

The Art Issue

FALL 2021

AJS

PERSPECTIVES

the magazine of the association for Jewish Studies





Ruth Weisberg, Kindertransport, 2021. Oil on gessoed paper. 22.5 x 28 in.

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From the Editors	10
From the President	12
Contributors	14

ARTISTS ON THEIR ART

Siona Benjamin <i>Finding Home #80 (Fereshteh) Lilith</i>	16
Tobi Kahn <i>Patuach, Sagur, Patuach (Open, Closed, Open)</i>	18
Douglas Rosenberg <i>Song of Songs</i>	19
Sara Benninga <i>Around the Table</i>	24
Jeffrey Abt <i>Traveling Homeland</i>	26
Heddy Breuer Abramowitz <i>Lost in the Conversation: Finding Jewish Identity between the Lines</i>	30
Lynne Heller <i>Suspended—An Art Installation about Camp Naivelt</i>	32
Marlene Robinowich <i>Witnessing, 2019</i>	36
Robert Kirschbaum <i>Devarim Series</i>	38
Richard McBee <i>Rabbi's Maid: A Painting's Journey</i>	40
Ruth Kestenbaum Ben-Dov <i>War, Torah, and Painting</i>	44
Joshua Meyer <i>Illimitably</i>	46
Ruth Weisberg <i>Kindertransport</i>	48
Andrew Meit <i>Surviving Covid by Coloring Lilien</i>	50

SCHOLARS' INSIGHTS ON ART

Painted into a Corner: Seeing Jews in Medieval Rome Danny Smith	54
Jewish Art on Jewish Land? Martin Buber's Conception of 'Adamah Yehudit' Noa Avron Barak	56
A World with Worlds in <i>Evreiskii Mir</i> , a 1918 Russian Jewish Journal Dalia Wolfson	58
The Women Artists of Farlag Achrid: A Jewish Modernist Masterpiece Revealed David Mazower	59
Being Within: Ernö Goldfinger, Forties Architecture, and Jewish London Deborah Lewittes	64
Josef Nassy's <i>Tittmoning</i> (1944): Blackness, Jewishness, and Holocaust Art Sarah Phillips Casteel	66
The Protective Illusion: Thoughts on Jewish Visual Assimilation by a "Jewish" American Artist Archie Rand	68
"The Liberation of G-d," Helène Aylon's <i>Self Portrait</i> , 2005 David Sperber	70
Decanonization, Jewish Art, and American Art Museums Jennifer McComas	72
<i>What Will Remain: Broken Art for a Broken World</i> Evelyn Tauben	76
A Genizah for Stained-Glass Windows Alanna E. Cooper	78

ARTIST-SCHOLAR COLLABORATIONS

Avant-Garde Textiles, Jewish Art? Julia Phillips Cohen, Linsey Labson, and Devi Mays	84
FREELANDscapes: Imagining a Jewish Refuge in Australia Louis Kaplan (essay) and Melissa Shiff (art)	87

PEDAGOGY

Israeli Art, Jewish Art, and Jewish Studies Susan Nashman Fraiman	90
How We Talk about Jewish Art in World Religions: A Pedagogical Perspective from a Small Liberal Arts College Madison Tarleton	92

Teaching with Film and Media

<i>The Museum</i> Olga Gershenson	94
<i>Soviet Toys</i> Maya Balakirsky Katz	95

Roundtable

Teaching the Holocaust through Art Roundtables Editor: Jason Schulman Editor: Sarah M. Cushman Contributors: Natasha Goldman, Paul B. Jaskot, Barbara McCloskey, Belarie Zatzman	96
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THE PROFESSION

From Book to Object and Back Again Barbara Mann	102
The Jewish Art Salon: Celebrating and Promoting a Vibrant Jewish Art Community Yona Verwer	104

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- Stephen Cohen

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Archie Rand. 326: *To Send the Impure
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Tobi Kahn. *Patuach, Sagur, Patuach*
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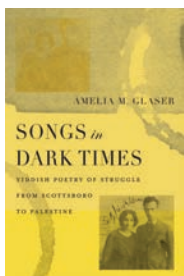
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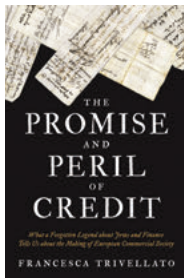
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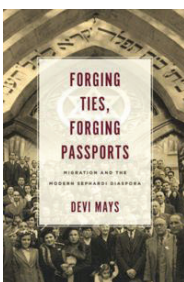
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From the Editors

Mira Sucharov & Chaya Halberstam



A look back through the archives of *AJS Perspectives* is also an encounter with hundreds of images: primary source photographs, maps, portraits of Jewish thinkers. As the magazine evolved, images grew in prominence, often complementing (rather than directly illustrating) the research articles. In the fall of 2017, *AJS Perspectives* burst into full color. Art and illustrations began to be chosen with greater care, and the occasional issue would showcase a featured artist. As editors who specialize in texts and politics, we wanted to achieve as high a standard for the visual component of *Perspectives* as we had managed with the written one.

In the spring of 2020, we appealed to art historian Samantha Baskind, a longtime member of the *Perspectives* editorial board, for help. What began as an afterthought—finding some decent images (that weren't too expensive!) to round out the issue—grew into a vital part of the publication. Working with Samantha in her newly created role as Art Editor, we opened up a Call for Art, which was circulated in contemporary Jewish art circles, and we began to showcase original Jewish art alongside original Jewish Studies scholarship. For her last issue before Samantha passes the baton to Douglas Rosenberg, who will succeed Samantha as Art Editor, we wanted to honor her hard work and expertise and address a long-neglected subfield within Jewish Studies (and *AJS Perspectives*) by bringing her on as a full co-editor for the current issue: the Art Issue.

We've aimed to showcase art and artists through a variety of formats in this issue. We include original art and commentary by contemporary Jewish artists working across an array of visual media, analyses of

particular Jewish artworks (both historical and current) by Jewish Studies scholars in a range of disciplines, and scholar-artist collaborations on themes relevant to the field. We've also included discussions of how to teach Jewish art, including via the inaugural column called Teaching with Film and Media (curated by Olga Gershenson). Finally, scholar-artists reflect on the role of artistic production in their professional lives.

In the pages that follow, we are thrilled to have brought together a dynamic mix of artists and scholars working in studio arts, art history, and material culture. The themes that emerge are rich and varied—biblical and talmudic motifs, family and memory, Holocaust trauma and survival, migration and Jewish identity, feminism and Zionism, medieval Judaism, Yiddish, architecture, race, assimilation, and Jewish death and dying: the full gamut of Jewish experience, through a visual lens.

Chaya Halberstam & Mira Sucharov,
Editors

Let's look at the contemporary moment. The flourishing of Jewish art on American soil is tremendously exciting. Yona Verwer's efforts with the Jewish Art Salon have given Jewish artists a venue to discuss and display their art. Works by some of those esteemed artists are featured in the pages that follow, as is an essay by Verwer about the Salon. Curator Jennifer McComas is currently reinstalling the European and American galleries at Indiana University's Eskenazi Museum of Art, fruitfully integrating works by Jewish artists rather than segregating them into separate galleries—or banishing them to storage. In doing so, she recognizes their output as integral to the regions where they lived rather than ghettoizing their art, and points to



Samantha Baskind
©Bachrach*

the artists' long-ignored religiocultural identities. In her essay, McComas explains one reason that Jewish art has been ignored for so long: Western art is typically understood as a product of national "schools," and its imagery was created within a dominant Christian society.

Jewish art cannot be understood within this rubric; Jews stand outside Western, Christian-based norms by virtue of their (often-marginalized) religion and because of their historic status as a diasporic people. So, too, the old canard about Jewish image-phobia has died hard. Then there is also the complicated question of where Israeli art fits into the conversation about Jewish art, the subject of Susan Fraiman's pedagogical contribution.

Archie Rand is not as optimistic. As one of the leading progenitors of Jewish art, he has at times suffered at the hand of art dealers and critics. Rand sees art with a Jewish position as an aesthetic liability. In his moving essay in this issue he voices concern about excommunication from the scholarly discourse because, as he's experienced firsthand, there's a role artists need to assume to assimilate into American art and culture. That role is not Jewish and surely not biblically based; although the subject is a recurrent theme in contemporary Jewish art, it has been deemed passé in the postmodern era.

But there's an artistic and scholarly effort underway at this crucial moment in the academy and the art world to expand and complicate the canon of art and to legitimize subfields of art history. In light of today's robust scholarship on minorities and their cultural production, the time is right to look carefully at (and celebrate) Jewish art—ancient and new.

And so this issue of *Perspectives*, the first of its kind, fleshes out connections between the Jewish experience and cultural representations.

Like literature, which certainly is never viewed merely through prose plot summaries or reduced to authors' messages, artworks are analyzed here for their pictorial purposes and in dialogue with visual traditions. Art cannot be reduced to extensions of the biographies of their producers or viewed at face value as illustrations. Indeed, the authors in this issue make art their central focus by privileging the visual properties of their objects of inquiry and closely decoding the meanings conveyed through those visual properties in concert, of course, with historical context.

Yes, Jews have long been dubbed "The People of the Book" and Jewish Studies as a discipline has indeed been primarily text oriented. Yet there is a different kind of Jewish text that has been mostly ignored—art—and with this issue we invite readers to think about how to draw intellectual sustenance from cross-disciplinary exchange by considering the vital possibilities of Jewish artistic culture. By "looking" Jewish.

Samantha Baskind,
Art Editor and Guest Co-Editor

*Samantha's headshot photo was taken by Bachrach Photographers, founded in 1868, which has been operated for over a century by four generations of a Jewish family, and is recognized as one of the oldest continuously operated portrait studios in the world. A Bachrach photographed every president from Lincoln to George H.W. Bush and immortalized hundreds of other American luminaries, including Thomas Edison, Amelia Earhart, and Hank Aaron.

From the President

Jeffrey Shoulson



Knowledge beyond Words

We are much more than our words. This is true not only of ourselves as individuals, but also of the worlds we study and teach. Yet far too often—and certainly if I’m speaking for myself—we confine and reduce those worlds to the words in which they are represented. It is no wonder, then, that when we implicitly accept or openly espouse these constraints of language and text, we also limit the voices we hear, the perspectives we see, and the meanings we derive from them. Such limitations, in turn, have further implications for who and not only what count as subjects for our research and instruction.

Though they have constituted vibrant and growing areas of inquiry within Jewish Studies, art history and the history of material culture have far too often been marginalized, consigned to a secondary role in much of the scholarship produced within our fields of study. The essays and other (visual and well as textual) contributions to this exciting issue of *AJS Perspectives*, therefore, serve as critical and necessary interventions. Editors Chaya Halberstam and Mira Sucharov, along with this issue’s Guest Editor and Art Editor Samantha Baskind, have enlisted a distinguished and diverse array of contributors, ranging from artists to art historians, museum curators to conveners of artistic communities, teachers to art collectors. Through the wide range of their voices and visual representations, we are invited to reconsider many of the most central questions to have emerged within our scholarly discourse of the last decade, questions pertaining to identity and all its multiple (and often contradictory) manifestations; considerations of differ-

ence and diversity, particularly with respect to the varieties of Jewishness; meanings of historical/cultural continuities and ruptures (as manifest, for example, in the study of the Shoah or of Zionism); and the implications of the blurred boundaries between textuality and materiality.

It is hard not to notice that, once the rigid boundaries between text and image have been unsettled, many other categories of knowledge also begin to shift and destabilize, whether they pertain to gender and sexuality, to race and ethnicity, to national identities, or to religious theory and praxis, study and ritual. I encourage you to explore these shifting boundaries through the pieces assembled in this issue of *AJS Perspectives*, and I hope that they inspire you to consider how this diversity of media can enrich your own teaching and research.

Jeffrey Shoulson
University of Connecticut

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Contributors



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Siona Benjamin



Tobi Kahn



Douglas Rosenberg



Sara Benninga



Jeffrey Abt



Heddy Breuer Abramowitz
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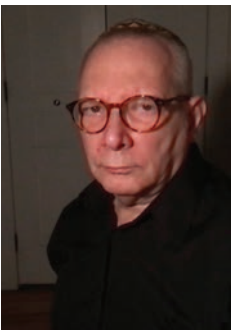
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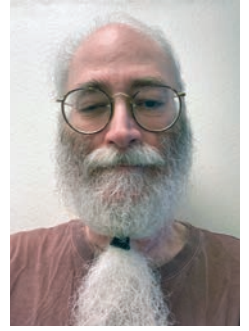
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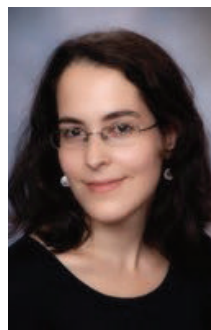
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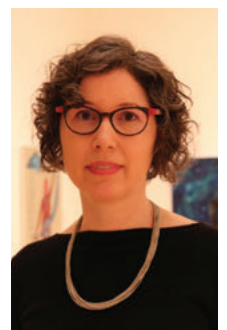
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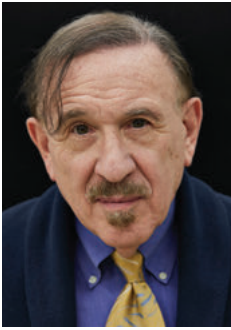
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THEN TO THE AMAZEMENT OF ALL, THERE AROSE FROM THE FIRE
A BLUE MAIDEN, WAFTING THE FRAGRANCE OF LOTUSES IN BLOOM



Siona Benjamin. Finding Home #80 (Fereshteh) Lilith, 2006. Gouache and 22K gold leaf on panel. 38 x 26 in.

Siona Benjamin

Finding Home #80 (Fereshteh) Lilith

I am a Bene Israel Jew originally from India, now living in the United States since 1986. My multimedia work translates into several different media, including mosaics, scrolls, and most often paintings. All my work reflects my background of being brought up Jewish in a predominantly Hindu and Muslim India.

In my paintings I combine the imagery of my past with the role I play in America today, inspired by Indian/Persian miniature paintings, medieval illuminated manuscripts, pop art, comic books, Sephardic icons, and the current sociopolitical climate, as a means to explore the cultural boundary zones of my immigrant self.

I have been studying the Torah (five books of Moses) and midrash (rabbinical interpretations) with rabbis and on my own for seventeen years. The figures from these holy texts have thus become figures in my paintings that act out their parts—recording, balancing, rectifying, restoring, and absorbing. It is through this multilayered research and recycled mythology that I can dip into my own personal specifics and universalize, thus playing the role of an artist/activist.

Very often I look down at my skin and it has turned blue. It tends to do that when I face certain situations of people stereotyping and categorizing those who are unlike themselves. Therefore, over the years I have developed many blue-skinned figures in my paintings. This blue self-portrait of sorts takes on many roles and forms, through which I theatrically explore ancient and contemporary dilemmas.

I am also inspired by Indian goddesses like Kali and the famous blue god Krishna. I show how these figures use their blue skin to tell (or mostly retell) stories. In this process of recycling and rejuvenating, they merely remind me in making the work (and hopefully my audience in viewing the work) that mythmaking is cyclical and timeless. Thus, blue skin has become a symbol for me of the

Very often I look down at my skin and it has turned blue. It tends to do that when I face certain situations of people stereotyping and categorizing those who are unlike themselves.

color of the sky and the ocean, of belonging everywhere and nowhere and of being a Jewish woman of color.

My series Fereshteh (“angels” in Urdu)—which I have been working on since the early 2000s and continue to this day—explores the women of the Bible and brings them forward to combat the wars and violence of today vis-à-vis midrash (interpretation) in my intricate paintings. Currently, there are eighty-two paintings in the Fereshteh series. The eightieth painting is called *Finding Home #80 (Fereshteh) Lilith*. Lilith’s name is written in Hindi at the base of the painting.

Inspired by Gianlorenzo Bernini’s sculpture Ecstasy of Saint Teresa

Also by the iconography of Saint Sebastian
Lilith is renamed Shanta Masuma

Shanta is peace and Masuma is innocence in Sanskrit and Urdu, respectively

Telltale symbols cannot decide where she should belong
A stigmata, a sign for the holy trinity; the hand of Fatima, the daughter of the Islamic prophet Mohammad; a tallit, a Jewish prayer shawl; and the white worn by widows in India

The imprisoned hand sometimes reaches for the gun
Suffering does not necessarily teach us the rules of humanity

Swathed in the dignity of her red, white, and blue
Lilith urges you to think again

Of another skin, another time, another fragrance,
another renaissance.

SIONA BENJAMIN is a painter from Mumbai, now living in the US. Her work reflects her background of being brought up Jewish in Hindu and Muslim India. She was awarded two Fulbright Fellowships to India and Israel. Website: <https://artsiona.com>



Tobi Kahn. *Patuach, Sagur, Patuach (Open, Closed, Open)*, 2012. Acrylic on wood. 9 x 12.5 x 9.5 in.

Tobi Kahn

Patuach, Sagur, Patuach (Open, Closed, Open)

The Tashlikh ritual allows us to enact the casting off of our inevitable shortcomings. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Jews have symbolically tossed their failings into the water, usually by emptying their pockets or throwing crumbs of bread into a lake or river. This vessel is designed to hold the invisible memories of our own darkness and harm, disappointments we accrue but can shed each year so that the radiant memory of those who are gone—revivified by the Yahrzeit lamp—can accompany and augment us.

This *Patuach, Sagur, Patuach* box is one of many ritual objects that I have created over the last forty years, including Omer counters, Shalom Bat chairs, huppahs, seder plates, Birkat Ha-ḥamah sculptures, Tu bi-Shevat

**The Tashlikh box clarifies what we must leave behind;
the Yahrzeit lamp illuminates what we hope to revive.**

seder plates, menorahs, memorial lights, arks, Holocaust memorials, and meditative spaces, among others. This box is sculpted from wood, as are all my ceremonial objects, some of which I later cast in bronze. Multiple layers of gesso, acrylic modeling paste, opaque paint, and finally multiple translucent glazes are applied to the surface.

The Tashlikh box clarifies what we must leave behind; the Yahrzeit lamp illuminates what we hope to revive. These ceremonial sculptures live in relationship to one another—an intimate reckoning.

And so we weave our lives between the need to discard and the mandate to remember, longing to relinquish our transgressions, to take wing past hovering darkness, to amplify the light.

Like Jacob, we lay our heads on a pillow of stone to dream of angels. Bound to earth, dust to dust, we can—through art, through love—construct a ladder to transcendence, compelled to make something beautiful of loss, of limitation: the rent fabric of our unredeemed world.

All of my work has been a quest to distill what we remember into essential images, into archetypes that allow the past to be transformed by imagination. Art responds to the capacity of the soul to be at home in the world while signaling transcendence, to be faithful to ancient truths while leaping toward a future at the horizon's curve. Although Judaism has emphasized words and interpretation, I have found the visual elements of the tradition equally illuminating. For me, the life of the spirit is integrally bound up with the beauty of

the created world. My work is abstract, and yet always in relationship to the physical world, conveying its grandeur and simplicity.

TOBI KAHN *has been committed and steadfast in the pursuit of the redemptive possibilities of art in all mediums including painting, sculpture, meditative spaces and photography. His work has been the subject in over sixty solo museum exhibitions following his selection as one of nine artists to be included in the 1985 Guggenheim Museum exhibition, New Horizons in American Art. Kahn's work is in the collection of the Guggenheim Museum; the Houston Museum of Fine Art; the Phillips Collection; the Jewish Museum, NY; the Yale University Art Gallery; the Albright Knox Art Gallery; the 9/11 Memorial Museum; and the Minneapolis Museum of Fine Art, among others.*

Douglas Rosenberg

Song of Songs

In a moment in which we are experiencing a generational shift among Jewish identifying artists to a more inclusive and polyvocal, fluid understanding of Jewish identity, the politics and visual culture of Jewishness are foregrounded in astounding new ways. From graphic novels to digital art and highly charged dance and performance, to theater, music and literature, we see both a return to ritual and a search for new narratives of the contemporary Jewish experience. Thus, the field is expanded even while acknowledging its own histories.

While trying to define it, the modernist art critic Harold Rosenberg has referred to, the "ambiguous situation" of Jewish Art.¹ Such ambiguities are the product of resistance; a denial by artists of a Jewish visual canon, and of the constituents of an accepted visual

*Song of Songs is a
performance without an audience,*

in a quiet empty space,

*a no-space surrounded by
objects that move me,*

*dried and bronze cast sunflowers
from my garden, a small bell,*

tended to with love and affection,

*and excerpts from Song of Songs
printed on fabric that I can
wrap myself in,*

like a tallit,

*imagined on
quiet contemplative walks.*

Douglas Rosenberg. Song of Songs performance. Design and layout by Jacob Li Rosenberg. Dance Today (Mahol Akhshav) 38, August 2020.

Song of Songs is a rumination on our ability to recast narratives of faith into embodied performance.



Douglas Rosenberg. Song of Songs performance. Photos by Michael Eckblad. Dance Today (Mahol Akhshav) 38, August 2020.



Douglas Rosenberg. *Song of Songs performance*. Photos by Michael Eckblad. *Dance Today* (Mahol Akhshav) 38, August 2020.

culture of Jewishness generally. Staci Boris, who curated *The New Authentics: Artists of the Post-Jewish Generation* at the Spertus Museum in 2008 alludes to the idea that contemporary Jewish artists are “Free to choose their affiliations, they are Jewish culturally, religiously, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, partially, biologically, or invisibly” further expanding Rosenberg’s notion of the “ambiguity” of Jewish art to include a kind of ambiguous Jewishness as well. And as the culture shifts into a post-modern present, a fluid and indeterminate present, Jewish culture itself becomes a space in which issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, politics, history, and nationality are transposed into a new visual culture; it’s art is conceptual and often performative. It poses questions gleaned from a history of wandering; through landscapes, through ideas, through identities, and through texts both sacred and otherwise. Artists of what Boris calls, the *Post-Jewish Generation* do not lack faith. Perhaps they have given into the hallucinatory effects of faith. As Rosenberg noted,

“To be engaged with the aesthetics of self has liberated the Jew as artist”

Perhaps this “engagement with the esthetics of self” has created a liminal space for the creation of a new version of Jewish Art, one situated within unfamiliar territory.

Imagine wandering in the desert for 40 years with little food or water. Imagine ethnic cleansing and Holocaust, imagine a biblical degree of suffering and the onerous confines of practiced faith itself. What sort of images might that conjure in the mind of a wanderer if one who asks the right questions?

The idea of epigenetic traumaⁱ proposes that we carry the biological traces of our ancestors’ experience. Perhaps the transgenerational effect of such a condition is a rethinking of the world in a new and confusing visual culture, one that looks unfamiliar and even grotesque at times. Yet, we recognize something of ourselves in its aura.

Song of Songs is a rumination on our ability to recast narratives of faith into embodied performance.

DOUGLAS ROSENBERG is professor of Video/ Performance Installation in the Art Department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and an artist working with performance and photography.

i Rosenberg, Harold, “Is There a Jewish Art,” first presented as a lecture at The Jewish Museum in New York and subsequently published in *Commentary*, 1966.

ii Carey, Benedict, Can We Really Inherit Trauma? December 10, 2018, *New York Times*.

