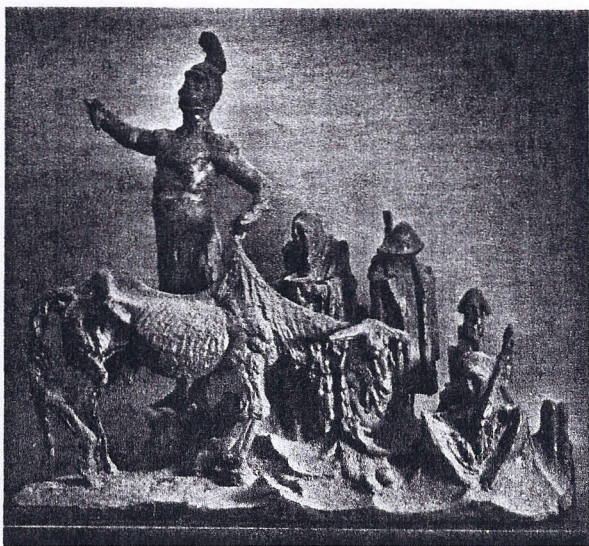
Finally, in 1925, he took a collection of his miniatures to New York, where they were exhibited in a Fifth avenue gallery.

At that time, Rosenthal was literally down to his last 15 cents, which he spent on food. Then, while wandering around, he saw his name in headlines, hurried 35 blocks to the Forty-second street library for a paper, and found that he had become one of the most talked about people in the art world.

**THE** greatest love of Rosenthal's life, however, is not sculpturing, but music. But at one time, while studying the violin, he asked his teacher if he would become the greatest violinist in the world. "Aren't you satisfied to be just a great violinist?" the teacher countered. With that Rosenthal threw his violin on the floor and said, "You've just given me my last lesson."



This "huge" statue of John Brown is 11 inches high.



The god of war auctions off Napoleon's horse and clothes. The satirical work is but 6½ inches high and 7 wide.