

**ALTON S. TOBEY**

*(1914-2005)*

## **"DER SCHREI"**

*(The Shriek)*

As a young Jewish man, Alton Tobey was horrified by the stories he heard from the survivors of the Holocaust after World War II -- too horrified to deal with it in his art. It wasn't until the former Yugoslavia began to disintegrate was he able to begin using the Holocaust as a theme for a still ongoing series of works triggered by the shock of hearing the obscenely euphemistic term "ethnic cleansing." Thus began the series titled "Der Schrei" -- German for "The Shriek."

Like the Nazi flag, the series is done in the colors of white, black and red, which in these works stand for life, death and blood. Also in this series, medium and process is a powerful part of content or statement. A single image of the back of a climbing man in the form of a small bronze figure owned by Tobey is repeatedly reproduced by photocopy and applied in various configurations to a solid background.

With almost unbearable poignancy a single figure simultaneously retains its individuality and becomes an indiscriminate part of the mass showing the opposing perceptions between victim and killer. To Jews individuals who were known and loved were killed to be painfully remembered; to the Nazis it was just the laborious extermination of a mass to be forgotten.

And now the shriek that echoes through time must first be seen to be heard. Tobey was quoted as calling himself, with more than a little validity, a "schizophrenic artist." The documentary quality of researched realism demanded by his commissions must have often been in frustrating conflict with any urges for artistic exploration and needs to follow the muses he would have had. That he is an artist as well as a professional is readily evident, and he is among the rare who are successful at both.

*--Raymond E. Tubbs; September, 1997*