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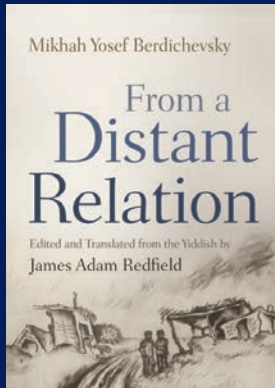
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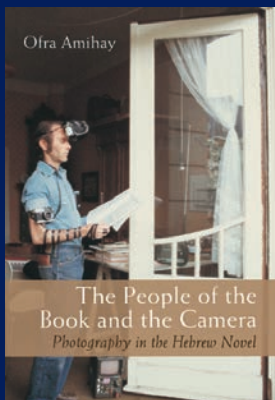
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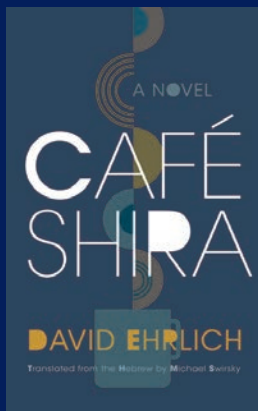
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Sara Benninga

Around the Table

In 2015 my father passed away. He was fairly young, sixty-eight years old, active and lively to his very last months, despite fighting an aggressive cancer. My father immigrated to Israel in 1973. Initially of Dutch origin, his family survived the Holocaust, came back to the Netherlands after the war, then moved to the United States when he was seven years old. My father was a large influence on my younger self. He was my link to the Netherlands, to a sense of universality, and he educated me to be social, interested, and active.

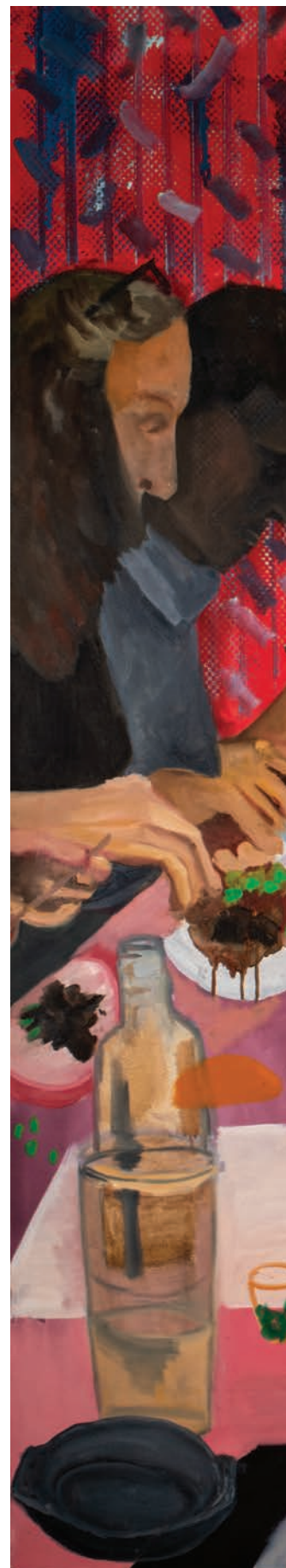
Featured here is one out of a number of paintings on the subject of family, which I made after his death. It shows a family meal, figures seated around a table on which lie an assortment of food bowls, cups, plates, and bottles. While the scene is descriptive, it is not intended to be realistic: not all the figures have a plate or utensils, there are too many bottles, and the size of the same objects varies. These objects express a gentle balance in the painting, they are part of painting itself, formed in action. They turn the table into a composition, and are essentially manifestations of paint—dots of orange and green, small fields of white, the crisscross pattern of raw sienna. The scene is based on a family photo I took on our last visit to Amsterdam with my father, while my great aunt, Sara Tromp, was also still alive. She lived there her whole life—including the Second World War, during which she hid in apartments around Amsterdam. She, as opposed to her sister—my Oma, Helen Benninga—never wanted to leave the Netherlands—not before nor after the Holocaust. On that last visit we went to a small restaurant in her neighborhood—she loved it (it was actually precooked Dutch food, defrosted, and not all that good), and there I took the photo. At the time I made the painting, my father had

The scene they are taken from is a last meal before the arrival of death.

already died. Thus, I removed his figure from the circumference of the table—and planted him in that green bush to the right. In his place sits a little girl—she is colored in reds. The two figures closer to us—those with the space-wars look-alike outfits—are figures from a scene in Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*—a movie which impressed me with its ability to convey religious passion in visual form. The scene they are taken from is a last meal before the arrival of death. The background is divided into two parts—with different negating patterns—which create a sense of depth. So do the perspectival lines of the table.

This painting is expressive of the way I work. I do not have rigid rules for my image making. I mostly paint medium- to large-sized oil paintings, scaled to the human body viewing them. In this way I evoke an empathy, or at least some form of comparison between the figures in the painting and those outside it. While I work intuitively, developing areas of the painting as I go along, I often work around a theme. The theme is an emotional one, relying on memory and experience. The figure of my father appears half erased, in the bushes, or in the corner, testimony to his importance and absence. Assessing the growing sadness of departure or the expanding void between myself and his image after his death runs as an internal logic of this piece.

SARA BENNINGA is a painter and art historian. She lectures in the Department of Visual and Material Culture at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, as well as in the Department of Art History at Tel Aviv University. She has exhibited her work in solo shows as well as in a number of group shows in Israel.





Sara Benninga. Gathering, 2017. Oil on canvas. 67 x 71 in. Photo by Shai Halevi

Jeffrey Abt

Traveling Homeland

This is one in a series of pieces using portability to embody the diasporic condition and the preservation of memories. It is fashioned as something that can be readily hung, or, when necessary, quickly taken down, folded into a packet, and tucked away, as when fleeing danger or seeking a better life. Made as though for a migrant, it requires little space or care.

When opened, the central panel of the piece depicts an imagined scene based on accounts of hospitalizations during the Covid pandemic, when dying patients were isolated from family. The simplified and flattened treatment of the figures is intended to distance the experience as though recalled from memory rather than captured in the moment like a photograph. The setting is meant to be intimate and unposed. The figures are derived from those in the Birds' Head Haggadah, an early fourteenth-century manuscript created in what is now southern Germany. In the Haggadah the figures were used to illustrate Passover preparations as well as biblical stories associated with the Passover narrative. They were adopted to populate

narrative panels in the *Traveling Homeland* series because of the ways in which the figures, despite being rendered almost uniformly with beaks, head coverings, and gowns, often convey a striking degree of individuality. Also appealing is the uncertainty surrounding why figures in the Haggadah were depicted with birds' heads and what kinds of birds they might be—raptors or less aggressive species, for example.

The patterns running through and adjacent to the central panel come from several historically and geographically diverse ornamental traditions. They are used in this work like traces of the times and regions through which it has passed, arranged as though an accretion of designs, each added when this object was handed down from one generation to the next or carried from one cultural setting to another. The formatting of the patterns as bands was partly a formal solution, but also inspired by the appearance of interior ornamentations in the wood synagogues of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, where lumber planks, on which decorations were painted,



Jeffrey Abt. *Traveling Homeland (Hospital)*, 2021. Oil on linen. 19 x 6.7 in. (closed).



Jeffrey Abt. *Traveling Homeland (Hospital)*, 2021. Oil on linen. 15.5 x 14.5 in. (open).

...one in a series of pieces using portability to embody the diasporic condition and the preservation of memories.

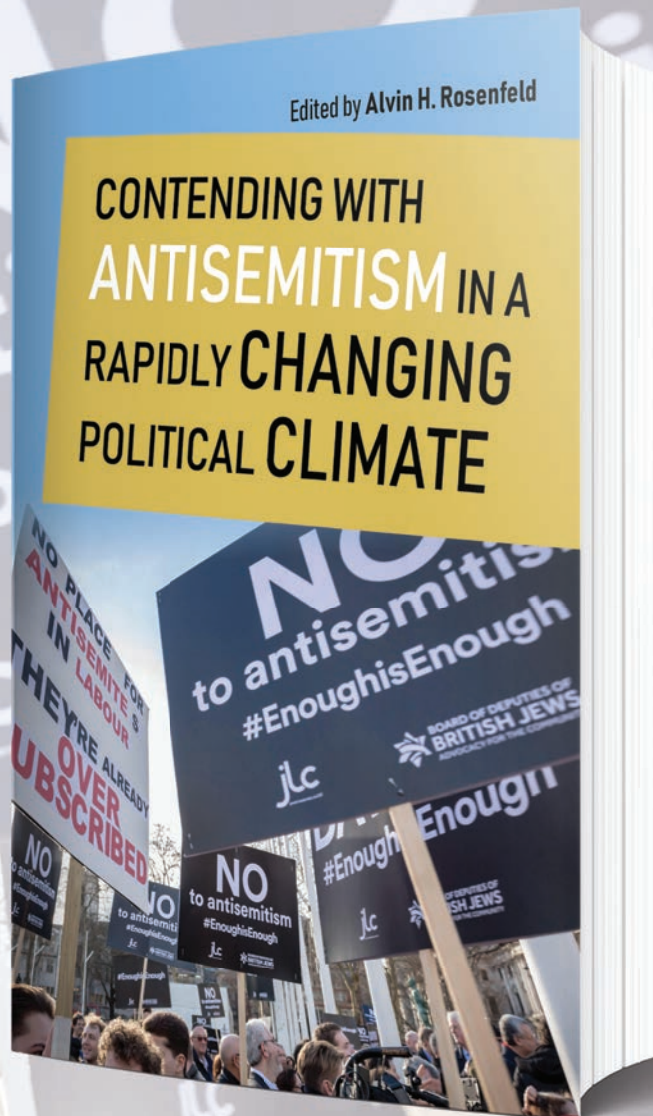
would age and separate, leaving gaps that sometimes disrupted or were worked into the decorative schemes.

The title for the series, of which this is the third piece, is taken from Daniel Boyarin's *A Traveling Homeland: The Babylonian Talmud as Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). None of my works in the series are illustrations of Boyarin's ideas, but the series does grapple with the underlying insights that motivated the book and shape its content. In that sense, the *Traveling Homeland* series aims to materialize life in exile and on the move, drawing on the experiences of Jewish history for thinking about many peoples in the

past and now. Of particular interest are the analogy of folding/unfolding with memory acts: dislocations of places and events, the bodying forth of experiences from one's past into the present, the ways in which occurrences are repeatedly recalled and then recede, and the interanimations and layering of memories with everyday life.

JEFFREY ABT is professor emeritus in the James Pearson Duffy Department of Art and Art History of Wayne State University. He has a BFA degree from Drake University and studied at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem before completing an MFA at Drake. He's an artist and writer, with artwork in museum and corporate collections throughout the United States, and he has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in America and abroad.

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Reichert, Josua [SIGNED]

1998, Leipzig: Verlag Faber & Faber. 79/100

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The letter 'mem' (cropped)

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Heddy Breuer Abramowitz

Lost in the Conversation: Finding Jewish Identity between the Lines

The amorphous question of what is Jewish identity has crept onto center stage as I mature. The technological gallop became the backdrop for this exploration. I have witnessed the purging of libraries, the culling of reference books, the digitization of contents and its corollary: disappearing means of communication. This has resulted in rippling changes in the publishing world and perhaps other backwash continues. I am anxious about leaving literary legacies to administrators and efficiency managers. Whose culture will remain on the shelves fully intact? Which of many “narratives” will be prioritized and at the expense of which others? In light of our current rhetoric and action, I feel it is ever more critical that the range of expression of Jewish identity be preserved.

To investigate these themes, I create collages using discarded book parts, vintage postcards, and cursive handwriting that for me represent a disappearing literary culture. I explore the individual’s relationship to writing, reading, and correspondence. These elements may evoke associations with specific times or places, add historic context, educate an author’s oeuvre, and, perhaps, jiggle the memory of the correspondents. Pulling together these now-quiet elements gives perspective on the passing of time; the slipping away of what were once familiar and mundane and their replacement by cutting-edge means. Cursive writing and—dare I say—penmanship are going the way of the buggy whip. The references to landmark touchstones of modern Jewish history are fading from collective memory. Here, these items compose a Zeitgeist in microcosm.

My collage *About the Conversation* is titled after the book cover of the same name by Albrecht Goes (1908–2000). It was exhibited in *Authenticity and Identification*, curated by Ori Z. Soltes this spring in Washington, DC. Placed on hand-marbled endpaper, a postcard from 1967 Addis Ababa (year of the Six Day War) is broken into a house structure with gardens, juxtaposed with what seems to be

From my father, who had witnessed Nazi book burnings and mourned the destruction of German cultural treasures and censorship, I learned early to value books.

a renaissance-era dandy, and placed on an Israeli envelope of the pre-digital-age call-up notice to reserve service. There is a 1938 (year of the Anschluss that subsumed Austria into Nazi Germany) scrap in German cursive signed by a man named Heinz. The postage stamps of Ethiopia, Israel, and the cypress tree twig are meant to interact with the Goes book from the 1950s airing the subject of reconciliation of Germans and Jews a mere few years after the Shoah.

This work combines competing elements of my background: I was raised secularly in a southern Maryland suburb where I went to public school, a Jesuit college, and then law school at the state university. My family attended small Conservative congregations and my formal Jewish education was minimal. My home life as the daughter of survivors—of life in Nazi Austria and in Hungary; of concentration, extermination, and displaced persons camps; and of the experiences of a Buchenwald liberator with the US Army—gave me a prism through which I still see life. In my 20s, Israel became my home and my informal Jewish education picked up after formal structures ended.

From my father, who had witnessed Nazi book burnings and mourned the destruction of German cultural treasures and censorship, I learned early to value books. I cherished books as a public resource. Initially, I hesitated to transgress and “mutilate” a book. Yet, my finds were one step from the refuse bin. After a book’s first life was over, I reasoned, using it in my collages would repurpose the work and extend its place in contemporary culture.

I found the Goes book on one of the many *hefker* benches where people set out ephemera they aren’t



Hedy Breuer Abramowitz. *About the Conversation*, 2017. Mixed media collage. 11.75 in. x 14 in.

prepared just to trash. This one was next to Jerusalem's Gan Rechavia complex where many professors from the Hebrew University reside. The booklet was clearly vintage, and printed in German in a Gothic typeset. It joined the rest of my gleanings.

Preparing a collage for me is trial and error. I work intuitively and combine elements with the visual and the thematic elements in play from the beginning. In this work, I chose the central figure of the man standing in the garden because I noticed that his pose of hand-on-heart sincerity contrasts with his gaze. It struck me as aloof, that of a detached observer and perhaps emotionally distant. The subject could be an everyman of any era. Who is to say whether or not the figure is Jewish or whether he is in the position of the assimilated Jew of his time? He follows the fashion convention of his time; he is the one who

blends. Perhaps his clothing presents one identity to the outside while covering his core identity on the inside?

I picked this painting by Nicholas Hillyarde (1547-1619) from an abandoned book of Elizabethan miniatures. It certainly had no Jewish associations at its inception; it spoke to me for that reason. The various elements in this collage are meant to reverberate against each other and be considered as clues to unasked questions. In the larger conversation about Jewish identity, who are we, where is home, and how do we view ourselves?

HEDDY BREUER ABRAMOWITZ is an American-Israeli multidisciplinary artist. Born in Brooklyn, NY to Holocaust survivors, she was raised in southern Maryland near Washington, DC. She is a painter, collagist, photographer and writer. Website: www.heddyabramowitz.com

Lynne Heller

Suspended—An Art Installation about Camp Naivelt

Archival inkjet print on paper and film, markers

November 12, 2018 - February 12, 2019

Curator: Evelyn Tauben

www.fentster.org #fentster

I had the privilege of being asked by curator Evelyn Tauben to create an art installation for a unique exhibition space located at 402 College Street, Toronto, Canada. FENTSTER (Yiddish for “window”) is an arena for “presenting site-specific installations of contemporary art connected to the Jewish experience.” Evelyn and I spoke at length a few times about possible directions I could take in developing work that referenced my Jewish heritage. She was intrigued by my experience of growing up at Camp Naivelt, a Canadian-Jewish socialist summer camp and cottage grounds.

The process of finding a visual representation of Naivelt and my childhood was an intriguing proposition. Naivelt and its history are rich in so many ways. People and community were its primary asset, but also it was a place of culture, music, dance, arts and crafts, architecture, a tiny bit of sports—swimming at the very least. And, of course, politics were paramount. However, right from the beginning, Naivelt was an experience of and about nature. It was conceived and developed by women who were looking for ways to give immigrant working-class children an alternative to inner-city life in the summertime. Naivelt was a summer sanctuary for me, an inner-city kid myself, forty years after its establishment. It was a place of delicious freedom to run and explore, learn about life and people, but at the same time it was safe and comforting. Much has changed in Brampton, Ontario, Canada, where the camp is located, since the 1960s and 1970s, when I was there. Where there were farmers’ fields and orchards there are now tracts of housing, but Naivelt continues to be a place set apart, where nature is still omnipresent.

In response to Evelyn’s prompts for work that reflected Naivelt, I decided to develop a piece of work about nature which led me to a particularly vivid memory I have of visiting camp with my family in the offseason, during early spring. Our family took a drive out to Naivelt one day and happened upon an incredible natural phenomenon. The Credit River, which runs through the property, is usually pretty sleepy in the summer. It does, though, have a spring breakup that can sometimes be quite convulsive. The river had thrown huge chunks of ice, up to three to five feet deep, many meters from its banks. The fields around the river were strewn with ice floes. The place looked like a salt mine. The whole family was mesmerized by the sight. My dad lifted me up onto one of the pieces of ice and I remember looking down into it and realizing that there was debris frozen into place. It was a dead fish staring back at me out of the ice that made the biggest impression on me.

There is a bridge which crosses over the Credit River which was a fundamental entry point, bottleneck, and occasional impediment to getting into Camp Naivelt. It was iconic. Sitting on an ice floe, looking back at the bridge was the memory I chose to encapsulate my experience of that day. I started the work by traveling out to Camp Naivelt, a journey I haven’t taken for many years, to take photographs. From those photographs, I created a layered installation of digital collage for the piece. The imagery was printed at a large scale (66” h x 78” w x 5” d) to address the space and viewing experience. I was challenged with the issue of printing out a digital collage, work that was subtly layered on the computer screen. Emulating the layered quality of the digital version was tricky as Evelyn and I grappled with suspending layers of imagery of various shapes and opacities.

Along with the suspended layers, the window of the gallery space had the imprint of the city’s graffiti artists. The glass had been incised with subtle marks and lines. I decided to highlight the marks by using paint to draw into and along with the lines that others had left behind. This added another layer to the piece that helped to recreate the sense of a multilayered image.

Sitting on an ice floe, looking back at the bridge was the memory I chose to encapsulate my experience of that day.

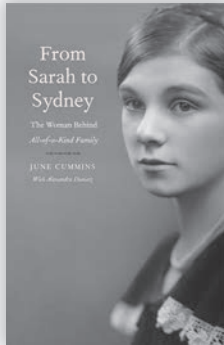
The focal point of the cutout of the child's silhouette adds a poignancy to the piece as it points to absence by the lack of detail and the ghostly white against the textured bridge and ice. The work was principally displayed during the winter months and played into the cold temperatures of the Toronto climate—frozen in time. I dedicated the work to Cindy Rosenbloom, a Naivelt childhood friend, who died at an early age due to a bicycle accident.

LYNNE HELLER is a post-disciplinary artist, designer, educator and academic. She is adjunct professor at OCAD University, co-director of the Data Materialization Studio, affiliate member of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto and reviews editor for Virtual Creativity. She is principal investigator of the SSHRC-funded project, Thinking through Craft and the Digital Turn.

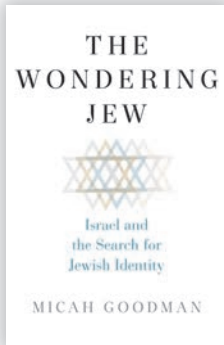


Lynne Heller. Suspended, 2018. Photographic installation with collaged imagery, pigment-based inks, archival paper, mylar, corplast, clear cling, magnetse. 66 x 78 x 5 in.

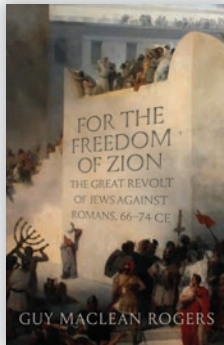
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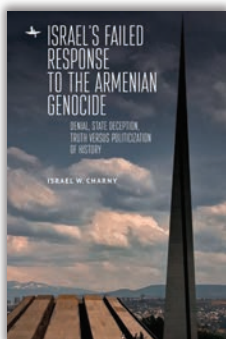
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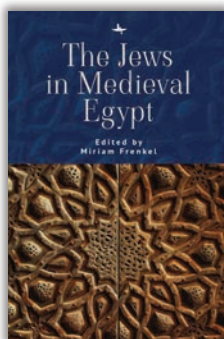
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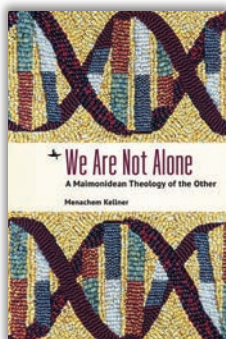
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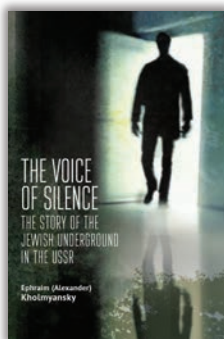
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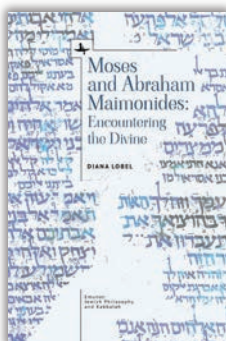
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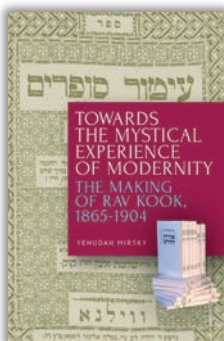
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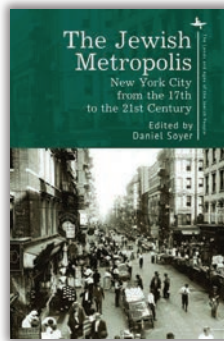
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Marlene Robinowich. Majdanek Memorial, Lublin, Poland (top left), Window of Warsaw (bottom left) The Old City, Jerusalem (right). From the series Witnessing, 2019.

Marlene Robinowich

Witnessing, 2019

I had been raised and educated to understand the history and events of the Holocaust. I had read Anne Frank's diary, and had seen the terrifying images of bodies in black-and-white photographs. Those images were burned into my memory—cold and harsh historical documents of the destruction of groups of people connected to me through a common set of values in foreign places. I knew the images were created to provide records, to show the world what war and power was capable of doing if left unchecked, but the newspaper photographs were images belonging to my grandparents and parents. That made the pictures important as artifacts, but they were not *my* images, *my* story, or *my* connection to the Holocaust.

While the color palettes are similar, the contrast of death and life represents sadness and also joy.

It was not until I saw rows of buildings and open fields for myself, standing next to my husband, friends, and community members that I realized I never understood how important my images could be in re-telling this larger story. I had been teaching photography for almost two decades. I took photos with my students, working on technical aspects, or of my children and places I lived and visited, and had always been interested in Jewish Studies and research in connection to making art. Then, after going on the International March of the Living trip in 2019 and agreeing to document the journey for the Savannah Jewish Federation, my work changed.

Sorting through thousands of images over the past two years during the pandemic, I felt conflicted about being an artist who made work about the atrocities and still thought of the people in those news images as suspended in tragedy. By listening to those who lived through it, or to their children and grandchildren who know the stories by heart, and by seeing empty synagogues, crumbling buildings, and death camps that were not just remote, cold, dark crime scenes, I used my camera to process. What I recorded was not the images seen in movies; instead, they were beautiful bright green fields under cloudless blue skies surrounded by cities just out of view. This made me realize that if I wanted to use my images to understand, teach, and to relate to my peers and younger generations, the images would need to be different from those used to teach me about the Holocaust. My documentary photographs needed to be in color, to show the present, the surroundings, the connection between death camps in Poland and life in Israel.

