



## Roland Flak

By Julien Flak

In the Polynesian cultures that Roland loved so much, important individuals, sages, and elders are said to have a supernatural power known as *mana*. Among the Ashkenazi Jews, the same people are said to have the qualities of a *mensch*. Roland, a *mensch* with so much *mana*, left us on April 11.

A humanist, a tolerant and open spirit, creative, generous, and with an insatiable curiosity for everything, faithful in friendship and in love—my father was all these things at once. The son of Polish immigrants who arrived in France in the 1920s, fleeing the misery of the pogroms, Roland was born during the war in 1940. His father, Henri, a volunteer in the French foreign forces, was a prisoner of war at the time of his birth. His mother, Fanny, took him and his older sister, Micheline, to France’s “free zone” during the occupation, where they lived in hiding until the end of the war.

Roland expressed interest in a career in the arts from the time of his youth, but his parents expressed doubt: “A profession in the arts? *Oy vehs mir*, my son, study for a real job!” Roland heeded his parents’ words and studied pharmacology. While attending university, he met Edith, the love of his life. They opened a pharmacy together in 1970, and it became a place for meeting and sharing, thanks to Roland’s innate feeling for human contact and his ability to listen. Since it was located just a few steps from the Hôtel Drouot, where he became a ubiquitous presence, Roland was often in the

company of art dealers, artists, and auctioneers. He and Edith took advantage of their contacts to begin collecting paintings, sculptures, and curiosities of all kinds. This passion became so consuming that by the end of the 1980s the pharmacy had as many art objects in it as it did medicines.

Edith and Roland decided to turn their passion into a profession and opened Galerie Flak in 1990. Moving from pharmacy to gallery, Roland traded in his bow tie for his famous round eyeglasses. And with the gallery’s opening, Roland finally realized his dream of being surrounded by artists and works of art. Soon thereafter, Edith and Roland began to show tribal art, which they had become interested in through the works of Picasso and the Surrealists. Working with my parents in the gallery for the last nearly ten years, I had the good fortune to share, learn, and exchange ideas with my father on the subjects of the world’s art, culture, and mythology that he loved so much.

With his inspiring and inspired personality, Roland loved to share his knowledge and to make the most distant cultures and the art forms so different from our own more accessible to those he came into contact with. Today I know that he has joined the great circle of primordial ancestors of Africa, Oceania, and elsewhere; that he is with the *tzadikim* and other great initiates; and that he has entered into the dance of the *kachina* spirits he loved so much. They must be having a stimulating discourse about the full range of the world’s art, spirituality, and culture.

“Roland, just a few days before you disappeared, you made me happy. I bought my first *kachina* from you—beautiful, powerful, and ancient. Today it is an orphan. It weeps, as do I.” *Pierre Moos*

## Francine Bourla

By Marc Petit

Francine Bourla is no longer with us. Her friends will no longer see her crouched in the corner of Galerie du Scorpion, her Parisian den on rue Galande, suspiciously watching passers-by. She was the good dragon, a wild animal—ferocious, a little bit the shaman, with few illusions about the world and humanity. But despite this gruffness, she was fundamentally and completely generous.

Francine never liked to speak about her past, and her friends had to wait for the eulogy by her son, political journalist Bernard Guetta, at the Montparnasse cemetery, to have some idea of the frightening tribulations she endured as an adolescent during the war years. From this hell she emerged strong and intractable, and with an extreme perspective of humanity. On the one side, there was the good minority; and on the other, the bad, the great masses of “those with no opinion.” Always a rebel, she did little to veil her left-leaning views, which were actually more anarchistic than militant. Her demand for truth and her hatred for conformity subjected those she communicated with to ongoing examination. Much of what she said had to be decrypted to glean what she meant, and great tenderness lay behind her words when she said to a colleague, “Strange, but I hate less and less.”

Francine was modest but, in her own way, she was also proud. She loathed snobs and, above all, the arrogance of money, and she praised herself for not being part of the upper-crust circle of antique dealers. She was a discoverer and a hands-on person. In the areas she traveled to, Ethiopia and Nepal, she was known to everyone. She had limited financial means but possessed eyes and instincts that can’t be learned. She had taste. Making no fanfare about it, she obtained magnificent Konso statues and was involved in the earliest arrival on the Parisian market of masks from Himachal Pradesh, an Indian territory between Nepal and Ladakh. Though most of her colleagues were in Katmandu, she discovered a splendid group of Kullu masks in New Delhi, one of which, an exceptional and previously unpublished white mask with unusual sculpted eyes, is illustrated here.

Unapologetically marginal, Francine Bourla’s strong personality has left an imprint of values that have become rare these days—proof that it is still possible to practice the profession of art dealing with honesty, with a taste for the beautiful, and with personal acumen, even in the face of the short-term speculation and fads that are so much a part of the market we know today.

