

Benno Elkan¹

By Erich Toeplitz



Benno Elkan / tomb in Mayence

When roaming through the most important German museums, for instance, in Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt a. M., Leipzig, Dortmund, Mannheim, and Munich, one encounters also the works of Benno Elkan. For today's Jews, it is a source of satisfaction to find Jews among the leading artists also in the field of plastic art; and among them, Benno Elkan has undoubtedly made a name for

¹ Toeplitz, Erich: Benno Elkan, in: Menorah. Jüdisches Familienblatt für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur, vol. 7 (1929), no. 9-10 (September 1929), pp. 455-458.

himself in our time. This is all the more astonishing since without any teacher and no artisanal background, quasi as his own student through tenacious work, he has attained his mastery.

Anyone having an overview of the artist's work will be amazed to realize that it is almost impossible to detect the otherwise customary homogeneity of external appearance one is used to see or search for as the distinct creative power of a master. Anyone acquainted with Benno Elkan is aware that in his



Benno Elkan / The Stone of Lament - tomb in Wickrath (Rhineland)

dedication to his work and tasks, he never emphasizes the self-worth of his, after all, rather powerful personality. It is precisely in this modesty where a true artist's real value lies, and this restraint largely destines Benno Elkan to be a portrait artist. Many of his medals and busts meet us with a bluntness and incisiveness as if life itself was facing us. As an excellent master of the various techniques, to him this is about finding a synthesis for the problems arising from the sense of sculpting as such, the material, and the personality of the depicted. Dedicated to this task, a work of art emerges through masterly treatment of the material and complete penetration of the model, with which the creative artist becomes one in the process of creation. In line with the master's worldview and unique quality to

complete given, indeed, limited tasks, a great number of monuments of cemetery art can be found in his oeuvre. Each work in



Benno Elkan / Memorial “To the Victims,” Frankfurt a. M.

this field, whether tiny or enormous, was created with a sincere love of it and a tender and sensitive understanding for its human purpose as well as for its embeddedness in the surrounding landscape. Not only the sculptor and the compassionate human being, but also the architect comes to the fore wherever there is an opportunity for full expression. There is just one thing one must not demand of him, namely, compromise with a prevailing opinion or a snobbish spirit. Each task he faces must be solved according to the best of his abilities, and he allows neither himself nor, in fairness, others to confront questions of artistic creation that concern only him in any other but a co-creative way. The boldness of this attitude must be met with due respect especially in these unstable times! Neither isms nor mania, neither external circumstances nor simply pushing the effects of his personal touch are at the center; rather, only matters of



Benno Elken / Mr. and Mrs. Feibermann (Landau in der Pfalz) / portrait busts

sculpting are espoused by him with the zeal of a prophet. The fact that the prophet is nevertheless honored in his German homeland, in his hometown of Dortmund, and in his home of choice, Frankfurt, has been demonstrated in a highly gratifying manner on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday. Moreover, this unerring advocate of artistic ideas emerges outside of his busy, tireless work as an animated companion and a man of the present who is driven to share the wealth of his views and experiences in the literary field as well. (Polnische Nachtstücke, illustrated. Delphin Verlag, Munich. 1918; Tante Clementine, illustrated, Karstadt-Verlag, Leipzig; Spanien, illustrated, Delphin-Verlag, Munich, 1925.) Thus, he has always known to live an engaged life and to beware of leading a remote, solitary life in the ivory tower. Benno Elkan's life is dedicated to the goal of transforming the world of mere appearances into the world of tangible being, and it would be important to offer him the best possible opportunities to do so. Only through examination of the circumstances of creation will his work keep expanding further and higher: it depends on the patrons of art, not solely on the artist, to uphold for Jewry's sake a representative of far-reaching impact in the field of art.