To create small narratives, I placed an image of a lace curtain bleached by the sun beneath an image of an Orthodox man standing alone in front of the enormous mound of ashes at Majdanek, where the creator of the monument, Wiktor Tolkin, engraved the message: "Let our fate be a warning to you," next to an image of two young boys playing in the sunlit alley of the Old City in Jerusalem. While the color palettes are similar, the contrast of death and life represents sadness and also joy. The naturally muted colors of the stones and worn building facade

The naturally muted colors of the stones and worn building facade reminded me about how life can change in almost insignificant ways that lead to destruction...

reminded me about how life can change in almost insignificant ways that lead to destruction, and then can almost be erased if we forget to look for them. Each photograph uses asymmetry to emphasize balance, but not equality of the subject. It was important to include both the landscape and isolated people interacting with the space as a link to memory and to add a sense of movement to the stillness of the cold, hard structures with diagonal lines of sight taking the viewer out of the frame. Rough textures paired with vulnerable moments were created by leaving a smooth negative space surrounding each subject. The juxtaposition of these three moments is a reflection of the variety of emotions experienced in photographing, processing, and producing these images, and it is these images that helped me understand destruction and death, but also reminded me about survival and life through the use of photography.

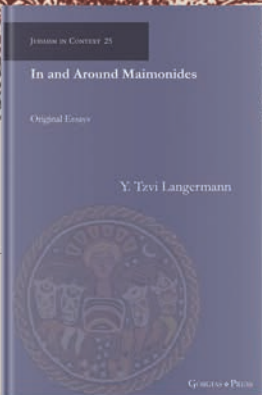
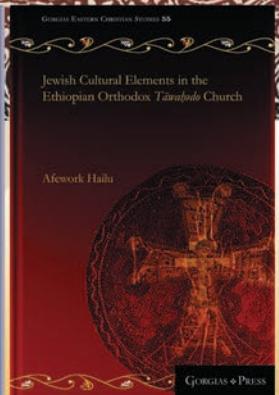
MARLENE ROBINOWICH is a photographer, professor, wife, and mother who grew up in the Catskills, just north of New York City. She teaches at Savannah State University, the oldest public HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) in the state of Georgia.

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“Engrave them, carve them, weigh them, permute them, and transform them, and with them depict the soul of all that was formed and all that will be formed in the future.”

—Sefer Yeḥirah

Sefer Yeḥirah (the book of formation) is an early magical and cosmogonic text lovingly embraced by later kabbalists. It describes the forming of the letters of the alphabet as the elements of Creation, the “building blocks” of the cosmos. The very physical nature of this process is striking. It speaks to me of art making, of familiar studio practice, particularly drawing (“weigh,” “permute,” and “transform”) and sculpture (“engrave” and “carve”).

This series of sculpture has its origins in my group of drawings, *Devarim*, which in Hebrew means both “words” and “things.” The plural of *davar*, *devarim* carries with it much of the same meaning as the Greek *stoicheia*, which can mean “elements” and “letters.” *Devarim* is also the

Hebrew designation of the book of Deuteronomy. In Jewish mystical tradition, the universe is, in a sense, both written and constructed. It is a concept similar to *logos* in Greek and *vac* in Sanskrit: Creation emanates from a sound / a word. In the *Devarim* drawings, I begin with a nine-square grid, commonly used as a demarcation of sacred space, found most prominently in Judaism as the basis for Ezekiel’s Temple Vision. I draw a cube, each face divided into the aforementioned nine-square grid. Following the grid pattern, I then begin to carve out, weigh, transform, permute, and depict forms initially intended to function as plans for discrete objects that are fragments of a more perfect whole. In creating some of these images, I deliberately evoke Jewish symbols: Hebrew letter forms, Jewish ritual objects, and references to the Temple and Temple implements, as well as numeric symbols invoked by the introduction of plane shapes—hexagons, octagons, and circles.

For my *Devarim* sculptures, I have, in keeping with the Sefer Yeḥirah, “engraved” and “carved” these forms from

solid blocks of aluminum. Extending the metaphor of word and thing, letter and element, each piece can be considered a fragment of Creation. They express concretely the concept, from the Lurianic Kabbalah, of tikkun 'olam, the repair or restoration of the world through the ingathering and reassembly of fragments of the universe shattered in the Creation, achieved through both concrete action and spiritual edification.

The sheen of the metal makes these works seem almost transparent: they have weight and yet appear almost weightless—they have presence, and yet often disappear into their surroundings. I have carved forty-two of these works, to make reference to the one of the “secret” names of God, the forty-two-letter Name, and to create the elements for a larger work of installation art. Associated with the creation, the Zohar (the book of splendor) speaks of “the first forty-two letters of the Holy Name, by which heaven and earth were created.” The forty-two-letter Name is also said to consist of the first forty-two

The sheen of the metal makes these works seem almost transparent: they have weight and yet appear almost weightless—they have presence, and yet often disappear into their surroundings.

letters of the Hebrew Bible, and thought to have been engraved by God, during the Creation, on the stone that was used to separate the waters. That stone ultimately became the foundation stone of the Temple, and is regarded as the center of the universe.

ROBERT KIRSCHBAUM has exhibited and lectured about his work throughout the United States, India, and Israel, with some of his work currently being exhibited at ANU – The Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv. Kirschbaum divides his time between New York City and Hartford, Connecticut, where he is professor of Fine Arts at Trinity College.

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Richard McBee

Rabbi's Maid: A Painting's Journey

Amid the flurry of misogyny in the Talmud tractate Ketubot, one encounters the singular story of the death of Rabbi (Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, the editor of the Mishnah). We can well appreciate the talmudic authors' distress at relating the death of the literary and spiritual leader of their rabbinic revolution, that is, the first written codification of the Oral Law. His death signaled the end of an era.

On page 104a, his death looms and everyone wants to postpone this inevitability; so much so that it was decreed forbidden to even mention his demise when it actually occurred.

Deeply distressed, Rabbi's maid ascended to the roof and prayed: "The angels desire Rabbi to join them and his students desire Rabbi to remain with them; may it be the will of God that his students may overpower the angels." When, however, she saw how often he resorted to the toilet, painfully taking off his tefillin and putting them on again, she prayed: "May it be the will of the Almighty that the angels may overpower the students."

And yet the students incessantly continued their prayers for him to live; so she took matters into her own hands. She carried a large jar up to the roof and threw it down to the ground with a loud crash. Startled for a moment, they ceased praying and the soul of Rabbi departed to its eternal rest.

What an amazing story of the courageous action of one woman, confounding the rabbinic elite and assisting in the mercy death of the greatest sage of the time! This story simply demanded to be addressed in visual art.

It seemed to me that the images of Heaven above would have to be contrasted with the earthly petitioners below, perhaps all in a yeshiva or beit midrash setting. Considering my own experience as a yeshiva student at Mesivta Tiferes Jerusalem on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, an urban storefront might work well to allow the viewer to look in and see the students studying and praying for the merit of their master.



Edward Hopper's Early Sunday Morning at Whitney Museum in situ with McBee. Photo by Menachem Wecker

The tranquil peace of Hopper's scene psychologically set the drama about to unfold.

A building with a second floor would allow depicting the sick Rabbi in bed in a room upstairs. So I simultaneously started sketching options and also looking for an art historical model to appropriate that would reflect the narrative setting and transform it into something contemporary.

One of Edward Hopper's most famous images, *Early Sunday Morning* (1930), was perfect for this narrative. The tranquil peace of Hopper's scene psychologically set the drama about to unfold. The talmudic story progressed relentlessly; the holy Rabbi was dying! The desperate students, those who knew him and even those who had simply heard of this great master, have gathered in the storefront yeshiva to do whatever they could to allow this eminent man to live a bit longer. All night they studied Torah in his merit and prayed to avert the inevitable death that approaches ... and dawn comes, quietly and beautifully ... *Early Sunday Morning*.

And then suddenly—this unnamed woman, a loyal maid of a holy man—takes action! The talmudic narrative driven by an antinomian feminist perspective in combination with an appropriated image guarantees instant visual recognition for an otherwise unknown subject.



Richard McBee. Rabbi's Maid, 2016. Oil on canvas. 30 x 40 in.

Executing the painting involved multiple adjustments to the original, including the addition of an elderly couple out for a morning stroll. Turning back, they have just noticed the praying yeshiva students and the women's minyan, unaware of the flying jug about to shatter the morning quiet.

Not surprisingly, images sometimes summon unanticipated reactions and responses. Within a year of its creation, a colleague of my daughter, Dr. Moshe Cohn, saw this painting on my website and immediately bought it, since it depicted perfectly one of the main aspects of his philosophical and practical approach to palliative care.

His rabbi, Rabbi Moshe David Tendler, a noted expert in Jewish medical ethics, frequently uses this specific talmudic passage imaged in my painting as additional textual support to his halakhic position that, in a case of

someone who is dying and suffering but is prevented from dying by some agent or process, it is permissible to remove that agent to allow the person to peacefully die. Since normally Jewish law forbids any action that could hasten an individual's death, this is not accepted by all halakhic authorities. Nonetheless Rabbi Tendler's position emphasizes the elimination of suffering (i.e., quality of life) to be a crucial mitigating factor. Rabbi's maid in the Talmud clearly took this merciful position and my painting firmly brings its perspective into the twenty-first century.

RICHARD MCBEE is a painter of biblical subject matter and writer on Jewish art. He is a founding member of the Jewish Art Salon. His artwork and reviews can be seen at richardmcbec.com.

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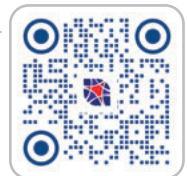
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Ruth Kestenbaum Ben-Dov

War, Torah, and Painting

May 19, 2021

The image of the sleeping artist at right hints at the dreamlike quality of the landscape that takes up most of this large painting. This scene includes a visual conversation with the Torah portion *Ki Teze'*, which opens with the laws of war: "When you go to war against your enemy ..." (Deuteronomy 21:10). I was spurred to paint it when three of my four children were serving in the Israel Defense Forces at the same time. This led to my attending a number of military ceremonies in close succession. Even though I served in the IDF, these events appeared strange to me, and thus a combined insider-outsider view lies at the heart of the painting. My ambivalent outlook goes beyond the struggles of any Israeli parent, as I carry within me childhood memories of attending antiwar demonstrations with my parents in Washington, DC, where I was born. Writing here about the painting invites me to ponder that upbringing, as well as the decision to make Israel my home.

Much of the imagery in the painting connects seemingly unrelated sections of the Torah portion to its opening. This includes the law of sending the mother bird away before taking her eggs or chicks, usually interpreted as an act of compassion (Deuteronomy 22:6-7). In the painting I become that mother bird, flying away and leaving the eggs to be removed. Looking at those four sweet eggs, I appreciate their deep connection to our nest and their commitment to protecting it. Incidentally and ironically, the soundtrack in many IDF ceremonies includes a popular Israeli song with the refrain "Fly away, chick!" sung by a mother bird to her offspring.

In a key ceremony my children promised to defend our country, even at the cost of their lives, while holding a Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) in one hand and a gun in the other, the two joined in an act of salute. The female figure enacting that moment at the left edge of the painting



In the painting I become that mother bird, flying away and leaving the eggs to be removed.

brings to mind another law from the Torah portion, the prohibition against a woman wearing male attire (and vice versa, in Deuteronomy 22:5). Here the gun is the ultimate male attire, in my daughter's hands. After returning home from one of the swearing-in ceremonies I cooked a Shabbat meal. Looking at a raw piece of chicken in my kitchen brought to my mind the bloody reality hidden behind both our appealing cooked food and our uplifting military ceremonies. I recognize that violence is a human reality, as does the Torah, with its laws of war and eating tempering that reality, rather than denying it; thus the shocking union of gun and Bible makes sense. Still, I look back at those childhood antiwar demonstrations and wish they hadn't failed.



Ruth K. Ben-Dov. *Ki Tetzeh (When you go out to war)*, 2015.
Oil on canvas. 39 x 57 in. Photo by Dror Miler

While working on this painting I allowed myself to proceed without detailed planning, allowing visual surprises to emerge: the landscape seems to fold into itself and change perspective, from the view from my studio balcony overlooking the Galilee hills (with the Jewish and Arab towns of Karmiel and Deir El-Assad) to an aerial view of an imagined site seen from a plane. This site is targeted with a red circle and bears the shadow of a fighter plane. The circular target resonates with the circular plate holding the piece of chicken, as well as with the circular nest. That piece of chicken, a dead bird, leads the eye to its counterpart, the flying one, with the shadow of the aircraft creating a visual triangle between the three. The interplay of colors includes the golden earth tones that take up much of the canvas, punctuated by the white plate, bird and eggs, red target and meat, and framed at left and right by the green of uniform and olive tree. The paint itself is of course what creates the illusion of space

and volume, while its texture becomes the texture of the rocky land; yet it also stands for itself, as stains of paint covering the sleeping artist's work clothes. Thus the visual experience of the work is the fundamental conduit to its ideas, reflecting my ambition to fuse observational painting with explorations of place and identity.

As I write this piece, my youngest son is on active duty on the Gaza border. While *Ki Teze'* reacted to military ceremonies and training, now it's the real thing. And as the painting doesn't reconcile the chaotic imagery within it, so I learn to live with the various voices within me: the fear of losing a child to war and the sadness about the children killed by our forces; the acknowledgement that I have enemies who want to eradicate me, my family, and my people, and the hope for reconciliation with my Arab neighbors here in the Galilee.

Note: The painting Ki Tetzeh was inspired by an earlier work on parchment that was part of the Women of the Book project (www.womenofthebook.org).

RUTH KESTENBAUM BEN-DOV is an artist living in Eshchar in northern Israel. Her work is featured in exhibitions devoted to Israeli painting and contemporary Jewish art. Website: www.ruthkben-dov.com



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Joshua Meyer. Illimitably, 2019. Oil on canvas. 30 x 30 in.



Joshua Meyer

Illimitably

My paintings are built up by layering thick paint. When you look at the overlapping marks, you can see time elapse. The paintings take months to complete, but leave their own processes open and visible. I work with live models over these spans. *Illimitably* shows not only a person at full-length, but the story of how he came into being. The layers recount the way the painting was made—the paint holds memories, accruing information, and allows the image to reveal itself incrementally.

But I am curious about the accrual. I want to know how all of these selves interact and overlap. Each mark and each color is a point in time. By leaving my process open and visible, the paintings can contain—just as a person can—many overlapping stories. The art is not a fixed thing, it is a dialogue. Pthalo blue covers a cerulean blue, and an ochre hides a brighter hue as I try to resolve the image. The painting's palette gradually turns autumnal. The heavy layers and colors move and build, adding up to a painting that should refuse to sit still.

My paintings are centered around people—family and close friends—who keep the art's momentum rooted in relationships and personal stories. *Illimitably* is a self-portrait, however, with one foot planted squarely in reality, the painting veers off and begins to unravel. The paint takes on a life of its own, unmooring itself from its descriptive origins.

Art has an ability to hold multiple, competing truths. Judaism loves complexity too. Jews love to answer a question with a parable. Think about the hasidic tales, think about Kafka's "Parable," and, of course, think about midrash. Instead of walking away with a simple answer or solution, we learn to empathize with characters. We get to

... the paint holds memories, accruing information, and allows the image to reveal itself incrementally.

feel the struggle for understanding. We're looking for those elusive openings so that we can burrow in and find meaning. We can enter and engage. Art has this power. Paintings are rich with contradictions, and as viewers we each have to do the work of weaving or sorting these aspects and impulses for ourselves.

Judaism can be legalistic as well, but the code is actually a book of arguments. The Talmud's discussions and struggles are not a straight path at all. So Judaism teaches us that nothing is black and white. Everything is process and reevaluation. That is the way I approach the world, and it is the way I make art. I struggle and I seek. So it lays some philosophical groundwork for my art, and my art also lays some groundwork for my Judaism. When I exhibit my paintings in a gallery, the white walls rarely give away the fact that I am deeply enmeshed in the Jewish community. But art is omnivorous and more or less devours everything in my life, just as Judaism is really foundational to the way I think about the world.

JOSHUA MEYER is known for his thickly layered paintings of people, and for a searching, open-ended process. Meyer has been recognized with a 2021 CJP Arts and Culture Impact Award. The artist studied art at Yale University and the Bezalel Academy and has exhibited internationally, including solo exhibitions *Tohu vaVohu* at Hebrew College in Boston, *Becoming at the Yale Slifka Center* and *NYU Bronfman Center*, and the retrospective *Seek My Face* at UCLA's Dortort Center. Meyer is represented by Rice Polak Gallery in Provincetown and Dolby Chadwick Gallery in San Francisco. Website: www.joshuameyer.com



Ruth Weisberg. *Kindertransport*, 2021. Oil on gessoed paper. 22 x 28 in.

Ruth Weisberg

Kindertransport

I make art out of all aspects of my identity, finding in the process that art integrates my experiences, beliefs, and Jewish heritage. The history of the Jewish people and the history of art have been especially profound sources. One very recent series has been inspired by the Kindertransport, the organized rescue effort to evacuate Jewish children from the Nazi-controlled areas of Europe to the United Kingdom between 1938 and 1940. Although estimates vary, nearly 10,000 predominately Jewish children between the ages of five and seventeen from Nazi Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland were transported to Britain by train and ship.

As always, I want my images to be recognizable but with elements of timelessness and a very affecting humanity.

This work is an oil painting on gessoed heavyweight paper and is part of a series of six paintings. Working in this manner allows me to create images that have dramatic lighting, strong figurative depictions, and very tactile surfaces. As always, I want my images to be recognizable but with elements of timelessness and a very affecting humanity. Anyone who is familiar with my art should be familiar with this technique from previous bodies of work.

I note my tendency when confronting the Holocaust to depict events and images that precede or follow the Final Solution. However tragic, there is always an element of hope. The Kindertransport children are now in their 80s or

For me, as an artist, the great Italian, Spanish, and Flemish masters are a constant inspiration.

90s. Some remained in England but many emigrated to Israel and the United States. I know them as children in my art, but I have met some in person in Los Angeles. We are all affected by history, but being Jewish makes that aspect of my work particularly poignant. It is important to me to have an emotional connection with my subject matter—to feel a shared history and identity. Even when I depict images from Renaissance art history I want my viewer to feel the humanity of the people I depict, and at the same time recognize that I evoke recent Jewish history. I hope that elements of Renaissance and post-Renaissance art will resonate in my use of gesture and facial expression. We all share a common humanity.

Over the years I have taken as my source of inspiration the paintings or frescos of artists such as Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Diego Velazquez, and Jan Vermeer, among others. For me, as an artist, the great Italian, Spanish, and Flemish masters are a constant inspiration. Women artists are regrettably far rarer but I have also sought out the work

of Sofonisba Anguissola, Mary Cassatt, and Kathe Kollwitz. I feel wed to the past as both an artist and a Jew.

Art at its core is an affirmation of the very best of our collective past and our humanity. I find the interweaving of the past and present to be endlessly thought provoking and a real source of inspiration. I feel truly blessed to be an artist.

RUTH WEISBERG is professor of Fine Arts and director of the USC Initiative for Israeli Arts and Humanities at the University of Southern California. She founded the Jewish Artists Initiative of Southern California in 2004. Her work is in sixty major museum collections including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Biblioteque Nationale of France, Paris; Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica, Rome; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Norwegian National Museum, Oslo; the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the National Gallery, Washington, DC; and the Whitney Museum.



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Andrew Meit

Surviving Covid by Coloring Lilien

Lovingly Escorting the Dead = Melavim Be-'Ahavah 'et Ha-Metim
מלווים באהבה את המתים

Since childhood, creating art helped me deal with the daily stress of having several disabilities (deafblind from Rubella). Over time, art became part of my Jewish spirituality and an expression of my Judaism. I came to realize an image can be a prayer and a teaching. Later on, I discovered Ephraim Moses Lilien's powerful Jewish black-and-white imagery. Currently, I create inspired interpretive colored versions of his images drawing upon decades of mastering Photoshop™ techniques. But who is Lilien?

Lilien, an early twentieth-century German Jewish artist, created black-and-white ink drawings in the style of art nouveau exploring Zionist and Jewish themes and issues. Unique is his use of nude art elements and sexual suggestion.

This past year Lilien helped me soar over Covid. Covid is a deadly, overwhelming stressor for us all. I was determined to stay inside, remaining safe, but I needed something to keep me creatively focused. An art project lasting at least six months to a year would do.

I searched through Lilien's work for an image offering a story about death. He explored death to make death personal, to help humankind see death. Finally, I found an unnamed image, which I named *Life Cycle*. Pouring my effort and vision into this Lilien image would bring me the stability I sought.

To be human is to die. This fact I learned very young. I learned also an eternal fact: we exist but for a whisper of time. Judaism teaches how to deal with those facts: caring for the dead, the dying, and the memories of them. In addition to sacred words, visual art can be another means to show how Judaism teaches compassion for the dead and dying. Lilien's *Life Cycle* does that—thoroughly—which is why I choose the image to help me transcend Covid.



Top: Illustration by Ephraim Moses Lilien published in *Die Bücher der Bibel* (Berlin: Benjamin Harz Verlag, 1923), via Wikimedia Commons.
Bottom: Andrew Meit. Lovingly Escorting the Dead (Melavim BeAhava et HaMetim), 2021. Digital painting.

Lilien's *Life Cycle* presents a panoramic black-and-white image compressing all the human life-cycle stages: birth, life, and death. The extended life is presented as a man, representing humankind. Lilien does not give clues as to who the man, baby, or the bones are. Social relationships are, at best, implied. A vast, nearly empty black sky lies behind the man. However, Lilien provides a protective tent with a handmade, occupied crib and a used gravesite with a shovel ready to receive a body. It is not clear what ground the man is walking on: some rock, some grass, some desert, and a cliff!—all implying a rough life passage. There is a sea or lake just behind the graves and distant mountains behind the tent. The naked, stooped-over man carries on his back the heavy bones of the dead. He steadies himself using a tall walking staff, tightly gripped. He walks towards the graves with focused, wide, weary eyes. The skeleton faces upward with a leg pressed to the man's back. The bones are

Getting the colors and blending transitions just right took a lot of experimenting. Nature often changes color when there is death, so the ground reflects that change.

wrapped in dark cloth—to respect the dead and to protect the living. Lilien places him—his journey—midway between cozy crib and empty grave plot.

It is challenging to translate Lilien’s images into color visually and semantically. My coloring is guided by his use of nature, natural settings, and symbolic objects. This includes an implied light source. I researched historical/traditional colors before I colored the image. The stages of birth, life, and death give a natural arrangement of three parts that guides coloring. Naturally, the colors of sunrise, high noon, and sunset echo those same life stages. Getting the colors and blending transitions just right took a lot of experimenting. Nature often changes color when there is death, so the ground reflects that change. The baby’s quilt pattern uses bright hopeful primary colors; it is Jacob’s ladder, reaching to the divine. Although Lilien shows a black robe, considering the colors already used, I decided a dark blue robe with red flecks (symbolizing our blood)

would be better. The walking staff is dark red, for by tradition’s blood, one’s life path is made steady—if held tightly. The Man(kind) is an earthling, so a darker brown skin befits him. To earth, he too will return one day.

Over the past year, learning daily of the mounting needless deaths, I steadily worked on coloring *Life Cycle* to compassionately carry the bones of those known and loved through my art with their memories. Holding onto the tradition of art and of Judaism steadied my art and my heart walking through a Covid valley of death.

ANDREW MEIT is a self-taught artist with training from the Cleveland Art Institute and a BA in Religious Studies with minors in Math and Philosophy from Stetson University. He created the first digital version of the typeface used in Gutenberg’s Bible, “Good City Modern” and was lead software tester for the award-winning graphic-design software FreeHand 3/3.1.

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Resurrection of the Bull, from *The Life and Miracles of St. Sylvester*, ca. 1247. Fresco. Oratory of St. Sylvester, Basilica of Santi Quattro Coronati, Rome. Photo by author

Painted into a Corner: Seeing Jews in Medieval Rome

Danny Smith

Rabbi Zambri, in a blue cloak and white-and-gold scarf, stands motionless on the right edge of a fresco painted in the mid-1240s in the Oratory of Saint Sylvester in the Basilica of Santi Quattro Coronati. His wizened mien, his beard, and his garments—particularly his headscarf—betray his identity as a Jew. He stands amid a throng of other Jews gazing sadly toward the center of the fresco, where Emperor Constantine sits enthroned. The fresco depicts the story of Zambri’s powerlessness, his defeat. The first image of a cycle of the life and miracles of the fourth-century Pope Sylvester (d. 335), the scene depicts a debate staged before the Roman imperial court between Zambri and Sylvester, the last of a series of debates staged to convince the Roman Empire to embrace Christianity. According to late fourth- or early fifth-century accounts of Sylvester’s life, Zambri and Sylvester came before the emperor leading a bull. Zambri acts first, killing the bull by whispering the Hebrew name of God into the bull’s ear. Sylvester responds, resurrecting the bull by whispering the name of Christ.¹

In the image Zambri stands flanked by male and female attendants, one of whom gestures at a bull that hovers comically: face planted into the dirt with its hind quarters pointed straight into the air. On the left side of the fresco, although badly damaged, the bull is visible again, this time alert, sitting upright and glaring toward Zambri and his attendants. A single hand (a sketch of the frescoes from the seventeenth century reveals the hand is Sylvester’s), points towards the now lively and angry bull. At the center of the scene Emperor Constantine and another man sit enthroned, clearly impressed by what they have witnessed.

In the frescoes of the chapel dedicated to his life, Sylvester’s triumph over Zambri is only the first of his many miracles—the sainted pope slayed a dragon, cured Constantine of leprosy, and even baptized the emperor. Painted nearly a millennium after Sylvester’s death, the chapel was decorated in the 1240s at a moment when the papacy sought to position itself as a power greater even than the emperor. At the time the papacy fought with the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, whose troops and supporters repeatedly attacked papal convoys and threatened the Papal States. Popes elected in absentia fled Rome to the relative safety of France, as artists who remained in the city sought to depict the power of the papacy and the deference of Constantine to Sylvester and his successors.

I’ve spent hours in that chapel and hours more poring over images of it—photographs, diagrams, drawings from the

Scholars' Insights on Art

seventeenth century—trying to figure out what effect the fresco cycle has on its viewers. In the frescoes I see echoes of the processions of icons of Christ through Rome popular in the Middle Ages, subtle and nuanced use of pictorial space to fix an ideal vantage point for a viewer, complex allegories of eschatology and salvation. But at the root of that visual complexity is Zambri's silent presence.

In the cycle Zambri functions as a necessary prelude. He and his companions present a metric against which the power of Sylvester's faith could be easily and demonstrably measured. He personifies the Christian concept of doctrinal supersession: the notion that the Old Testament served as a precursor and prelude to the New Testament. Anything he can do, the fresco shows us, Sylvester can do better. But, by depicting such supersession, the fresco also preserves an image of what has been superseded. The result is the omnipresent Zambri. Even in defeat he remains—a visible Jew at the heart of a profoundly Christian space.

Images of doctrinal supersession abound in Rome, particularly from the Middle Ages. Dozens of churches are decorated with dueling fresco or mosaic cycles: Old Testament on one side, New Testament on the other.ⁱⁱ Medieval rites of church dedication even likened the altar of a Christian church with the stone that Jacob anointed to pray upon after his dream of a ladder to heaven in Genesis.ⁱⁱⁱ Like Zambri, Jews and their stories came to rest permanently in the corners of fresco cycles and in the decorative programs of altarpieces. This desire to depict the superseded not only shaped the art of Rome, it also shaped Rome.

The church has long been obsessed with keeping Jews visible, and visually distinguishable from Christians. Even before Zambri was immortalized in fresco, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 decreed "that Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress."^{iv} In 1555 Pope Paul IV went so far as to order the construction of a single Jewish quarter in Rome, a ghetto beside the river "to which there is only one entrance and from which there is but one exit."^v There Jews could live in permanent

The church has long been obsessed with keeping Jews visible, and visually distinguishable from Christians.

juxtaposition with Christian Rome, permanently visible to the Christians of Rome. Paul's order might appear to be a strange choice. On the church's urging kings of Spain, France, England all expelled their Jews in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Meanwhile the Papal States not only didn't expel their Jews, they refused to let them leave. Instead Paul reconstructed the city into an image just like Zambri's fresco. Zambri was painted into a corner but left there as a permanent reminder of what had been, what was triumphed over. Paul's order fixed and framed the entire Jewish community of Rome—making the ghetto a central and visible reminder to Christians of what their faith had superseded.

DANNY SMITH is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Art and Art History at Stanford University and the 2020-2021 Marian and Andrew Heiskell/Anthony M. Clark Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome.

i Although untranslated in full, an edited Latin version of this text, called the *Actus Silvestri*, is in P. De Leo, *Ricerche sui falsi medioevali I: Il Constitutum Constantini; compilazione agiografica del sec.VIII. Note e documenti per una nuova lettura* (Reggio Calabria: Editori meridionali riuniti, 1974), 151–221.

ii On the role of images of the Old Testament in churches see Margaret R. Miles, "Santa Maria Maggiore's Fifth-Century Mosaics: Triumphal Christianity and the Jews," *The Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 2 (1993): 155–75.

iii Genesis 22:16–22. Lee Bowen describes how the prayer and language of the dedication ceremony reframed Jacob's stone as a Christian altar. Lee Bowen, "The Tropology of Mediaeval Dedication Rites," *Speculum* 16, no. 4 (1941): 469–7.

iv Canon 68 of the Fourth Lateran Council. Translated at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/lateran4.asp>.

v Paul IV's order was in a papal bull entitled *Cum nimis absurdum*, from 1555. Translated at: <https://www.cjlr.us/dialogika-resources/primary-texts-from-the-history-of-the-relationship-paul-iv>.

Jewish Art on Jewish Land? Martin Buber's Conception of 'Adamah Yehudit

Noa Avron Barak

In 1901, the young Martin Buber addressed the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, where he claimed that modern Jewish art can be created only on "Jewish land" ('*adamah yehudit*). That same year, he commissioned a bookplate featuring the phrase *MEIN IST DAS LAND* (The land is mine). To what land was Buber referring on these occasions? Did his words point to the territory of Israel, as dominant accounts of twentieth-century Israeli art would have it? Or did he use '*adamah yehudit*' metaphorically, as the image of a garden city on the bookplate, which lacks any of the Holy Land's attributes, suggests? In this short reflection on the meaning and historical import of Buber's concept of '*adamah yehudit*', I put forward an answer to these questions.

Conventional art histories often claim that Buber's 1901 speech founded the dominant paradigm for thinking about Israeli art, according to which modern Jewish art can only be made on Jewish land, that is, in Israel. Although the first mention of the speech in canonical work of art history only appears in 1980 in Benjamin Tammuz's *The Story of Art in Israel*, this idea had been taken up as a key principle for understanding modern Jewish art in Israel by at least 1939, when Elias Newman published the first historiographical book on Israeli art, "Art in Palestine." Obviously influenced by territorial Zionism, which took root among the Yishuv in this period, Newman's text emphasizes the centrality of the territory of Israel for the development of modern Jewish art. However, Buber at no time belonged to this strand of Zionism. For Buber, Zionism was a cultural movement to be led by Jews all over the world, for the sake of all humankind. Although Buber's statements were used to establish the territorial understanding of Israeli art, this was not Buber's intention.



Ephraim Moshe Lilien. Martin Buber Bookplate, 1901.
The National Library of Israel, Ms. Var. 350 A/7a

My reading of Buber's concept of "Jewish land" stems from his well-known book *On Zion: The History of an Idea* (1944), in which he argues that there is a primordial universal connection between '*adam* (man) and '*adamah* (earth) with which God created and nourished him: and when man's '*adamah* degenerates as a result of external circumstances, man himself declines with it. Although Buber uses this universal bond to explain the particular link between Jews and the Land of Israel, he does not see the territory as inherently holy. It is rather God's choice of the Jewish people that is holy. This choice, though, must be continually reestablished. This will occur in the modern era, Buber explains, only when Jews fulfill their universal designation as role models for a new kind of human community.¹ In fact, *On Zion* articulates Buber's fundamentally allegorical conception of '*adamah*', according to which it also stands for human social relations. Given that Buber's early texts anticipate his later thought, I argue that his reference to "Jewish land" in 1901 did not exclusively point to Israeli territory and should be understood more broadly.

For Buber, renaissance is a manifestation of a developed kind of modern nationalism, which has shifted its focus from territory to culture.

This reading is bolstered by Buber's essay "Jewish Renaissance," which was published eleven months before the Basel address. It relates the concept of cultural rebirth—renaissance—to cultural Zionism. For Buber, renaissance is a manifestation of a developed kind of modern nationalism, which has shifted its focus from territory to culture. When Buber talks about culture, he refers to land rather than territory, hinting at its metaphorical linkage to cultural rebirth. Consider this passage: "Everywhere sleeping worlds emerge like *green islands from the depth of the sea*—within the soul of the *individual human being*, within the structure of societal reciprocity, in the artistic birth of works and values, in the external spheres of the cosmos, in the ultimate mysteries of all being—all things are renewed. Bathed in young light, *the old earth* sees with new eyes, and the rebirth celebrates its quiet sun festivals."ⁱⁱ

Here, renaissance is understood as an internal and external rebirth of both the individual soul and cosmos, as manifested in cultural creation. Buber's essay does not mention the Land of Israel at all, even in relation to the Jewish cultural renaissance. In fact, it is analogous with the bookplate, in which a Jewish island has risen from the sea—a metaphor for the Jewish community's cultural rebirth. The metaphorical land presented in the bookplate's image and text stands for the conditions under which Jews' creative forces can unfold freely, wherever they reside.

This suggests that Buber's 1901 address was part of a wider polemical debate over the essence of Zionism. Unlike political Zionism, Buber and his Democratic Faction party saw Zionism as Jewish cultural national movement. From this perspective, Zionism's goal was to rebuild Jewish culture, not the Jewish state. Hence, when Buber explained that true Jewish art can be created only on Jewish land, he was actually allegorizing the concept of land. For Buber in this speech, *'adamah yehudit* is a well-defined and proud Jewish human community allowing Jewish cultural rebirth wherever that community is situated. Buber's description of new Jewish literature, created throughout the Jewish Diaspora, best conveys the metaphor: "Nothing has brought to my attention as overwhelmingly as Jewish literature that a new land has been born, that we have received *new strength and a new voice*."ⁱⁱⁱ Clearly, the "new land" mentioned here does not refer exclusively to Israeli territory. Rather, it is understood as an empowered new Jewish community, as articulated in Jewish literature.

In this short intervention, I have argued that Buber's "Jewish land" is best understood metaphorically. It stands for a new Jewish way of life, a cultural community in which the conditions are in place for Jewish creativity to prosper. For Buber, Jewish art can only flourish on Jewish land thus conceived, of which the Land of Israel is but one of many manifestations.

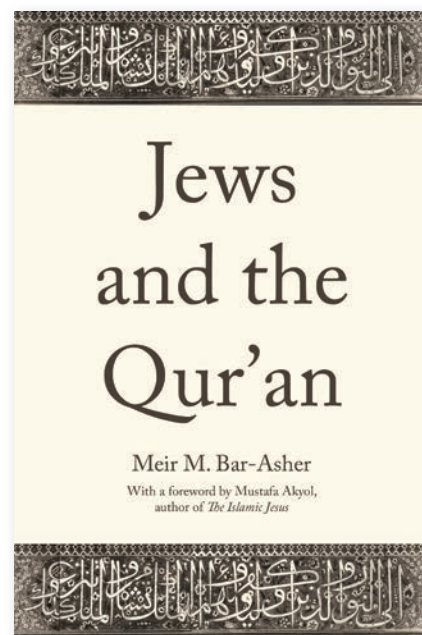
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i Shalom Ratzabi, *Anarchy in "Zion": Between Martin Buber and A. D. Gordon* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2011) [in Hebrew].

ii Martin Buber, "Jewish Renaissance," in *The First Buber; Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber*, ed. Gilya Gerda Schmidt (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 32. Author's italics.

iii Martin Buber, "Adress on Jewish Art," in Schmidt, *The First Buber*, 59. Author's italics.

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A compelling book that casts the Qur'anic encounter with Jews in an entirely new light

A World with Worlds in *Evreiskii Mir*, a 1918 Russian Jewish Journal

Dalia Wolfson

“A velt mit veltlekh,” goes the Yiddish expression of wonderment at a point where different spheres meet: “a world with little worlds.” Just such a compact, teeming world might be found in the logo of *Evreiskii Mir*, a fleeting publishing project that put out an ambitious Russian Jewish literary journal of the same name in Moscow in 1918. Edited by the writer Andrei Sobol and the theater critic Efraim Loiter, *Evreiskii Mir* (literally, Jewish world) was an exceptional anthology of translated Yiddish-to-Russian and original Russian literature. A collection of pieces by Jews and non-Jews, *Evreiskii Mir* counted among its contributors Yiddish writers Dovid Eynhorn and Dovid Ignatov, as well as major voices of Russian modernism such as Valery Bryusov, Vladislav Khodasevich, and Jurgis Baltrusaitis. While Hebraists and Yiddishists staked out claims for the language of Jewish cultural nationalism, Sobol initiated one of the few known projects of the time that actively solicited original works in Russian, as well as translations of Yiddish literature into Russian.ⁱ

The *Evreiskii Mir* logo does not appear on the pages of the periodical *Evreiskii Mir* itself. Yet it surfaces in Sobol’s frantic correspondence in archives in both Moscow and New York, under the bilingual Yiddish-Russian letterhead of “Moskver Farlag–Moskovskoe Knigoizdatel’stvo” (Moscow Publishing) or, sometimes, under the Russian-only letterhead naming it “*Evreiskii Mir*.” It winks back in letters sent in Sobol’s quick hand to figures ranging from prominent dance critic Akim Volinsky to Russian poet Nikolai Ashukin to Yiddish literary critic S. Charney.ⁱⁱ The logo’s persistent presence on *Evreiskii Mir*’s stationery invites examination.

In the logo’s middle spins a globe, balanced on the scaly, undulating back of the Leviathan, a primordial beast. Overhanging this lively assemblage is a ritual set from



Detail of stationery logo from a letter Andrei Sobol wrote to S. Niger (YIVO, RG 360 Box 49 Folder 1228). YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

The *Evreiskii Mir* logo does not appear on the pages of the periodical *Evreiskii Mir* itself.

the holiday of Sukkot: a palm frond, myrtle leaves, willow branches, and an etrog.

The iconography of the logo reveals the folk models and political dreams enlisted in the creation of a new Jewish culture. Both the Leviathan and the Four Species point towards messianic strivings, yet their usage in the logo is untraditional. The Leviathan was a familiar motif seen carved into the wooden ceilings of eastern European synagogues.ⁱⁱⁱ As Boris Khaimovich explains, at times the Leviathan wrestled with the land beast Behemoth, locked in a match that foretold the end of days; other times, it was curled, head meeting tail, encircling the holy city of Jerusalem (and the greater cosmos, by extension) in a stabilizing hold.^{iv} In these synagogal ceilings the Leviathan served an eschatological or cosmogonic purpose; in the *Evreiskii Mir* logo its placement marks a shift in the shape, time, and location of the messianic age. The vision that the Leviathan supports is set not in the Land of Israel but between foci of the modern Jewish experience. With no clear capital, this new territory appears to have two poles: the shtetl of the Pale, with its low, wooden houses to the right, and Moscow, studded with proud onion domes, to the left. The Four Species, coupled with the Leviathan, refer to the banquet of the messianic age,

when it is said the righteous will eat in a sukkah made of the Leviathan's hide. Here, they, too, are suspended not above the religious locus of the ingathering of exiles—the Holy Land—but over a space where a Jewish minority culture might thrive in a diasporic, European context.

The second issue of *Evreiskii Mir* was never published: Sobol was forced to leave Moscow, the venture dissolved and the local cultural milieu for its reception did not last too long. The final pages of the first and only issue, however, preserve an intriguing preview. Included is the the upcoming issue's table of contents, as well as titles of separate manuscripts: some tracts by an L. E. Motilev had already been printed, and a translation of Abram Efros's "The Cry of Jeremiah" was yet to come. In part, then, a focus on the little letterhead logo draws attention not only to the singular *velt* of the journal, but also to the larger projects that might have been. Alan Mintz wrote, "In a moment of extraordinary cultural discontinuity and breakage, it is exactly the provisional and impermanent qualities of the periodical—its fluid, combinable and uncanonical makeup—that put it in a position to broker the piecing together of new cultural formations."^v While

the texts of such little journals as *Evreiskii Mir* present a dizzying miscellany, the visual elements on the margins, down to the stationery letterhead, may guide us towards the editors' grander designs.

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i On *Evreiskii Mir* and other projects in Russian-language publishing (such as the journal *Safrut*), see Kenneth Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 66–69.

ii *Evreiskii Mir's* history, including Sobol's extensive correspondence, is discussed in Vladimir Khazan, *A Double Burden, A Double Cross* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2017), 55–67.

iii One evocative example of how such ceilings were perceived by modernist Jewish artists turning to folklore appears in El Lissitzky, "On the Mogilev Shul: Recollections," trans. Madeleine Cohen, *In geveb* (July 2019).

iv Boris Khaimovich, "Leviathan: The Metamorphosis of a Medieval Image," *Images 1* (2020): 1–20.

v Alan Mintz, "Introduction: The Many Rather Than the One: On the Critical Study of Jewish Periodicals," *Prooftexts* 15, no. 1 (1995): 1–4.

The Women Artists of Farlag Achrid: A Jewish Modernist Masterpiece Revealed

David Mazower

Two years ago, I was browsing donated books at my workplace, the Yiddish Book Center, when a bright illustration caught my eye (fig. 1). Against a dark sky lit up by lightning flashes, two androgynous yellow-blue figures writhe like puppets beside a pool. I turned the book over and saw a Yiddish title page—*Himlen in opgrunt* [Heavens in the Abyss], by Chaim Krol, with illustrations by Esther Karp. The book was incomplete, extremely fragile, and utterly intriguing. That chance encounter soon turned into an obsessive quest. It led me to libraries and archives on three continents, a scholarly conference in Poland, and a growing conviction that the book I had chanced upon was a crucial missing piece of a wider story: the forgotten women artists of Jewish, and especially Yiddish, modernism.

The first clue to the significance of the book I had found was the name of its publisher, Farlag Achrid. WorldCat



Fig. 1. Illustration by Esther Karp for Chaim Krol's *Himlen in opgrunt* (Lodz, Farlag Achrid, 1921).

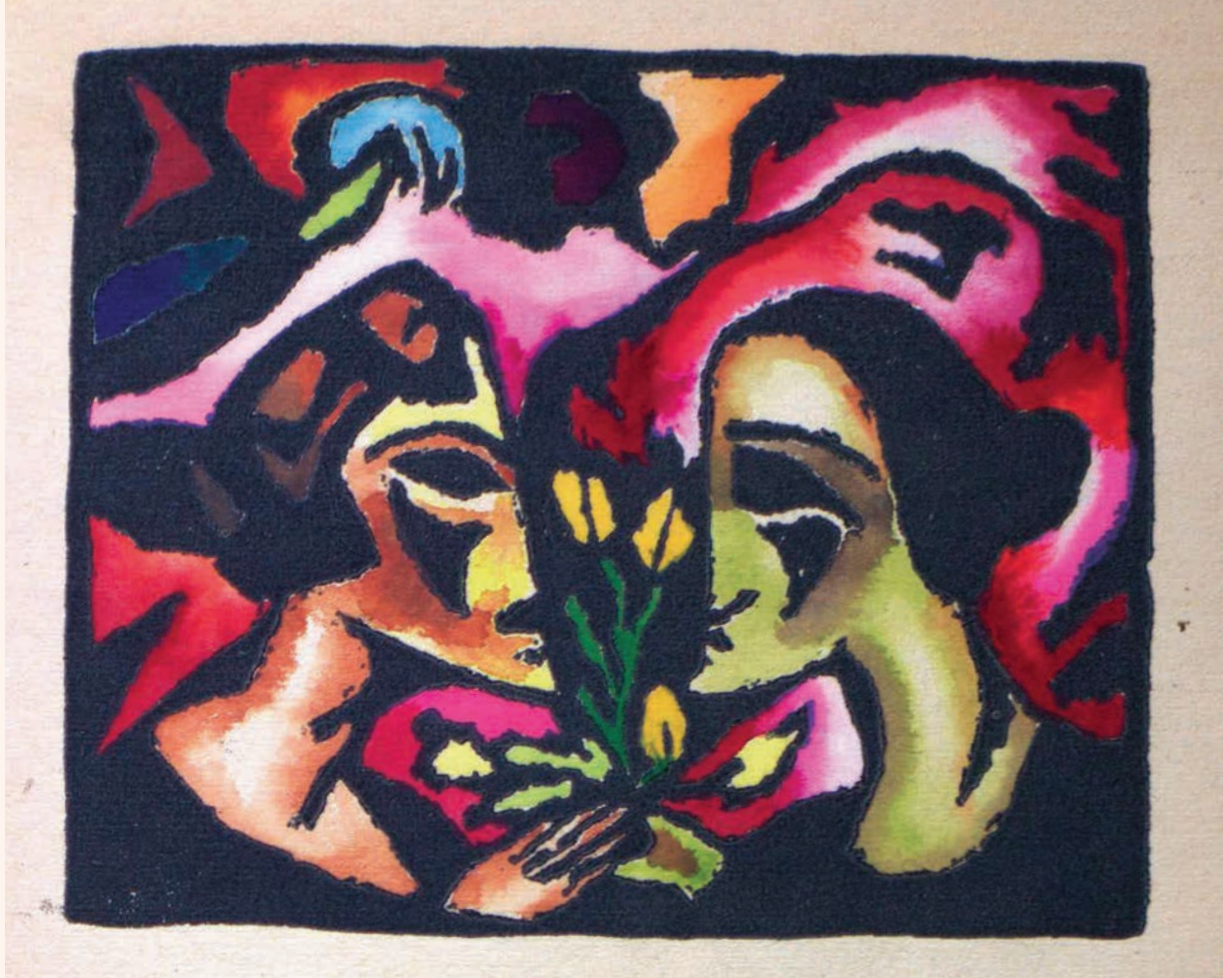


Fig. 2. Illustration by Dina Matus for Rachel Lipstein's *Zwischen dem Abend und Morgenrot* (Lodz, Farlag Achrid, 1921).

showed just three titles under that imprint, all published in Lodz in 1921. Each slim volume of poetry—two in Yiddish, one in German—was illustrated by a woman artist: Ida Broyner, Ester Karp, or Dina Matus. A total of fifteen surviving copies were listed, and by the time the pandemic struck, I had seen eight of them, starting with the copies at Wellesley College and the Library of Congress. What I found stunned me. Every book was a unique work of art, printed, then hand-finished with its own color palette. A woman's neck was pale in one copy, bruised with purple blotches in another. Water was blue, then iridescent. A strange bird, like an overweight pterodactyl, assumed multiple psychedelic guises. The luminous color illustrations were powerful, haunting, and hypnotic. It seemed clear to me that I was looking at a blazing masterpiece of Polish Jewish expressionism, but references to the books were almost nonexistent.

Broyner, Karp, and Matus came together to create these extraordinary works on the fringes of *Yung Yidish*, a loose circle of avant-garde artists, writers, and theater folk in post-World War I Lodz. At the time, and ever since, the most celebrated figures in the group were Yankel Adler, Moyshe Broderzon, and Marek Szwarc. Women were present in *Yung Yidish* but men predominated, especially

Every book was a unique work of art, printed, then hand-finished with its own color palette.

as contributors to its journals. In sharp contrast, the Farlag Achrid project has a clear feminist orientation and energy. Its organizer and inspirational force appears to have been Rachel Lipstein, a poet whose apocalyptic German text *Zwischen dem Abend und Morgenrot* [Between Dusk and Dawn] was illustrated by Dina Matus, a close friend. While Broyner stayed in Lodz, and Karp moved to Paris, Lipstein and Matus were at the center of a coterie of radical Polish Jewish women who moved on from Lodz to Berlin and then, in some cases, to Moscow.