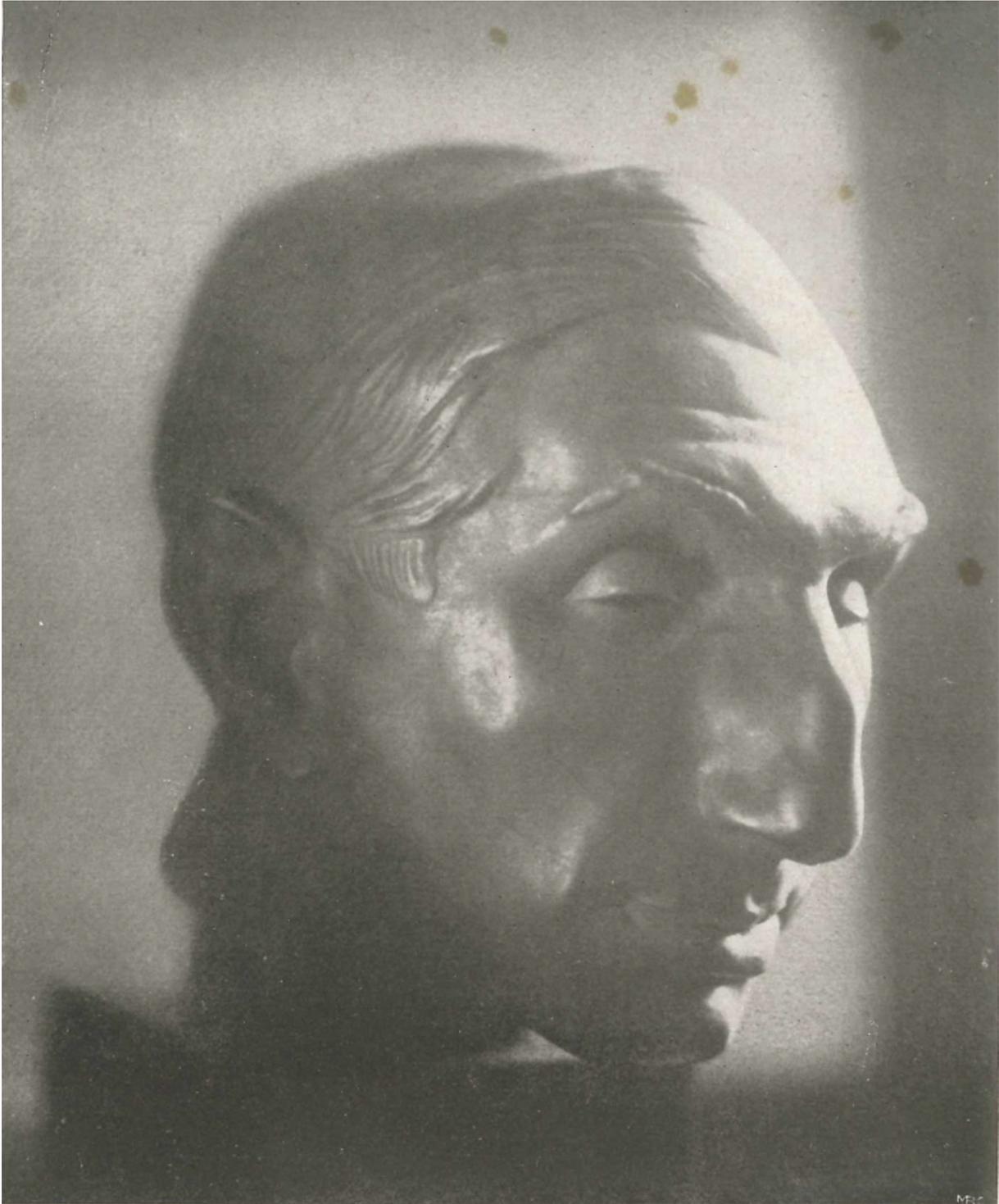
(Translation: Lilian Dombrowski)



Benno Elkan / Monument for all victims (Völklingen)



Benno Elkan / Hanna Rowina / portrait bust



Benno Elkan / Alfred Flechtheim, Düsseldorf / portrait bust