Other Jewish women artists created outstanding avant-garde books, of course, including Sarah Shor, Sonia Delaunay, and Teresa Zharnover. But the Farlag Achrid titles—a trio of coordinated, complementary illustrated books showcasing the work of overlooked women artists as printmakers, calligraphers, and painters—stand alone. Its very name—Achrid—can be seen as a one-word manifesto. Lipstein was fluent in Hebrew, among many other languages, and the choice of this biblical word, carrying a promise of earth-shaking upheaval, is surely at once political, artistic, and personal.

Two years ago, when I began researching these books, none of the librarians I met had ever opened them.

At the time they created these works, Broynier, Karp, Matus, and Lipstein were still in their twenties and must have felt the world was theirs for the shaking. All found success, but fate has not been kind to their memory. It is little exaggeration to say that all three artists were crushed by the Holocaust, although only Dina Matus perished in it. Karp, known in France as Esther Carp, succumbed to devastating bouts of mental illness. Broynier's health was also profoundly damaged. In addition, the war swept away almost everything Broynier and Matus had ever created. In a profound sense, the Farlag Achrid trilogy is their collective *matseyve* (monument).

Two years ago, when I began researching these books, none of the librarians I met had ever opened them. Without exception, all were amazed at what they were seeing. Now, a century after the books' publication, word is finally getting out. In France and Poland, there are plans for exhibitions, facsimile editions, and more. Rebalancing the Jewish modernist canon to give women artists their due is a work in progress. It's one in which Broynier, Karp, and Matus deserve to play an honored part.



Fig. 3. Illustration by Ida Broynier for Dovid Zitman's *Af vaytkeytn krayznde fal ikh* (Lodz, Farlag Achrid, 1921).

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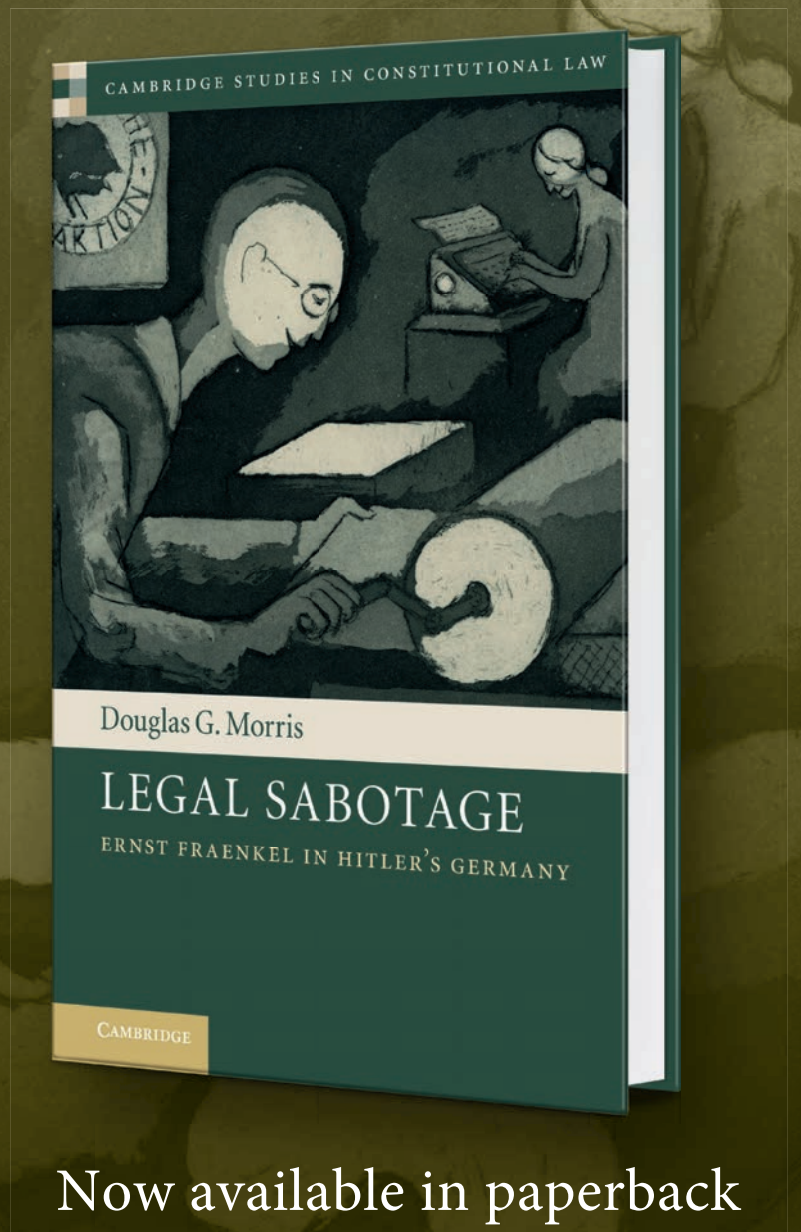
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Being within: Ernő Goldfinger, Forties Architecture, and Jewish London

Deborah Lewittes

From 1941–42, the Hungarian Jewish architect Ernő Goldfinger published a series of essays in *The Architectural Review* that set him apart from his contemporaries. That he had been rethinking architecture and urbanism is unsurprising. Trained in Paris and a member of various international avant-garde collaboratives, Goldfinger was well connected in the art world as a British correspondent for *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, painter, collector, and designer of furniture, exhibitions, toys, and interiors. Goldfinger was also a significant presence in the large community of émigré and exiled Jewish intellectuals that settled in London in the thirties. England offered a safe haven, but there was still a lurking antisemitism. In 1935, *The Architects' Journal* published a letter from an irate reader, warning against “Jewish-Communist doctrine” and referring to a Jewish tendency to “antagonize” others. The Royal Institute of British Architects required refugee architects to partner with those already registered to work, and a fear of being associated with foreigners was common. Goldfinger’s colleague Berthold Lubetkin hid his Jewish identity—for which Goldfinger labeled him a “scoundrel”—and, as many scholars have documented, Jews in midcentury England were told to keep quiet and not attract attention. Jewish-England was not English-England. Goldfinger was acutely aware of this cultural climate; his biographer Nigel Warburton reveals that Goldfinger and his wife had considered changing their surname.

Yet Goldfinger didn’t remain quiet. The 1940s essays, “The Sensation of Space,” “Urbanism and Social Order,” and “Elements of Enclosed Space,” reveal Goldfinger’s strong departures from the prevailing architectural ideals of the day through his theory of “spatial emotion”: a user’s subconscious response to architecture. Goldfinger defines architectural enclosure broadly, including buildings, streets, urban spaces, and even human interaction. He emphasizes the importance of technology, elevates the

Goldfinger thus objectifies the conscious process of artmaking, the completed work inseparable from the artist’s psychology.

role of the artist, and highlights individual experience. The only intractable characteristic is that one cannot look at enclosed space through a photograph, drawing, or model; spatial sensation incorporates vision, sound, smell, touch, and memory. Goldfinger calls this combination the “being within.”

“Being within” counters both continental rationalism and the New Empiricism’s pared-down forms, the two main poles that had fallen into place by this time. While an attention to technology and art was not unusual—the machine aesthetic had led much of modernism’s search for new inspiration, and Le Corbusier, for example, had also discerned art in architecture—Goldfinger elicits from these related concerns a focus on the moment in which a work is experienced. Spatial emotion “is geographically and historically fixed,” rejecting the time-and-place-lessness of the international style’s universalism. Goldfinger’s theories reject the functionalist language of rationalist modernists, and while his conceptions of architecture and city planning are profoundly twentieth-century in spirit, even skyscrapers become creations to fulfill basic emotional needs.

For others, technocentrism had run its course, at odds with a war-torn world searching for humanity. The policy-making editors of *The Architectural Review*, including the important German émigré art historian Nikolaus Pevsner, suggested a return to traditional forms, linked to picturesque principles, in contrast to the abstractions of the international style they had earlier championed. For Pevsner, picturesque theories aided what would become his lifelong quest to define the Englishness of English art.



Ernő Goldfinger. Drawing of architectural enclosure, 1942. Credit: RIBA Collections. Used with permission from RIBApix.

Townscape planners spoke in painterly terms of two-dimensionality (color, building outlines, roof triangles, etc.) and also discussed individual users—that is, pedestrians encountering visual surprises. Yet Goldfinger distances himself from these philosophies; planning in terms of the picture plane neglected the volumetric aspects of “being within.” He discusses high-rise structures as if an occupant were inside looking out, not a passerby looking up, his drawings often emphasizing a view through a window to the world outside.

Goldfinger takes art, technology, and the user and unites them newly, his “being within” implying another possibility. He writes, “If persons creating a work of art experience an artistic emotion while doing so ... those undergoing its effects [are] enabled to experience an emotion of a similar nature.” Goldfinger thus objectifies the conscious process of artmaking, the completed work inseparable from the artist’s psychology. Goldfinger then grants the viewer the vital task of contemplating art. The existentialist-sounding language is intentional, as much

scholarship has addressed the importance of existentialism in postwar British culture. In planning, an existentialist attitude helped the fifties generation undo orthodox modernism and in the arts, the tactility of art brut and abstract expressionism’s gestures came to be viewed as clear evidence of artists’ choices and the materiality of art. Yet Goldfinger is writing in 1941–42, before Jackson Pollock placed his canvases on the floor and before Jean-Paul Sartre accepted the term “existentialism.” Goldfinger has brought focused attention to the role of human expression in architecture, surely motivated by witnessing a world at war and sensing that prewar ideals and universal experiences had become irrelevant. His attitude towards the individual user separates him from the collectivity behind modernism, the welfare state’s inclusivity, and nationalistic looks to the past.

And yet, in spite of the focus on “being within,” the sense of “being without” poignantly defined Goldfinger when he wrote the essays. His biographer notes that “as a Jew with communist connections,” Goldfinger occupied a tenuous

place in London society; his application for citizenship was delayed. The Goldfingers even had non-Jewish-sounding names ready for their children. This consummate insider to the art world was unwittingly an outsider. Perhaps Goldfinger's writings on human activity and emotional responses to architecture were attempts to feel rooted in an upended world of war, living in a society in which being Jewish or foreign made things complicated.

Instead of remaining unnoticed, Goldfinger quite vocally helped shape modern London. In 1945 he was commissioned to write a book promoting the government's proposal for postwar reconstruction. His theories inflect the book, making a somewhat paternalistic project appear forward-looking, urging residents to "think hard ... [s]tudy the Plan intelligently, using their heads as well as their

hearts." The future city, it seems, requires "being within." By the fifties, the international architectural vanguard had adopted much of Goldfinger's language, but his insider status was always tempered by knowing his Jewish identity kept him separate from English culture.

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Josef Nassy's *Tittmoning* (1944): Blackness, Jewishness, and Holocaust Art

Sarah Phillips Casteel

What are the boundaries of Holocaust art? What has been the reception history of artworks that exceed those boundaries and defy normative conceptions of Jewishness? These questions are illuminated by little-known Caribbean artist Josef Nassy's *Tittmoning*, which was created in a Nazi internment camp in 1944. In particular, Nassy's oil painting suggests how, in our current decolonizing moment, we might rethink definitions of Holocaust and Jewish art to better reflect the porousness of histories and identities.

Born in Paramaribo, capital of the Dutch Caribbean colony of Suriname, in 1904, Nassy was descended from both enslaved Africans and Jewish settlers. His Sephardic surname and intricate genealogy typify the Eurafrican Jewish population that emerged in colonial Suriname as a result of Jewish plantation ownership, slaveholding, and intensifying contact between Jews and African-descended populations amid sharply unequal relations of power.¹ After spending his early years in Paramaribo, Nassy moved to New York City as a teenager and then settled in Belgium in the 1930s. In 1942, he was arrested as an enemy alien and imprisoned in civilian POW camps in Belgium and Germany for the duration of the war. During his internment,



Josef Nassy. Tittmoning, 1944. Oil painting on wood. 14.21 x 12.48 in. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection, Gift of the Severin Wunderman Family. Photo by Sarah Phillips Casteel

The men are likely African American jazz musicians Johnny Mitchell and Henry Crowder, both of whom Nassy sketched repeatedly but did not identify by name.

he created over two hundred drawings and paintings thanks to materials supplied by the International YMCA. In the 1980s, Nassy's wartime corpus was acquired by a Belgian Jewish Holocaust survivor who subsequently donated the collection to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.ⁱⁱ

Tittmoning is a poignant double portrait of two Black prisoners interned in Ilag VII-Z in the village of Tittmoning, Bavaria. The men are likely African American jazz musicians Johnny Mitchell and Henry Crowder, both of whom Nassy sketched repeatedly but did not identify by name. *Tittmoning* thus attests not only to Nassy's African diaspora presence in the camp but also to that of a number of other Black internees. Nassy presents Mitchell and Crowder in the austere, claustrophobic atmosphere of the medieval castle that served as their barracks. In contrast to the stiff, motionless posture characteristic of individual portraits, the men's more casual poses convey their enforced intimacy and shared identity as prisoners. Mitchell is seated on the top bunk of a bed playing the guitar while Crowder lies on the bunk below reading, his head propped up in his left hand. Intent on their activities, the prisoners' knitted brows and heavily shadowed faces convey psychological challenges of internment that are not captured by textual and photographic records of Ilag VII, including a wartime photograph of a smiling Mitchell in the USHMM collection.

As in another group portrait of Black internees that Nassy painted the previous year, in *Tittmoning* Mitchell's guitar occupies the foreground of the image and is positioned slightly off-center. While Mitchell's body and face turn away from the viewer, his guitar is seen head on. Its luminous orange tones draw the viewer's eye while the bright white pages of Crowder's book below provide a secondary focal point. The guitar and the book protrude out of the gloom that envelops Mitchell and Crowder, signalling the spiritual sustenance that music and reading offered in a context of profound uncertainty and disempowerment. Also similar to the earlier painting, an image is affixed to the wall behind the two prisoners. Possibly a pinup or artwork created by one of the prisoners, the image's introduction into otherwise stark surroundings suggests how internees sought to reshape and thereby regain some control over their material environment.

The Nassy Collection depicts internees of various backgrounds, offering a valuable visual account of the daily lives of civilian POWs. To my knowledge, the collection is also the most extensive visual document of Black prisoners in the Nazi camp system—many of whom, paradoxically, had emigrated to Europe seeking greater freedom. Other depictions of Black internees in Ilag VII by white prisoner-artists adopted the visual language of cartoons and caricature. As a skilled painter of African and Jewish heritage, Nassy arguably was uniquely positioned to convey the Black internees' complex psychologies and predicament. The postwar reception history of the Nassy Collection reveals, however, the difficulty of assimilating this vision to dominant institutional, scholarly, and memorial narratives. Nassy's creolized Caribbean Jewishness, imprisonment in internment rather than concentration camps, and artistic focus on Black prisoners posed challenges for his works' reception that have contributed to their invisibility. Yet his artworks are not simply passive objects awaiting analysis through existing interpretive frameworks. Rather, they are also countermemorial agents that actively call on us to reshape such frameworks and broaden our understanding of both Jewishness and wartime experience.

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i See Aviva Ben-Ur, *Jewish Autonomy in a Slave Society: Suriname in the Atlantic World, 1651–1825* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

ii For a fuller account of Nassy's biography and artistic corpus, see Sarah Phillips Casteel, "Making History Visible: Dutch Caribbean Artist Josef Nassy's Visual Diary of Nazi Internment," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 64 (March 2021): 28–46, and Casteel, "Outside the Frame: The Josef Nassy Collection and the Boundaries of Holocaust Art," *Jewish Social Studies* (forthcoming). See also Monica Rothschild-Boros, *In the Shadow of the Tower: The Works of Josef Nassy, 1942–1945* (Irvine, CA: Severin Wunderman Museum, 1989).

The Protective Illusion: Thoughts on Jewish Visual Assimilation by a “Jewish” American Artist

Archie Rand

Does the outer space into which we dissolve taste
of us at all?

-Rainer Maria Rilke

Mid-century America: Marc Chagall’s prints were popular, Borscht Belt comedians were fixtures on TV shows, and architect Percival Goodman’s invitations for artists’ synagogue work coincided with Harry Belafonte joyously singing “Hava Nagillah.” Jewishness was being seamlessly mixed into the American soup.

Meanwhile, Jewish abstract expressionists, and there were many, were invited by the two major critics of the time—Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, also Jewish—to dissolve their Jewishness. Cautiously aware of Jewish self-exile, some artists fielded some subcutaneous push-back. Morris Louis had paintings named for the Hebrew alphabet (albeit posthumously) and Jules Olitski, late in life, titled paintings with biblical references.

As a young painter I looked mostly towards Jackson Pollock and as an adolescent was fortunate, through art critic Clement Greenberg, to have met his contemporary Barnett Newman, a hero of mine. Although I never anticipated being regarded as a “Jewish” artist I didn’t shy away from it. A substantial chunk of the gallery scene, dealers and artists, was peopled with Jews and to the naked eye nothing seemed unusual about being a Jew in visual manufacture and commerce. I had shown a well-reviewed series of ten paintings in 1972 that were titled with the names of the ten rabbis of the Yom Kippur martyrology, which was unremarked in critical analysis. A commission in 1974 to mural the interior of Congregation B’nai Yosef, an Orthodox Brooklyn synagogue, opened the vastness of untapped potential that lay in Jewish literature, which could be used as armature for my studio work. With the exception of encouragement from older Jewish painters,

notably Philip Guston and Jules Olitski, most of my peers reacted with open hostility to my working with “religious” subjects. I questioned why. These are some of my thoughts about the atmosphere that artists confront if they are working from any positioning derived from their experience as American Jews.

Barnett Newman named a number of paintings with biblically derived titles. In Newman’s *The Stations of the Cross* (the concept being a seventeenth-century Catholic invention that Protestants don’t employ), the abstracted narrative proposes assimilative conciliation although it at the same time gingerly conceals the subversive. The first two paintings of that series, from 1958, were initially called *Adam* and *Eve*. No matter how abstract his work could be, Newman always remembered that Jesus was Jewish. Sometimes Newman spoke to me in Yiddish, a great memory. I’ve heard the joke that art history is Jews explaining Catholicism to Protestants.

Where Newman’s paintings contained an unflinchingly located witness, Mark Rothko’s conceptions were amorphous and bloodless, beckoning an offstage theremin’s woo-ee-ooo. Desperate to goyishize divinity, Rothko lacked the cultural chops to get the specifics right. It’s a country club, Mark. They can smell your concealed passion, your smarmy intelligence. While Philip Guston looked to the torment of a camouflaged Babel riding with the Cossacks and succeeded eventually in being both Jewish and an artist, Rothko actually thought he was smart enough to pull off being perceived as ecumenical. I met Rothko. He was miserably disdainful of the second generation staining colorfield painters (read Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis—née Bernstein) whom he mistakenly believed co-opted his style and got credit for his stuff. Frankenthaler took inspiration from Jackson Pollock. Rothko, like Adolph Gottlieb, tried to develop a brand, a symbol, that would



Archie Rand. 394: To Eat the Thanksgiving Sacrifice on the Day It Was Sacrificed (Leviticus 22:30), 2001-2006. From the series *The 613*. Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 in. Photo by Samantha Baskind

wow the viewer, hoping that his successful contribution to this utopian visual Esperanto would universally translate and finally give Jews some rest if not acceptance—or even applause. But Rothko's pontifications, yes hubris, belie the authenticity of his product.

However, Rothko's last black, austere, paintings, produced in fatigue, are uniquely magnificent. Rothko's mid-canvas horizon line stretches to the ends of the support (which Guston would employ in the mid-1970s), making "land"—something Jews didn't historically own. Chagall doesn't have "land"—everyone floats—and the nineteenth-century Sephardic artist Camille Pissarro atomizes the world into a spray in his Impressionist paintings. That unatmospheric place in Rothko's last black paintings could be inhabited but Rothko had no ability to live nontheoretically. Shocked, the somber *luftmensch* had unintentionally succeeded in painting an idol—a believable space. Rothko's faith had been long discarded and strategically replaced by intellect, so he fell prey to this common tactical blunder. After working with Max Weber he had always made the smart move siding with *seykhel* over *kishkes*. Now Rothko found that he had painted a Jewish space, bereft of consolation, and had blocked himself from entrance to his own work. In the frenzy of his chronic disappointment he, unawares, had made a Golem, staring back, and he was afraid. Horrified,

Having a visual history verifies a culture as a respectable group.

he had fabricated bleakly infinite polar midnights and they were real. They, finally, were Jewish paintings. Like Walter Benjamin, paralysis locked in the hills of Spain, Rothko died by suicide. My friend Philip Guston was later to warn, sternly, "To paint is a possessing rather than a picturing."

Having a visual history verifies a culture as a respectable group. Museums dutifully mount heraldic banners of these cultures' recognizable, national sophistication. Paintings and sculptures validate that there were individual, national distinguishing values and these displayed images are tangible acknowledgments belonging to and representing these Western fiefdoms: Italian, Spanish, Dutch, German, American, Romantic, Renaissance, Constructivist, Impressionist, etc. If you have no visual history then you have to make one in order to get a seat at the table. And that's what Jews need(ed) to do. Otherwise you don't exist.

Over time, marginalized groups can sense the plates shift underfoot, leaving fresh opportunity for the entrance of their unenlisted voices. This rush to claim curatorial viability is in full swing as the disenfranchised address the challenge for a reconstitution of a visual history, providing a foundation for alternate aesthetics and acceptances.

But for many reasons, Jewish self-portrayal in artistic culture remains self-contained and hermetically coherent to itself without invitation or reflex to meld into the host cultures' visual component. That's because if Jewishly inflected art is acknowledged then Jews must be considered a "nation," a "people," separating their communal and behavioral identities from the sole connotation of their being religionists. Jewish art and its reception is a topic on which I could write pages but it would not be acceptable to a vast majority of people. As recently as April 2021, the *New York Times*, supported by Wikipedia, outrageously referred to Isaac Bashevis Singer as a "Polish" writer, only incidentally, and later referred to his being a Jew. As Jewish artists, our insistence on self-identification will gain us no advantages. It is a moral choice about whose outcomes I harbor little optimism.

ARCHIE RAND, *Presidential Professor of Art at Brooklyn College*, is the subject of more than 300 solo and group shows. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, among many others.

“The Liberation of G-d,” Helène Aylon’s Self Portrait, 2005ⁱ

David Sperber

Feminist thinkers have often challenged the transcendent male image of Providence in favor of a more immanently afeminine notion that embraces the world and human experience, rejecting any identification of vulnerability with weakness. The resultant alternative notion of divinity opens the way to a different, perhaps more harmonious relationship between humankind and the world. *Self Portrait: The Unmentionable* (2005; fig. 1) mounts Helène Aylon’s (1931–2020) struggle to write feminine divinity back into Judaism by superimposing the name of God onto her forehead. Observant Jews do not write or pronounce this name for God, because it is considered too sacred to be used in common parlance. The photograph was made by projecting Aylon’s *Digital Liberation of G-d* (2004) onto her face, therefore showing the holiest name of God (the letters yod-hei-vav-hei—YHVH) written in Hebrew across her forehead.ⁱⁱ

The *Digital Liberation of G-d* is a video version of Aylon’s groundbreaking installation *The Liberation of G-d* (1990–96; fig. 2), which was the first and central work in the series *The G-d Project: Nine Houses without Women*. This twenty-year project proposed a scathing feminist critique of Jewish texts and rituals. In the installation *The Liberation of G-d*, Aylon covered pages of the Hebrew Bible with transparent parchment and highlighted the verses that she found offensive to a feminist reader with a marker, questioning verses that express sexist and misogynistic views. She asks, “Do they belong in a holy book? Did God say it to Moses, or is it a patriarchal projection?” In this pioneering work, the artist purged the text of its sexist and misogynistic verses, as if to liberate God from the effects of patriarchy.

Self Portrait: The Unmentionable connects the demand to restore the female side of God in the Jewish world, on the one hand, with the demand to bring back women themselves into Jewish history and to reclaim women’s



Fig. 1. Helène Aylon. *Self Portrait: The Unmentionable*, 2005. Color photograph.

spirituality, on the other. In this way, the work continues in a similar vein of another prominent work of the artist, *My Notebooks* (2011 [1998]; fig. 3), which further deals with the challenge mounted in *The Liberation of G-d*. An installation comprising fifty-four empty notebooks accompanied by text written in chalk on a blackboard, *My Notebooks* deals with exclusion and invisibility. In the chalk text, Aylon imagines a lost Torah, one that was never written or handed down to the Jewish people from their foremothers. She dedicated the installation to the women excluded from Jewish history: “To Mrs. Rashi and to Mrs. Maimonides, for surely they had something to say.”

In her important book *After Christianity*, the feminist theologian Daphne Hampson pointed out that the male God represents what is considered male perfection (power, singularity, etc.), and therefore monotheistic religions are a “feminist nightmare.”ⁱⁱⁱ However, unlike Hampson—who called for women to leave the church and establish a post-Christian religion—Aylon’s intention is to create change from within her Jewish world.

Whereas most American Jewish feminist artists in the past did not foreground their Jewishness but emphasized their gender identification in a collective movement, Aylon’s engagement with a critical stance related to her Jewish identity since the 1990s constitutes a groundbreaking, radically social avant-garde, and sets itself a goal to effect changes in the Jewish world.

Aylon died in New York of COVID-19 on April 6, 2020. During her final year of life, I had the pleasure and honor of being with her for many hours and even whole days in which I interviewed her and studied her archives. With her



Fig. 2. Helène Aylon. *The Liberation of G-d*, 1990–96. Fifty-four altered versions of the five books of Moses, velvet panels, velvet-covered pedestals, lamps, magnifying lenses, video monitors. Installation view, The Jewish Museum, New York, 1996.



Fig. 3. Helène Aylon. *My Notebooks*, 2011 [1998]. Fifty-four Israeli school notebooks, masonite panel, velcro, and chalk on blackboard. Installation view, Mishkan LeOmanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod, Israel, 2012.



Fig. 4. David Sperber. *Untitled*, 2019. Color photograph.

permission, I photographed one corner of her home, consisting of her Shabbat candles and a photograph of her and her mother lighting the candles (fig. 4). This corner also included pictures of her family, traditional Jewish ritual objects, and a tzitzit necklace—a ritual object she had invented and used in her performances in the distant past.

In the center she placed her work *My Eternal Light: The Illuminated Pink Dash* (2011), which she compared to the *ner tamid* (eternal flame) in the synagogue. “The *ner tamid*,” Aylon told me, “completes my long-standing critical preoccupation with the exclusion of women from the Jewish world, and the call to bring them back into the discourse.” Aylon stated: “The pink dash is what’s missing. That’s what’s off-balance. How could we have a religion without women in it? We love our Jewish culture, but we have to analyze what from the culture includes women, what doesn’t. And what from the culture was indeed originated by women.”^{iv} And on the right side of this work, she placed on the shelf *Self Portrait: The Unmentionable*.

DAVID SPERBER is an art historian, curator, and art critic. He is head of the Curatorial Studies Program at the Schechter Institutes, Jerusalem and member of the Israeli Rabbinical Studies Program at the Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem. Sperber’s book entitled *Devoted Resistance: Jewish Feminist Art in the US and Israel* was published in 2021 by the Hebrew University Magnes Press.

i This article is based on my short essays published in *The Female Side of God: Visual Representations of a Suppressed Tradition* (Frankfurt: The Jewish Museum Frankfurt, 2020), 60–65, 234–64.
 ii In religious Jewish writing, the word “God” is written with a dash (G-d), to avoid writing the holy name of God.
 iii Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 124.
 iv Judy Batalion, “Helène Aylon in Conversation,” *n. paradoxa* 33 (2014): 64.

Decanonization, Jewishness, and American Art Museums

Jennifer McComas

For the past two centuries, Jews have played prominent roles as artists, art historians and art dealers, art critics and art collectors. The rich array of Jewish art, broadly defined, is prominently displayed in numerous Jewish museums. Yet American art museums, including those identifying as encyclopedic, have long had an uneasy relationship with Jewishness. Over the last quarter century, art museums have directly addressed one particular aspect of Jewish artistic experience—the Nazi-sponsored looting of Jewish art collections. But only three American art museums have established Judaica collections.ⁱ And curators often ignore the potential relevance of many artists' Jewish identities and experiences in the interpretation of their work. For example, one reviewer noted that half of the American artists featured in the Whitney Museum's recent exhibition *Vida Americana: Mexican Artists Remake American Art, 1925–1945* were Jews (many of them Yiddish-speaking immigrants), yet their Jewish identities went “unexamined—and unrecognized—in both the exhibition and its catalogue.”ⁱⁱ This omission might have been less worrying had the catalogue not explicitly examined how American minority artists engaged with Mexican muralism. At a time when marginalized identities and perspectives are rightfully being integrated into the art historical narrative, what should we make of the fact that Jewish artistic experience remains largely “ghettoized” in Jewish museums?

As demonstrated two decades ago by Kalman Bland and Margaret Olin, the marginal place of Jewishness within the standard art historical narrative—and therefore the art museum—is a direct consequence of the discipline's development in tandem with the emergence of nationalist ideologies and racial classifications in nineteenth-century Europe. An artistic canon dependent upon such categories



Wedding Ring in the Form of a Synagogue, ca. 1700. Silver. 1.75 x 1 x 0.56 in. Gift of Frederick Stafford, Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, 59.54. Photo by Kevin Montague

simply could not accommodate the artistic expressions of a diasporic, religiocultural group.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, these scholars' strict literalist understanding of the second commandment—ignoring a wealth of rabbinic commentary—created a remarkably persistent myth that Judaism is antithetical to the visual arts.

In the twentieth century, as artists and critics grappled with antisemitism and assimilation, they hesitated to publicly embrace Jewish identities. In this context, the subtle references to the Holocaust in Mark Rothko's otherwise “universal” abstractions were (and are) easily ignored, but critics reacted with consternation at overt visualizations of Jewishness. The Jewish art critic Hilton Kramer, writing in *Commentary* for a Jewish audience, famously compared Hyman Bloom's 1940 painting *Synagogue*—expressionistically evoking an emotionally charged Kol Nidre service—to the “dismay one feels on finding *gefилte* fish at a fashionable cocktail party.”^{iv}

While Kramer's comment reflects an ambivalence common among postwar American Jews, it points also to modern art's uneasy relationship with “unmodern” religion. The fact that Jewishness is understood in the United States primarily as a religious identity—one, moreover, whose texts, rituals, and ideas are obscure to many—has not enhanced its visibility in the art museum. As I write, the University of Rochester's Memorial Art Gallery is exhibiting *The 613 by Archie Rand*,* a contemporary exploration of the mitzvot, or commandments, of Judaism. But such exhibitions remain comparatively rare. In fact, when I visited the MFA Boston in 2019 to study its Judaica collection, I found that the few works on view—ritual objects crafted at Jerusalem's Bezalel



Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University. On the wall at right, works addressing by the Holocaust by Jewish American artists are incorporated into a display of midcentury American art. Two works by Japanese American artists referencing the war and Japanese internment are also on view. Photo by Shanti Knight

Jews and Jewishness, however, are rarely considered within the context of decanonization, for Jews hold positions of power and privilege in the art world.

midcentury works by Jewish American artists Abraham Rattner, Jennings Tofel, and Jacques Lipchitz. Expressing their anguished reactions to the Holocaust by embedding references to Jewish ritual and mysticism in their compositions, their works subvert entrenched narratives that argue for the “universal” ethos of postwar American art.

Art historians once sought to construct a linear, hierarchical, and nationally homogenous artistic canon now acknowledged as exclusionary and misleading. Yet largely absent from decanonization strategies is a recognition that the exclusion of Jewishness—and the consequent delegitimization of Jewish artistic expression—has shaped the canon we seek to deconstruct. If art museums wish to present a full picture of human creativity, Jewish identity and experience—in all its diasporic heterogeneity—must be honestly and unapologetically visible.

JENNIFER MCCOMAS is curator of *European and American Art at Indiana University’s Eskenazi Museum of Art*, where she established the *World War II-Era Provenance Research Project*. She is also an adjunct faculty member in IU’s *Borns Jewish Studies Program*. For a forthcoming exhibition project, she is currently researching how American artists addressed the *Holocaust between 1940 and 1970*.

* See this issue’s front cover and page 69 for paintings from Archie Rand’s series *The 613*.

i Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Minneapolis Institute of Art; North Carolina Museum of Art.

ii Jeffrey Shandler, “In a Whitney Museum Exhibition, Jewish Artists Go Unrecognized and Unexamined,” *Hyperallergic*, January 6, 2021, <https://hyperallergic.com/612895/in-a-whitney-museum-exhibition-jewish-artists-go-unrecognized-and-unexamined/>.

iii Kalman P. Bland, *The Artless Jew: Medieval and Modern Affirmations and Denials of the Visual* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Margaret Olin, *The Nation without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

iv Hilton Kramer, “Bloom & Levine: The Hazards of Modern Painting: Two Jewish Artists from Boston,” *Commentary* 20, January 1, 1955, 586.

Art School in the 1920s—were located *outside* of the main galleries, reinforcing their art historically marginal status.

Many American art museums are now engaged in the process of “decanonization,” critically reassessing the traditional art historical categories reflected in their collections. A panel on decanonization at the College Art Association’s 2021 conference examined how several university art museums are challenging narratives that perpetuate dynamics of power and privilege. Jews and Jewishness, however, are rarely considered within the context of decanonization, for Jews hold positions of power and privilege in the art world. But until the historical erasure of Jewish experience and perspectives from the canon is recognized, museums will continue to present distorted art historical narratives.

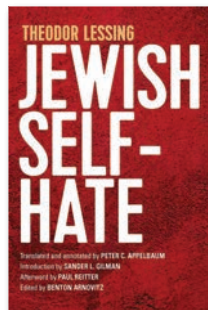
When I embarked on a major reinstallation of the European and American galleries at Indiana University’s Eskenazi Museum of Art (completed November 2019), I sought to complicate the canon through greater inclusion of women artists and artists of color, but also by integrating Jewish perspectives into the galleries where appropriate. Tellingly, the artworks key to my project had long been relegated to storage. In the medieval and Renaissance gallery, dominated (as such galleries usually are) by Christian liturgical arts, I installed the museum’s sole Jewish ritual object—a ceremonial wedding ring in the shape of a synagogue—contextualized with explanatory text and images. In this setting, the tiny object is a simultaneous testament to Europe’s pluralistic history and to the precarious status of its Others.

In our twentieth-century gallery, I emphasized international exchange, migration, diaspora—and yes, religious tradition—as drivers of modernist creativity. Here, I installed a small group of

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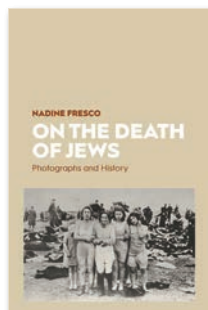
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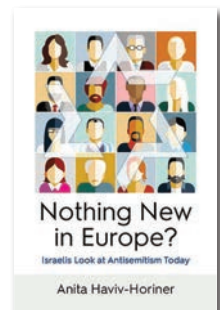


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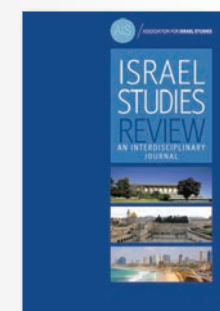
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FIRST GLOBAL SEARCHABLE DATABASE CONTAINS 2,626 OFFICIAL ANTI-JEWISH ACTS & LAWS OVER 2,000 YEARS

Researchers found 2,626 confirmed official Acts and 198 probable official Acts that paint a broad picture of Jewish discrimination for nearly 2,000 years in 50 different countries and territories.

Key Takeaways:

- Researchers found 2,626 confirmed Acts and 198 probable official anti-Jewish Acts.
- Governments, militaries, and churches or dominant religions enacted anti-Jewish Acts for almost 2,000 years.
- Most have heard of discrimination against Jews, but few know its depth and breadth.

SANTA MONICA, CA - September 22, 2021 - Over a decade of research uncovered thousands of official anti-Jewish Acts created by governments, militaries, and churches or dominant religions for nearly 2,000 years.

The extensive research is now presented as a free searchable database at **OAJA.org**, home of the Official Anti-Jewish Acts Project. The website is built around a search engine that can access the Acts with a keyword or date search. Sources, dates, and place citations are included for each Act. The Acts occurred in many forms, such as laws, regulations, church canons, royal proclamations, decrees, ordinances, writs, and final court decisions.

To be included in the **OAJA.org** database, an Act must be clearly anti-Jewish. These official Acts and laws often limited the work, marriage, travel, habitation, and congregation of Jews. Some levied taxes and fines on Jews that were not applied to gentiles, and others expelled or banned Jews from certain areas and occupations. **OAJA.org's** goal is to bring to light these historical events and encourage others to look for answers to the many questions that may surface after seeing the extent of the discrimination.

Official Anti-Jewish Acts is a project of the A-Mark Foundation, a nonprofit that presents unbiased political and social information to advance education, discussion, and debate. **OAJA.org** is a "work-in-progress" that grows as the researchers probe various national archives. The foundation explained the reasoning behind this project, saying, "It is common knowledge that Jews have been discriminated against (as have many others), but few are aware that official Jewish discrimination has been going on for almost 2,000 years and in so many different parts of the world. This archive of Official Anti-Jewish Acts reaches back 2,000 years to authoritatively verify the persistence of this pernicious hatred."

What Will Remain: Broken Art for a Broken World

Evelyn Tauben

Toronto artist Robert Davidovitz's trademark woven paintings explore dynamic palettes and the materiality of paint. In a new work created for the FENTSTER window gallery in downtown Toronto, entitled *What Will Remain*, he extends his study of color and form to the medium of glass, embracing a material central to his family's endurance through various stages of upheaval, beginning with his grandfather, Motel, born in Vilna in 1912. Against the backdrop of honouring his patrilineal line, Davidovitz's installation equally references important father figures of Jewish thought and culture, all with connections to Vilna, including the influential eighteenth-century rabbi known as the Vilna Gaon, eminent artist Marc Chagall, and prominent Yiddish poet Avrom Sutzkever. Together their stories and work inform this contemporary sculpture, which was made and exhibited at the start of the global pandemic in spring 2020.

Recuperating a connection to his ancestral roots in Vilna offered Davidovitz an entry point to creating a site-specific piece for FENTSTER¹, a Jewish exhibition space located in a storefront window in Toronto's early Jewish immigrant neighborhood. The artist's grandparents escaped the extermination of Vilna's Jews by fleeing to Uzbekistan in 1941. After the war, they returned to a ruined city. Motel repaired broken windows to support his young family. When his son (the artist's father) Meir made aliyah in 1973, he in turn opened a window business, often restoring synagogue stained glass. The Davidovitz family moved to Canada when Robert was seven and windows were again their entrée into a new life.

In his father's workshop, Davidovitz created this installation as an homage to Vilna and to the delicate material that buttressed his family for generations. Before the Second World War, Vilna (present-day Vilnius) was an important



Marc Chagall. *Synagogue in Vilna, the "Kloyz" of the Vilna Gaon, 1935.* Oil on canvas. 29.13 x 24.8 in. Private collection. Courtesy of Sotheby's. © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

center of Jewish life, known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania, a dynamic hub of Jewish learning, culture, and diverse ideological movements. Davidovitz's glass hanging is inspired by a 1935 painting Chagall made of the *kloyz* of the Vilna Gaon, who was a figurehead of the rationalist Mitnagdim movement, countering the rise of Hasidism's mystical views. Chagall visited Vilna to attend a scholarly conference at the YIVO Institute,ⁱⁱ the center for the study of Yiddish language and culture. Known as the capital of Yiddishland, in the interwar years Vilna was a hub of modern Yiddish culture and innovative Jewish life and arts—home to Yung Vilne—a group of young Yiddish writers and poets that included Avrom Sutzkever. Davidovitz's project was named for a phrase from a celebrated Sutzkever poem that repeatedly asks: "Who will remain? What will remain?"ⁱⁱⁱ

Through his stained-glass sculpture, Davidovitz harkens to a onetime Vilna landmark, reinterpreting the colorful windows of Chagall's canvas of the synagogue that was later destroyed during the war. He considered Chagall's picture closely alongside archival photos to determine how to fashion the windows. Intertwining personal and collective memory and working in an empty warehouse during the first lockdown, Davidovitz engaged in a quiet dialogue across time with these voices from Vilna, including a grandfather he never knew.

Davidovitz "completed" the work by breaking it—giving his methodical process over to uncertainty. The cracked panes are a reminder of the centrality of brokenness in life, undeniable at a time when our daily existence has felt shattered on a global scale not seen since the Second

World War. While associations to Kristallnacht are unavoidable, his is a generative gesture, not one of violent destruction. Fittingly, the work is ruptured, scarred, and imperfect but remains intact. The piece maintains its integrity despite the fissures. Brokenness is prevalent in Jewish tradition, from breaking the middle matzah at the seder^{iv}, to Moses smashing the tablets, to the notion of *tikkun 'olam*, repairing the world. Much like how a reminder of fragility and destruction interrupts the joyousness of a Jewish wedding when a glass is ceremonially broken, Davidovitz introduces fracture into the celebratory act of revitalizing a lost object from the past. This gesture is quintessentially Jewish. The sculpture also references how the work of repair has been essential to the subsistence of the artist's family.

The exhibition title borrows Sutzkever's lasting words without punctuation, vacillating between question and declaration. Passersby in Toronto gazed upon the window in a window over many uncertain and frightening months wondering—What will remain of life before? What will remain of this devastation?—and simultaneously confirming: What will remain is memory. What will remain is tradition. Connection and love will remain. Art and nature will remain. To conclude as Sutzkever did: "Is this not enough for you?"

EVELYN TAUBEN is a Montreal-born, Toronto-based producer, curator and writer. She is a leader in the field of contemporary Jewish arts and culture, founding and curating *FENTSTER* – a window gallery that explores the Jewish experience through contemporary art.



Robert Davidovitz. *What Will Remain*, 2020. Site-specific installation at *FENTSTER*. Photo by Morris Lum

- i *Fenster* is the Yiddish word for "window." The artist-run gallery is located in the storefront window of the hub for the independent Jewish community Makom: Creative Downtown Judaism.
- ii Benjamin Harshav, "Chagall, Marc," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, December 15, 2010, https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Chagall_Marc.
- iii Avrom Sutzkever, "Lid fun a togbukh / Poem from a Diary," 1974.
- iv With thanks to Rabbi Jenni S. Friedman for noting this aspect of breaking in Jewish tradition.



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A Genizah for Stained-Glass Windows

Alanna E. Cooper

Northbrook Community Synagogue's cavernous sanctuary seats 1,200 stackable chairs. Large, blank, white, and nondescript, the hall feels sterile. "Like a hospital," reports synagogue member Jerry Orbach. Yet, the building's vast stretches of empty walls also provide a benefit; they accommodate Orbach's obsessive habit of collecting stained-glass windows.

Over the past ten years he has filled the space with glass panels that now flank the bimah, hang off the walls, and are perched on a ledge near the ceiling. Vibrant reds, luscious greens, and flaming yellows form Jewish stars, holiday imagery, insignias of the twelve tribes, representations of Torah scrolls, spice boxes, the Western Wall, and an eternal lamp; a jumble of symbols in glass. The panels also form a medley of different shapes and sizes. One group of ten are square, each just a bit larger than an LP record. A set of five are semicircular, each the right size to serve as a decorative element above a doorway. Another is a massive installation that once graced an exterior wall, reaching from the second floor up to the roofline on the third.

The various glass sets were designed by different artists and during distinct time periods. Yet, they hold two things in common. First, they were all fabricated for synagogue buildings that have fallen out of Jewish hands as their congregations moved or dissolved. Second, all of them have been "rescued" by Jerry Orbach—a term he uses to indicate the windows' return to the Jewish community.

Thus far, Orbach has brought window panels from five former synagogues into Northbrook Community Synagogue. He has personally covered all expenses in donations, totaling more than \$100,000, in addition to spending hundreds of hours on phone calls, research, coordination, as well as physical labor. And his work is not complete. The synagogue building has a lower level, Orbach tells me, with more stretches of empty wall space.

"I had my bar mitzvah under these windows. I got married under them," he told me, explaining his emotional connection and how he came to arrange a trade with the church congregation.

And don't forget the synagogue grounds, which also offer the opportunity for new installations. At the moment, there is no end in sight for his collecting.

I connected with Orbach last summer through research for my book manuscript, *Disposing of the Sacred: America's 21st Century Jewish Congregations*. In the midst of the Covid pandemic, I haven't yet had a chance to travel to Chicago and see the collection in situ. Instead, Orbach has sent me photos, and we've had hours of phone conversations about his work creating the self-proclaimed "only repository of synagogue stained glass in the world."

Orbach is a garrulous storyteller whose interests do not much align with those of an art critic or art historian. Few of our discussions focused on who designed and fabricated the windows, what they depict, their color palettes, or the texture and quality of the glass. Instead, Orbach regales with tales of acquisition: how he identified the windows, procured them, transported them, and had them reinstalled in his own synagogue.

Story after story, and one phone call after the next, I wonder what animates his collecting. But Orbach speaks with such assuredness about his pious recycling that I am reticent to ask, fearing such a query would come off as rude, as though calling into question the very endeavor itself. I will come around to broaching the issue eventually, but not until I've heard all his acquisition stories.

The first set came from Kehillat Jeshurun, the Albany Park synagogue Orbach's family attended while he was growing up. When the Jews moved out of the area after World War II, the building was bought by a church. Orbach kept his eye on it. "I would prowl the neighborhood," he explained, surveying the fate of the area that had been predominantly Jewish until almost all moved out to the suburbs, leaving their storefronts, schools, and synagogues behind.



Stained glass designed by Dave Ruskin and fabricated in Barrilet Studios, Paris. Installed in Temple B'nai Israel, Saginaw, MI (1961) and removed and reinstalled in Northbrook Community Synagogue, Northbrook, IL (2021). Photo by Aaron Braun. Courtesy of the author

Decades later, Orbach returned to tour the previous Kehillat Jeshurun building and was struck by the stained glass, which had remained intact. "I had my bar mitzvah under these windows. I got married under them," he told me, explaining his emotional connection and how he came to arrange a trade with the church congregation. He had the stained-glass windows removed, and in exchange replaced them with new ones, decorated with Christian iconography more suited for the church.

Unlike Kehillat Jeshurun, which sold their building to a church, Mikro Kodesh Anshe Tiktin in Peterson Park was razed not long after the congregation dissolved in 2004. When Orbach received news of the building's impending demolition, he rushed to hire a crew to remove the

windows. "It was an emergency," he recounted in dramatic tones. The end came quickly, "We put up scaffolding," and within no time, "we were pulling out the windows from the front while the building was being torn down in the back. I was terrified. The wall was crumbling as the windows were coming out."

While Orbach was once focused on windows from buildings in Chicago's bygone Jewish neighborhoods, now he's broadened his attention to synagogues across the country. In December, 2020, he acquired a set from B'nai Israel in Saginaw, Michigan (which dissolved in 2005), and he is currently working to procure another set from a recently disbanded synagogue in upstate New York.

“It’s a living genizah,” Orbach corrects me—it holds the past while mingling with prayers of the present.

Finally, I ask. *Why?* Orbach pauses—a brief interruption in our lively back-and-forth—“There’s a feeling you get from them.... They enhance the room, the sacred space.” That’s not satisfying. I push him. “So why not commission new ones?” Why mount windows that are clearly not designed for the space they now occupy, windows intended to grace a doorway, that now sit perched above a ceiling ledge? An installation of glass intended for an exterior wall, which now serves as an archway to nowhere?

“They are beautiful,” he answers.

But what is beauty? So much is wrapped up in this word. In his famous essay “Unpacking my Library” the German Jewish cultural critic Walter Benjamin describes what it is like to watch a collector handle his objects: “He seems to be seeing through them into the distant past as though inspired.” Yes, indeed, Jerry looks deep beyond the surface of the windows, to see what they hold: “The history of the shul that’s gone,” he says, and then offers, “If you remember the shul, you are remembering all the people who were there.”

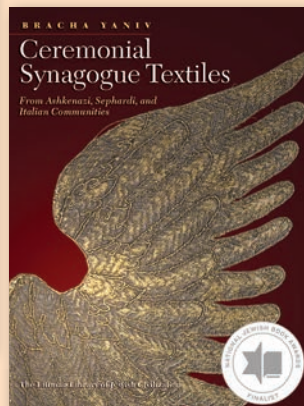
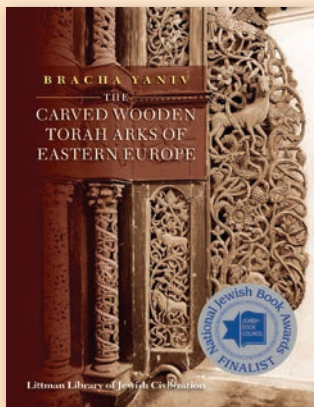
Once Orbach has the windows removed from the original spot for which they were designed, he has them encased in wooden cabinets and electrically wired to be lit from behind. In their new form, they are sculptures of light, glass, and memory. Plaques installed beside each set tell the history of the congregation whose building they once adorned.

“You’ve created a genizah for stained glass,” I suggest, referring to repositories of documents that are no longer useful, but that cannot be thrown away because of their sacred status. Found later, such items have served as important primary sources for historians writing the stories of communities that are gone. “It’s a living genizah,” Orbach corrects me—it holds the past while mingling with prayers of the present.

ALANNA E. COOPER is the *Abba Hillel Silver Chair* in Jewish Studies at Case Western Reserve University. Her forthcoming book is entitled, *Disposing of the Sacred: America’s 21st Century Jewish Congregations*.

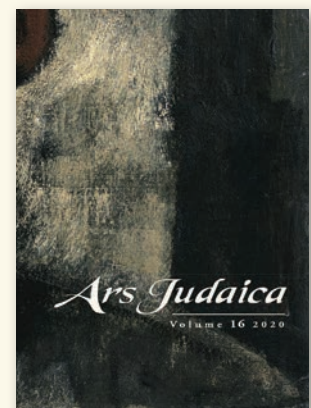
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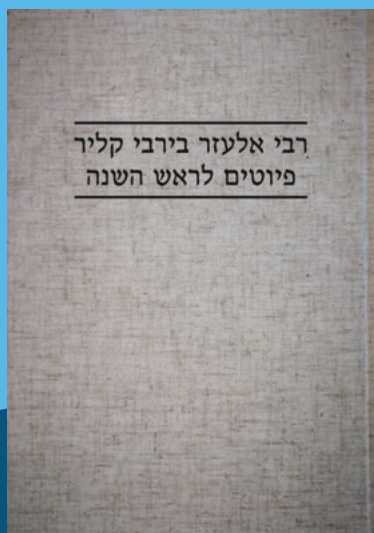
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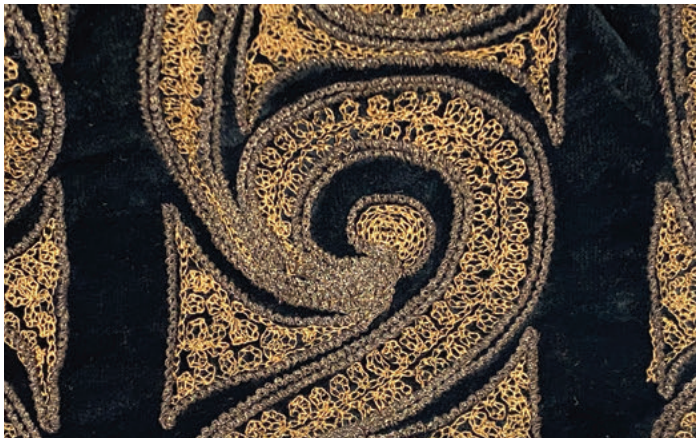
Artist–Scholar Collaborations

Avant-Garde Textiles, Jewish Art?

Julia Phillips Cohen, Linsey Labson, and Devi Mays

When is fashion art? When is it Jewish? The work of the avant-garde fashion designer Vitali Babani (1858–1940) allows us to grapple with these questions while examining pieces that have never before been analyzed in a Jewish context.

Whether fashion qualifies as an art form has long preoccupied fashion historians, who have made the case for expanding our definition of art to include a broad range of objects, including textiles. Such pieces were the staple of the business that Vitali Babani built up in Paris during the Belle Époque and interwar period after moving to that city as a young man from his native Constantinople. The Maison Babani produced a range of styles and products over the years, including garments inspired by North African, Middle Eastern, South and East Asian designs, as well as the modernist Parisian milieu of his day. Signature features of Babani garments included their use of silk velvets with heavy metallic embroidery, created using a distinctive chain stitch method.



Detail of Babani's chain stitch method. Evening dress or tea gown, black velvet with metallic embroidery, ca. 1928. Museum at FIT P87.30.1, Museum Purchase. Photograph by Linsey Labson

Babani dresses and coats featuring rich colors such as mustard, crimson, emerald green, dusty blue, and copper—as well as those cut from black fabric that amplifies the contrast with the gold thread embroidery—have featured in numerous exhibitions and are held in over a dozen museum collections around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Victoria & Albert in London, and the Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris. Each is one of a kind, much like other forms of art, such as a painting or a sculpture.

But were they Jewish? Maison Babani's designs make no explicit reference to Jewish material or traditions. Yet many of the designer's avant-garde pieces drew inspiration from the material environment of the Ottoman capital where Vitali was raised and the clothing styles shared there by Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. Embroidery with metallic thread on heavy velvets was a common feature of celebratory clothes among Ottoman Jews and Muslims alike. In this sense, the traditional garments Babani would have seen in his youth and which inspired much of his couture were Jewish, if not exclusively. Despite this, one searches in vain for any reference to Babani's Jewishness—on museum websites, exhibition catalogues, and auction sites featuring Babani pieces. The Jewishness of the designer—and thus also of his designs—has disappeared from view, leaving us with only fragments of the larger story.

This elision was not accidental. It forms part of a broader pattern that Jews of Middle Eastern origin experienced throughout the modern period as they made their way to new shores. This was true for Ottoman Jews who immigrated to the Americas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only to find that many of their new neighbors did not believe them to be Jewish—whether



Dress, silk velvet with metallic embroidery, Babani, ca. 1926. Metropolitan Museum of Art 1995.506.1, Gift of Richard and Judith Webb

because of their places of origin, the languages they spoke, or the way they looked and dressed. Aviva Ben-Ur has described the cool and sometimes incredulous responses Ottoman Sephardim received after announcing their Jewishness to Ashkenazic Jews in the early twentieth-century United States as “co-ethnic recognition failure.”ⁱⁱ Registering a related pattern in Argentina during the same period, Adriana Brodsky has suggested that “Sephardim were invisible as Jews to Argentines” because “they were linguistically different from Ashkenazim, lived in different ... neighborhoods, wore different styles of clothing, and had cultural and political practices ... acquired in ... lands ... not associated with Jewishness in Argentina.”ⁱⁱⁱ Ottoman Jews living in fin-de-siècle France recorded similar experiences, noting that even people they encountered on a

daily basis did not recognize them as Jewish.ⁱⁱⁱ Jews in such contexts appeared to others as “Turks,” “Arabs,” “Greeks,” or Mediterranean or “Hispanic” types, with little recognition that even when they were some, or all, of those things, they were also Jews.

So it was for Vitali Babani. Both during his lifetime and long after his death commentators have described him variously as French, Italian, Turkish, and “Middle Eastern,” but never as Jewish. Perhaps the rare scholars aware of the family’s Jewishness deemed it irrelevant to his artistic production and career. In other instances, it would seem, his Jewishness—like that of so many Middle Eastern Jews who made their homes in new émigré centers in the modern period—has simply gone undetected. Yet the techniques and materials his fashion house employed were not only broadly Ottoman but also intensely Jewish: many of the wedding dresses and synagogue adornments that Ottoman Jews made, used, reused, donated, and passed down within their families and communities bear a striking resemblance to the designs for which Maison Babani is best remembered today. Suggesting that various of Babani’s pieces were inspired by Middle Eastern design without also entertaining the possibility that they might—simultaneously—be Jewish runs the risk of reinforcing unnecessarily narrow ideas about what Jewishness is, or is not.

Bringing Babani designs into discussions of Jewish art is also useful for other reasons. Although the fashion house drew from the wellspring of historical Middle Eastern, North African, South and East Asian patterns and silhouettes, it was also decidedly modernist in its artistic orientation. As one of the earliest designers to introduce loose-fitting gowns into early twentieth-century Parisian fashion, Babani participated in the dress reform movement that helped free women from the confines of the corset and tightly tailored clothing. How often do histories of fashion or avant-garde art in this early twentieth-century moment recognize the role that Middle Eastern Jews played at the vanguard of both developments? The case of Babani invites us to reconsider our narratives once again.

JULIA PHILLIPS COHEN is associate professor in the Department of History and the Program in Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of two books: *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), and—together with Sarah Abrevaya Stein—*Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014). She is now preparing a modern history of Ottoman Jewish women’s work as well as a collaborative project with Devi Mays on the Babani fashion house.

LINSEY LABSON received her graduate degree from the Fashion Institute of Technology, where she studied fashion and textile history, with additional training in textile conservation. Her master’s thesis, “*Babani: Life and Legacy of a Forgotten Designer, 1894–1935*,” (Fashion Institute of Technology, 2021), serves as a reference for scholars of fashion and textile studies, and provides a comprehensive overview of Babani garments and paper ephemera found in collections worldwide.

DEVI MAYS is associate professor of Judaic Studies and History at the University of Michigan, and the author of

Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020). She is currently working on a critical translation of the Izmir-based Ottoman Jewish journalist Alexandre Ben Ghat’s Ladino diary of World War I—entitled *Two Steps from the Abyss: An Ottoman Jewish Witness to War*—as well as a collaborative project with Julia Phillips Cohen on the Babani fashion house.

i Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). On this phenomenon in the United States, see also Devin Naar, “Between ‘New Greece’ and the ‘New World’: Salonican Jews en route to New York,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 45, 64–65; Jane Gerber, “Sephardic and Syrian Immigration to America: Acculturation and Communal Preservation,” in *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 49–56; Julia Phillips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, eds., *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 371–73.

ii Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jew, Argentine: Community and National Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 2. See also Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 239, and, for elsewhere in Latin America, Margalit Bejarano, “From All Their Habitations: Sephardic Jews in Cuba,” *Judaism* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 96–97; Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), 163–64.

iii Cohen and Stein, *Sephardi Lives*, 200–206.



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Fig. 1. Courtesy of the artist

FREELANDscapes: Imagining a Jewish Refuge in Australia

Louis Kaplan (*essay*) and Melissa Shiff (*art*)

Let us begin with the following counterfactual question—what if Jewish Territorialist leader I. N. Steinberg (1888–1957) and his organization The Freeland League had instituted its proposed Kimberley Plan by purchasing millions of acres from the pastoralist Michael Durack in western Australia in the late 1930s, thereby saving Jewish lives before the Holocaust? Utilizing digital media (including the software programs Rhino, 3D Studio Max, and Photoshop) that are applied to the material traces of an alternative Jewish history, this project models and renders nothing less than an imaginary Jewish homeland situated in the Australian outback. From the rugged look of the landscape, we are quite far from the European shtetls and yet Yiddish appears to be spoken here (fig. 1). The Yiddish headline running along the paper house in the first FREELANDscape informs us what it was all about when we translate it as—“The Australian Project.” In contrast to Theodor Herzl’s Zionism that fixated on the return of the Jews to the ancestral Land of Israel as the promised location to build a modern nation-state, the Freelanders rather advocated cultural autonomy alone and concentrated their efforts on

settling uninhabited land wherever it was available on the globe. That is why this article by A. Glantz begins with a reference to what the author calls “territorialist thought” summarized succinctly as “A Land for Jews.”

“The Imaginary Jewish Homelands of I. N. Steinberg” is a collaborative research-creation project supported by an Insight Grant of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Like many contemporary works that make art through the excavation of archival or museum collections, the project reanimates and repurposes original documents (e.g., newspapers, letters, memos) found in the voluminous Papers of Isaac Nachman Steinberg housed at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York. In this example, a yellowed and fraying newspaper clipping is transformed into a three-dimensional house. This process combines in its construction the architectural modeling program Rhino with the subsequent texturing of the model in Photoshop. The house is replete with perforated door and window openings that allow for greater transparency—and for more fresh air and sunlight—



Fig. 2. Courtesy of the artist

but these cutouts also interrupt our reading of the original article in those places. In direct contrast to George Steiner's famous Jewish diasporic dictum of "our homeland, the text" for the people of the book, what we find here is not so much a textual homeland but rather the construction of homes for Jewish refugees that are made out of texts. Thus, the motto for FREELANDscapes would be "our homes, the texts" as we imagine a Jewish homeland in the Kimberley landscape. Featuring surreal juxtapositions, the series pairs these houses with landscape photographs that were shot on location during our fieldwork as we traversed the very places that would have become a Jewish settlement if Steinberg's bold and idealistic project had come to fruition. Thus, what makes Melissa Schiff's picturesque image partake of the character of photomontage is the fact that this imaginary paper house has been transplanted and superimposed onto the breathtaking landscape of the Kimberley. The placement of this Yiddish house with direct access to a body of water behind it is also an important marker that recalls Steinberg's prescient advocacy of irrigation and the construction of man-made lakes for agricultural success in the region.

The other FREELANDscape (fig. 2) consists of a photo-portrait of Steinberg who peers out in triplicate as if looking out the window of his green and white paper house at the foot of an imposing and impressive black rock formation.

This lack of a permanent place to call home is also what makes the juxtaposition of this piece of identification so powerful and poignant as it becomes the building block for a paper house located somewhere in the remote Australian outback.

What is the source of the official document used for this digital model and how does it comment on photography in general? Upon closer inspection, it is dated April 28th in that fateful year of 1933. In a stroke of good fortune, Steinberg left Berlin (where he was already in exile from the Soviet Union) on a trip to the United Kingdom on January 27th (the date is also visible in the central panel), but this also meant that he had no place to go after the Nazis seized power three days later. Signed in his own hand and with an official stamp, this Alien Registration Certificate allowed Steinberg to stay in London as a political refugee. Now it is well known that photography functions as a discourse of identification and that its categorical imperative demands that we keep our papers in order. This shows up on official documents such as the passports of nation-states. The point here is that while this refugee's certificate references the Soviet Union, Germany, and the United Kingdom, none of them offered "a land for Jews" and that is why Steinberg undertook his political mission in Australia six years later. This lack of a permanent place to call home

is also what makes the juxtaposition of this piece of identification so powerful and poignant as it becomes the building block for a paper house located somewhere in the remote Australian outback. In other words, Shiff's photo-montage drives home the point that this charismatic political organizer travelled to the Kimberley with the vision that it would be the place to forge a new Jewish identity (and identity papers).

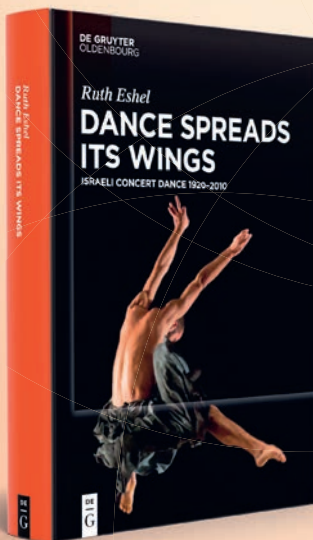
What if the Freeland League had succeeded in its goal of finding a refuge for persecuted Jews somewhere in Australia? These FREELANDscapes conjure a vision that matches I. N. Steinberg's fantastic Kimberley scheme but that also marks its failure (and the gap between the real and the ideal). The fragile paper refugee houses of this digital art project underscore the idea of a Jewish utopia that unfortunately crumbled, while offering the viewer an opportunity to learn more about alternative homelands and Jewish counterfactual histories beyond the Land of Israel during the twentieth century.

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MELISSA SHIFF is research associate at the Sensorium Research Centre for Digital Art and Technology at York University, Toronto. Her artistic practice has focused on Jewish themes for over two decades (both reinventing Jewish rituals and reanimating Jewish archives). Her work is in the permanent collection of the Jewish Museum in New York and she was the commissioned artist for two exhibitions celebrating the centennial at the Jewish Museum of Prague. She is principal investigator for "The Imaginary Jewish Homelands of I.N. Steinberg," supported by a SSHRC Insight Grant. Website: www.melissashiff.com.

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"Dance Spreads Its Wings is a preliminary essay—comprehensive, clear, interesting and in-depth on the formation and especially on the development of the dance field, as an important component of culture in Israel. Ruth Eshel's research encompasses historical and social backgrounds, dialogue with other arts, especially a fascinating story, from pioneering to blossoming."

Prof. Dr. Dan Oryan, Head of the Department of Theater Studies at the Western Galilee Academic College, Acre, Israel.

Ruth Eshel
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Pedagogy

Israeli Art, Jewish Art, and Jewish Studies

Susan Nashman Fraiman

I am sitting with a group of American students, some, but not all, Jewish, in the military cemetery at Kiryat Anavim in the Jerusalem corridor. It is Yom Ha-Zikaron, Israel's Memorial Day for its fallen soldiers. An obelisk-like memorial chamber designed by the artist Menachem Shemi (1897–1951) stands at the far end of the area. The inscription on the structure, in block Hebrew letters, reads: "To the Harel Palmach fighters who sacrificed their lives to die for Jerusalem, Judea and the Negev in the War of the Liberation of Israel." Shemi's son Aharon, known as Jimmy (1926–1948) was a beloved Palmach commander who fell in the 1948 war. The book published after his death, *Friends Talk about Jimmy*, became an Israeli classic. What started out as a temporary burial ground became a small military cemetery. Parents of soldiers who died then were given the option of being buried near their sons, and so Shemi and his wife are buried there as well. Today, the small cemetery is full of visitors, even though most of the graves are from the battles of 1948. People of all ages—children, soldiers, young couples, senior citizens—are crowded under the makeshift tent erected over the graves. The two-minute siren during which everybody stands still, in silence, is about to sound.

The choice of day and place is not coincidental—we are on a tour of the art of memory and memorial in the Jerusalem area, for my course titled History of Art in Israel from the Yishuv to the Present. Questions to be discussed: How have these events been commemorated in art? What does the artistic language of these works say about the period in which they were made, about those who made them, and about those commemorated? By attending this ceremony, the importance and power of memory and



*Kiryat Anavim Military Cemetery on Yom Ha-Zikaron.
Photo by Susan Nashman Fraiman*

The study of Jewish and Israeli art teaches us about Jewish values, influences from the outside world, and the way Jews have contended with their historical circumstances.

commemoration in Israeli society are directly experienced by the students, who most likely have never witnessed a comparable event.

I have been teaching Israeli and Jewish art to students at the Rothberg International School of the Hebrew University since 2007. In recent years, prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, besides students from the United States and Canada, I have had students from places as diverse as Australia, China, England, France, Italy, Hong Kong, and Germany. In order to teach Israeli art, one must start with the basics: How did Jews express themselves through art, either by making art or commissioning art, before the Emancipation? The next questions, of course, are: After the Emancipation and the entry of Jews into art academies, what changed and what didn't? What were the ideological forces that led to the founding of an art school, the Bezalel Academy in 1906, before the founding of the first kibbutz?

The challenges of teaching this subject are many. For example, the subset of Israeli art is an important branch in the study of Jewish art (and art history as a whole), and different in many ways from the Jewish art produced elsewhere.¹ Is all Israeli art created by Jews “Jewish” art? Some Israeli art is informed by Jewish tradition, history, and politics, while other works (as in many artistic traditions) are about the basic universal themes of love, childhood, the world we inhabit, beauty and ugliness, life and death. Israeli art has always shifted back and forth on the continuum from the particular to the universal, and sometimes even in the same decade one can find both trends.

Should I have the opportunity to give a virtual tour for those abroad, other sites of Israeli art, besides the Israel Museum and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, would include: the Bezalel Academy in downtown Jerusalem, Reuven Rubin’s house in Tel Aviv and the Bauhaus-style buildings of the 1930s there, and the Ein Harod Museum in the North, established on a kibbutz before the founding of the state. All of these have a part in the history and nurturing of Israeli art since 1906 and its importance in the development of Israeli culture. After all, the establishment of the State of Israel was declared inside the Tel Aviv Museum of Art on May 15, 1948. What I would hope to show is that the cultivation of artistic expression was considered essential not only to the growth of a Jewish entity, the state-in-the-making (from the Hebrew *המדינה שבדרך*) but to the rehabilitation of the Jewish people as a whole and as a key to their acceptance as equals among the nations. Moreover, the variety of these venues would show that the artistic languages of each of those periods reflect ideological needs as well as aesthetic/artistic needs.

Israeli art is but one color on the spectrum of Jewish artistic expression. Israeli art should not only be studied under the rubric of Jewish art—let alone art history as a broader academic discipline, where it is rarely discussed—but as a branch of Jewish Studies as well. Indeed, I would argue that the study of Jewish and Israeli artistic expression is vital to the teaching of Jewish Studies in general. Adding the study of works of art to the curriculum can also open windows

into Jewish experience through time and place: the world of ancient Jewry, via the frescos of Dura Europos (3rd century CE), or medieval Jewry, for example, through the depictions in illuminated manuscripts, or modern and contemporary Jewry, through the art of the Holocaust and the art of commemoration. The study of Jewish and Israeli art teaches us about Jewish values, influences from the outside world, and the way Jews have contended with their historical circumstances. We need both—the existential issues facing Israeli Jews and Jews living elsewhere are of necessity different, and these differences are reflected in their art: certain texts and experiences are taken for granted here in Israel, such as a knowledge of Hebrew and the experience of living as a majority in the land with all of its religious and political complexities.

As one adult student said to me upon seeing the frescoes of Dura Europos for the first time: “Why have we not been taught this before?” The student, a retired doctor, was encountering a Jewish mode of expression that he had never experienced, and was intrigued. In this way, too, the study of Jewish visual culture offers a fresh perspective for those who have seen their Judaism only through the prism of *tikkun ’olam*, humor, and food. Jewish and Israeli art is a birthright for Jews, and an invitation for non-Jews, to learn about the rich tapestry called the Jewish experience.

SUSAN NASHMAN FRAIMAN is a lecturer, researcher, and curator of Israeli and Jewish Art. She is currently teaching at the Rothberg International School of Hebrew University and the Pardes Institute.

¹ I would like to leave the questions of definition aside—see my article “A Jewish Art,” *Milim Havivin* 7 (2013–2014), <http://library.yctarah.org/journals/milim-havivin-vol-7-beloved-words/>.

How We Talk about Jewish Art in World Religions: A Pedagogical Perspective from a Small Liberal Arts College

Madison Tarleton

Religious Studies educators have an obligation to expose students to inconsistencies in the definition of the word “religion.” By debunking popular myths like “religions need a god/gods” or “religions need a text or canon” students can begin to unlearn long-held ideologies. My introductory-level World Religions class has a thematic focus on art and material culture that becomes the lens trained on each religious tradition studied over the term. The Judaism unit is one in which my students struggle to separate Judaism from Christianity and think critically about their differences.

Teaching Jewish art and material culture allows me to further explain the problem of definitions, categories, and identification of “Jewishness.” Scholars like Samantha Baskind, Larry Silver, Kalman Bland, and Ben Schachter have wrestled with the complex definitions of Jewish art and the definitional necessity of this category. My pedagogical reflection will be about my experience teaching Jewish art as a frame for teaching Judaism in a World Religions class in the Appalachian South. The challenges and pitfalls that come with defining Jewish art, I believe, are a microcosm for the challenges we face when trying to define “Jewishness,” and even further, the challenges we face when trying to define “religion.”ⁱ

For our Judaism unit, my students read from Samantha Baskind and Larry Silver’s *Jewish Art: A Modern History*. As they read, I relate the problem of defining Jewish art to a problem within Jewish Studies and Religious Studies more broadly: Who and what defines Judaism, Jewishness, and Jewish experiences? Students, specifically those raised in the Appalachian South and American Midwest who have been exposed to cultural Christianity, do not understand how to talk about religion—let alone art—that is not overtly devotional, symbolic, or “religiously meaningful.” In their introduction, Baskind and Silver ask two very important

The Jewishness of a person or a piece of art is more than just a Google search, as most of my students discovered.

questions that guide the students: What is Jewish Art?ⁱⁱ And, is it the artist or the art (content) that makes their art Jewish?ⁱⁱⁱ

To practically apply these questions, students search through the Bezalel Narkiss Index of Jewish Art, and look through the Modern Jewish Art database. Students have to select one image (a painting, an installation, a sculpture, etc.) and try to answer three questions: (1) Is the artist of this piece Jewish? (2) How do you think this image, object, or artifact reflects an important part of Judaism or Jewish culture? and (3) Does the content of the piece make it “Jewish” or does the artist’s Jewishness make it “Jewish?”

These questions are raised specifically to create discomfort around defining a person or a religion with ease. The Jewishness of a person or a piece of art is more than just a Google search, as most of my students discovered. In the same way that Baskind and Silver wrestle with the idea of Jewishness in identity and in art, I use this to demonstrate to my students the complexities of defining someone’s religiousness when the category itself is undefinable. Christianity, for many of my students, has been presented as a religious category with definable features, measurable variables, and distinguishing characteristics that make it Christianity and not “something else.” This meant I was likely going to challenge their very idea of religion.

By learning about Jewish art in a World Religions course, students are able to unpack the complexities of strict definitions and categories. Jewish art may represent the history of Jews without mandating a predetermined

definition of Judaism or Jewish experiences. Jewish art exists on a spectrum that considers the artist's experience, positionality, and relationship to the religion. Religions are often defined by the communities they encounter and how those communities encounter religious practices and rituals. Religious Studies scholars have debated the definitions and categorizations of religion for decades. The relationship a person has to a specific religion is dependent on their history, experiences, and once again, their positionality.

In their assignments about Jewish art, students had a range of responses similar to these:

"I truly only had no idea of what Judaism really was."
(Student A)

"Regarding the Silver and Baskind reading, while it is about Jewish art, I think that questions about religious identity and what it means to be Jewish can be answered." (Student B)

"The main thing that I have learned about this religion is the art that makes it so different." (Student C)

Using the Modern Jewish Art database allowed students to see the far-reaching edges of the category of Jewish art. Some students picked pieces by Mark Podwal. Many of his colorful pieces include symbols of Judaism—menorahs, seder plates, even lions. However, some students chose more abstract pieces like sculptures of an *eruv*, European cityscapes, or pieces that reflected parts of Jewish life and not necessarily religious law or practice. As the students reflected on the pieces they chose as well as those chosen by their classmates, they were able to more effectively articulate the ambiguities and challenges of defining Jewish art. In these articulations, they began to struggle with how they could place Judaism in a categorical and allegorical religious box:

"Based on all the readings from this class, to me, having a religious identity, or being able to believe in something that is difficult to see, is very important because having a strong sense of religious identity seems to bring you comfort and security in your life." (Student D)

My students ranged in age, race, religious background, and geographical location. Some of my students were born and raised in the Appalachian South and some were there only for school. I had students from South America, Europe, and the American Southeast. Each student brought their own learned ideas about religion but many ideologies were colored by a cultural Christianity that exists in the United

States, and specifically in regions of the Appalachian South. Their responses ranged in depth, engagement, and provocation. What this assignment made me aware of is the rampant Judeo-Christian myth in America that has failed our students. The myth of the Judeo-Christian "lump" has reinforced that Judaism and Christianity are more alike than they are different. I found this to be especially prevalent with my students who grew up in the Appalachian South. Most students assumed sameness and similarity between Judaism and Christianity, and teaching Jewish art as a way to teach about Judaism helped students disconnect the two religious traditions. Jewish art is different from Christian art because Judaism is different from Christianity. Jewish art does not always reflect Bible stories or prayers. It ranges from religious expression to lived experiences, to modern and abstract artistic expression. By exposing my students to the way that Jewish art is different from the stained-glass windows of the churches they grew up in, they were able to understand and unpack the differences between the two religious traditions.

MADISON TARLETON is a PhD candidate in Religious Studies at the University of Denver and Iliff School of Theology's Joint Doctoral Program and teaches in the College of Charleston's Religious Studies Department. At the time of writing, Madison was working as a part-time faculty member for Ferrum College teaching *World Religions*. Her research interests include medieval Judaism in Christian Spain, anti-Judaic and antisemitic material culture, and Jewish art.

i The idea of defining religion has been debated for several decades by Religious Studies scholars. This also extends into the reaches of Judaism. How, if at all, do scholars define something that is religious while also incorporating aspects of race, ethnicity, culture, history, geographic location, and lived experience? For the duration of this piece, I will be thinking about Judaism as a religious category and community that creates space for those who align with humanistic ideologies and more theologically conservative ideologies. With such a short time to teach Judaism in a World Religions course, I often tell my students that most religions outside of Christianity have a lived cultural component that is inaccessible to most American Christians. Judaism, in the way that I discussed with my students, is defined by its communal experience, social network, practice, and ritual, and the lived component—how people live out Judaism.

ii Samantha Baskind and Larry Silver, *Introduction to Jewish Art: A Modern History* (London: Reaktion, 2011), 8.

iii Ibid.

Welcome to the inaugural edition of “Teaching with Film and Media,” a column in which our colleagues from different fields will share film choices and ideas about how to use them in the classroom. Curated by Olga Gershenson, each column will engage with the theme of the current issue of *AJS Perspectives*. To start us off, here are two ideas for using film to approach art in the Jewish Studies classroom. For more ideas, check out the *AJS Perspectives* webpage.

The Museum

Olga Gershenson

The Museum (*Ha-muzeon*, Ran Tal, Israel, 2017, 72 minutes) offers a nuanced record of life at Jerusalem’s Israel Museum. The film lets viewers experience the museum’s galleries, storerooms, and board meetings. Singing guards, blind patrons, and a Haredi inspector share the screen with curators, Palestinian guides, and an American museum director. With no didactic narration and no judgement, Tal’s approach is both ironic and comprehensive.

The film is sensitive to politics, evident not only in the official ceremonies with government brass, but also in the backstage decisions and everyday routines. For example, one scene gives us an insight into a curatorial debate: What is to be done with a collection of precious Palestinian and Druze embroidery? “You display it,” explains the curator, “and it will be an act of cultural appropriation. You don’t display it, and it’s an erasure of the minoritized cultures.” In the end, the curators, both Jewish and Palestinian, decide to preserve the treasure the best they can, until times change.

The Israel Museum emerges in the film as a microcosm of Israeli society. A short running time means the film can be screened in its entirety, but its vignette structure also makes it ideal for clips. It can be used in classes dealing with Israeli culture and society. It will provoke discussions about relations of power, cultural appropriation, historic legacies, and even contested claims to the Land of Israel.

The Museum is available from Menemsha Films, <https://www.menemshafilms.com/>.



The Museum, movie poster, 2017.

OLGA GERSHENSON is professor of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies, and of Film Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her most recent book is *The Phantom Holocaust: Soviet Cinema and Jewish Catastrophe* (Rutgers University Press, 2013). She is currently working on a book about Israeli horror films.



Still from *Soviet Toys* (Dziga Vertov, 1924).

Soviet Toys

Maya Balakirsky Katz

Soviet Toys (*Sovetskie igrushki*, Dziga Vertov, 1924, 10 minutes), the first animated Soviet film, is emblematic of the political aspirations of Jewish filmmakers and their innovative use of technologies. Created in a medium that would attract many Jewish artists seeking to build a social utopia one frame at a time, *Soviet Toys* is both an advertisement for the film studio and propaganda for Bolshevism. Its stop-motion animation allowed Jewish artists to create visual gags that projected their Bolshevism and faith in film technology.

We watch the film through "Movie-Man," whose eyes are camera lenses that record society and its types. Despite the documentary conceit of the ever-watchful Movie-Man, the film communicates primarily through the special effects of stop-motion gags. The Capitalist enjoys a magically self-laid table. Ladies appear out of nowhere. Clerics are hinged like wooden nutcracker pieces, whose mouths go up and down. Seeing Movie-Man's exposé of abuse, the Worker appears

and defeats the Capitalist. Soldiers hang other corrupters of power by the neck, transforming them into decorative ornaments on the New Year's tree. At the conclusion of the film, Movie-Man sits in a thoughtful pose behind a desk at the state film offices and turns his goggled eyes squarely on the viewer.

Simultaneously a product of craft and an icon of Jewish avant-gardism, the film finds resolution in its own documentary power. *Soviet Toys* elicits a range of responses from students, and can be productively employed in courses dealing with Jews and film, media, Soviet history, and cultural production.

Soviet Toys is available for free download at <https://archive.org/details/DzigaVertovSovietToys1924>.

MAYA BALAKIRSKY KATZ is a psychoanalyst and associate professor of Jewish Art at Bar-Ilan University. She is co-editor, along with Steven Fine and Margaret Olin, of the journal *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art and Visual Culture*. Her forthcoming book *Freud, Religion, and the Birth of the Psychoanalytic Periodical* (Cambridge University Press) explores the exposition of religion during the founding years of the first psychoanalytic periodicals.

Teaching the Holocaust through Art

Sponsored by the Holocaust Educational Foundation of Northwestern University

Roundtables Editor: Jason Schulman

Editor: Sarah M. Cushman

Contributors: Natasha Goldman, Paul B. Jaskot, Barbara McCloskey, Belarie Zatzman

Introduction

Sarah Cushman: The Holocaust has stimulated inquiry in a range of disciplines, and methods and approaches used in these disciplines have broadened our understanding of the Holocaust. This development has grown Holocaust Studies from its base in History into a multi- and interdisciplinary field. Art and Art History have been late to embrace the study of the Holocaust. Adherents to traditional aesthetic hierarchies in those disciplines have long asserted there was no “art” produced under the Nazi regime, and have viewed visual culture of the era as documentary evidence, not the subject of serious artistic inquiry. At AJS 2020, held online, the Holocaust Educational Foundation of Northwestern University sponsored a roundtable on “Teaching the Holocaust through Art.” Panelists explored debates and recent developments in Art and Art History, and shared approaches, sources, and tools they use for teaching about the Holocaust.

Barbara McCloskey: Reckoning with the effects of images is critical to understanding the Holocaust and how it unfolded. Students in my course on art in the Third Reich and the memorialization of the Holocaust explore how visual media cemented the Aryan ideal of “German-ness” to oppress and eliminate Others—Jews, homosexuals, and the differently abled. The course exposes students to a range of visual media—painting and sculpture, film and exhibitions—to examine dialogically how structured absence, particularly of Jews, served to picture and create a *Volksgemeinschaft* (German people’s community).



Sonderkommando photographs taken secretly by prisoners in KL Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Summer 1944. The photos show burning bodies and women being driven to gas chambers in Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. www.auschwitz.org

For analysis of architecture, I use my fellow panelist Paul Jaskot’s *The Architecture of Oppression*, which helps students to consider the regime’s architecture in more than simply formal or stylistic terms. Students are asked to contemplate the relationship between war production minister Albert Speer’s use of modernism and classicism in his design of the Reich Chancellery, and the “Stairs of Death” at Mauthausen concentration camp, where those forced to hew stone for the structure were worked to death. Jaskot’s book exposes how Nazi building policy forwarded the processes of dispossession, ghettoization, and extermination.

I also use *Images in Spite of All* by philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman. The text helps students understand how disciplinary notions of “art” can prevent us from seeing and taking seriously the testimony that unremarkable visual materials can yield. The author’s brilliant analysis of four fragile, astonishing, and long-overlooked photographs of mass killing at Auschwitz demonstrates to them what Art History at its very best can do.

When dealing with the postwar period, I ask students to explore the destruction of the image world by the Nazi regime and the ensuing challenge to create a visual language adequate to memorializing the Holocaust. The work of James Young is especially useful here. Students explore how memorials seek to



remind us of the murderous legacy of the Holocaust and warn us against recurrences of cultural intolerance.

Finally, connecting students' historical study of the Holocaust to the present, I discuss with them the dark web and its veiled adoption of Nazi imagery. Students contend with how and why that imagery morphs and goes viral, and they consider to what extent it works to shape identity today in ways similar to how visual culture functioned in the Third Reich.

Suggested Reading List:

- Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
- Paul B. Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression: The SS, Forced Labor and the Nazi Monumental Building Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

Belarie Zatzman: My disciplinary approach to teaching the Holocaust through art-making practices is grounded in Theatre and Performance Studies. Scholar James E.

Young posited that “the facts of history never ‘stand’ on their own—but are always supported by the reasons for recalling such facts in the first place” (Young, *Stages of Memory*, 98). Young asks us to consider *why* we are doing this work with our students. We must remain acutely aware of the critical and aesthetic relationship between content and form, and recognize that “what we choose to tell, to whom we choose to tell it, and indeed, *how* we choose to tell it, all matter” (Zatzman, 97).

Young’s reflection—that “the most important ‘space of memory’ is not ‘the space in the ground’ or above it but the space between the memorial and the viewer, between the viewer and his or her own memory: the place of the memorial in the viewer’s mind, heart, and conscience” (Young, *Memory’s Edge*, 119)—impacts how I structure my curriculum. The performance of memory, the obligation to witness, and the representation(s) of narratives of identity are critical to my design of arts-education projects.



Artist Trading Cards (ATCs) are miniature artworks meant for exchange. They offer artistic opportunities for response to and reflection on the Holocaust. This ATC responds to the play, *Hana's Suitcase* by Emil Sher. It depicts a drawing of Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (1898–1944), the remarkable Bauhaus artist, who taught children in the Terezín ghetto. The participant created this sketch of Friedl on transparent mylar, evoking Charlotte Salomon's work. Beneath the portrait, the handwritten text suggests the deep impact of Hana and Friedl's narratives on the student.



Will Lammert, Memorial to the Victims of Fascism, Berlin, 1985. Originally designed in 1957 for the Ravensbrück memorial (never installed; known as The Unfinished). Installed in 1985, Große Hamburger Straße, by Mark Lammert. Also known as the Monument to the Deported Jews. Bronze. Photo by Jochen Teufel

Theatre historian Scott Magelssen asks us to consider the position of the audience/viewer not only as receivers of content, but also as cocreators. He cautions against passively consuming historiographic narratives. Literature scholar Adrienne Kertzer argues that “why people attend theatre about historical atrocity and what they do after the performance are what matters” (Kertzer, vii). Consequently, I attend to the extended spaces of performance—to the work that happens before and after seeing a piece—as I shape pedagogical encounters. Through pre- and postshow programs, we help teachers/artists/students address the Shoah’s rupture across generations, audiences, and contexts.

Educational drama and applied theatre offer participants a “framework for responding” (Langer, 12) to the difficult knowledge of the Shoah through real and imagined contexts. Possibilities for designing artistic and educational materials that respond to the Shoah include monologue and scene-study work; movement; poetry; visual arts; artist trading cards; photographs; and artifacts and memorials. Multidirectional and participatory practices—and knowing who is in the classroom—invite

multiple perspectives and offer opportunities for reflection on and creation of their own responses to the Shoah.

These forms of representation engage the lived experiences of participants to support their sense of agency and shared authority in remembering and re-telling the Holocaust through art.

Suggested Reading List:

- Adrienne Kertzer, *My Mother’s Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002).
- Lawrence Langer, ed., *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975).
- Scott Magelssen, *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014).
- James E. Young, *At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of The Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).

- James E. Young, *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016).
- Belarie Zatzman, "Staging History: Aesthetics and the Performance of Memory" in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 95–103.

Natasha Goldman: Overlooked monuments often disclose a commissioning body's wish to obscure information while well-known, provocative memorials point to a community's readiness to address difficult pasts.

When teaching students and teachers (the latter as part of the NEH Summer Seminar for School Teachers, "Teaching the Holocaust through Visual Culture"), I empower students with little historical knowledge to concentrate on what they see, thereby prompting them to interpret details and ask questions. For instance, Charlotte Salmon's *Life or Theatre? (1940–42)* is an autobiographical work of small-scale watercolors that depict the rise of Nazi power and the artist's adolescent anxieties and family suicides. The latter address themes students understand, helping them see Jews not solely as victims, but as people with everyday problems. Micha Ullman's *Bibliothek* (Berlin, 1995) is a small, underground memorial of empty bookshelves and is a respite from horrific, sometimes seductive Holocaust imagery. Will Lammert's *Monument to the Deported Jews* (Berlin, 1957/1985) was originally part of the Ravensbrück concentration camp memorial, but the commissioning body deemed it too "unheroic" for that site. East German art theory and Holocaust memory from the 1950s to the 1980s play vital roles when interpreting this memorial.

I conclude my Holocaust courses with works that demonstrate how the Holocaust matters today. British architect Sir Norman Foster's Reichstag cupola dome (2005) offers a metaphor for transparency and democracy. Hans Haacke's *To the Population* (2000), in the Reichstag's courtyard, converses with the phrase "to the German people," chiseled on the exterior of the Reichstag, pitting the attitudes of those who oppose immigrants, guest workers, and asylum seekers against those who recognize the entire population—citizens and noncitizens—as

worthy of representation.

Such works of art and memorials have the potential to enrich pedagogy about the Holocaust not only in the Art History classroom, but also in literature, film, history, foreign language, or Jewish Studies.

Suggested Reading List:

- Natasha Goldman, *Memory Passages: Holocaust Memorials in the United States and Germany* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020).
- Michael P. Steinberg and Monica Bohm-Duchen, eds., *Reading Charlotte Salomon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).
- Chen Tamir, "Hans Haacke," in *Entry Points: The Vera List Center Field Guide on Art and Social Justice*, no. 1, ed. Carin Kuoni and Chelsea Haines (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 112–17.

Paul Jaskot: Most scholars approach the topic as "the



William Kreis. Soldier's Hall, Berlin, 1938. Photo by Reinhard Schultz. Prisma by Dukas Presseagentur GmbH / Alamy Stock Photo

Holocaust AND art": art is supplemental, not central. How can we teach the Holocaust *through* art? I taught my first "Art & the Holocaust" seminar in 1995, when scholarship from art historians was thin. The literature has proliferated

and now includes contributions on architecture, painting, design, and sculpture.

Research on Holocaust-related art can prompt discussions of Jewish experience and the perpetrator's antisemitic policy in complex relational terms. We can push students to think about both in new ways through the same object, event, or cultural experience.

We can demonstrate such an approach using architect Wilhelm Kreis's Soldiers Hall (begun 1938), planned as part of the rebuilding of Berlin. At first glance, Soldiers Hall seems a typical Nazi building: a monumental neoclassical structure doing what we expect propaganda to do. But why did the perpetrators see this as a culturally positive monument? On the one hand, the massive scale and the eagle over the door reference the Roman Empire, revealing the imperial fantasy that characterized 1938 Germany. On the other, the layout of the building references the Greek Pergamon Altar, signaling ideological notions of racial lineage and superiority. The process of unpacking these references reveals fundamentals of perpetrator ideology—how Nazis thought about imperialism and race in co-equal terms.

The scale of the plan of which the building was a part (one-third of Berlin was to be razed) opens the door to considering Jewish experience. For example, in summer 1938 Albert Speer and his staff developed an antisemitic housing policy to acquire Jewish property for non-Jews displaced by massive site-clearing operations that this and other buildings required. Only in Berlin did Jews register their housing with architects, who used this policy to expedite this project.

Such an analysis reveals the ambivalent history of these objects. They point to the grotesque and inhumane—antisemitism as a racist ideology, as policy and practice experienced by millions of European Jews. They also point to the “positive” role of culture; they show what values perpetrators saw as “good.” Ideology legitimated murder; culture was literally barbaric. Key moments like this point in both directions offering a way to teach an integrated history of the Holocaust through art.

Conclusion

Sarah Cushman: With simple methods and thoughtful planning, monuments, buildings, paintings, and performance can become effective ways to engage students with learning about the Holocaust. The examples above are just some of the ways that instructors can “teach the Holocaust through art.” These examples also illustrate how study of the Holocaust enhances student learning about various Arts and Art History and how those fields and their methodologies contribute to the growth of the field of Holocaust Studies and enrich general understanding of that horrific time.

BARBARA MCCLOSKEY is professor of History of Art at the University of Pittsburgh. Her course, “Art in the Third Reich and Memorialization of the Holocaust,” invites students to study the role of visual culture in identity formation under Nazism.

BELARIE ZATZMAN is associate professor of Theater at York University. She grounds her approach to teaching the Holocaust in Theatre and Performance Studies. She draws upon a range of possibilities for designing artistic and educational materials. Visual culture is inherent to her graduate and undergrad classes.

NATASHA GOLDMAN is research associate in Art History at Bowdoin College. In researching memorials, Goldman uncovers complex, hidden stories and reveals how the Holocaust was understood in different times and locations.

PAUL JASKOT is professor of Art History and Director of the Digital Art History and Visual Culture Research Lab at Duke University.

SARAH CUSHMAN is lecturer in the History Department and director of the Holocaust Educational Foundation of Northwestern University.



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The Profession

From Book to Object and Back Again

Barbara Mann

My forthcoming book, *The Object of Jewish Literature: A Material History*, uses key terms related to materiality as a way of narrating literary history. Its origins may be found in an antiquarian shop in Krakow's Kazimierz neighborhood. While visiting Poland for the first time in 1998, I came across an olivewood-bound photo album from Jerusalem, produced by the A. Lev Kahane Press in the early twentieth century, and likely brought back by a tourist or religious pilgrim. The album contained a collection of cards with color-tinted drawings of holy sites on one side, and pressed flowers on the other. The captions appeared in Hebrew, Russian, English, French, and German. Many of the dried flower petals were remarkably intact, but the Hebrew had been scratched over in pencil on nearly every single page. I knew of the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Crafts, founded in Jerusalem in 1906, and recognized the general style and pedigree. But holding this particular book in my hands, and purchasing it from the owner for 90 zloty (his name was Jacek Barnas, I still have the signed original receipt, about \$50 today, adjusted for inflation), was a foundational moment for me as a scholar, a Jew, and an artist. The experience fueled my sense of the book as a mutable object that travels—among languages, countries, and owners.

Since then, I have wandered in European flea markets filled with prewar detritus, including household items and other personal possessions such as clothing, kitchenware, and toys. Some of this vast material sea is identifiably Jewish—books marked by the Hebrew alphabet, or items marked by their ritual function. Encountering these objects expanded my sense of what material culture has meant for European Jewish life. At the same time, it also hinted at a

The experience fueled my sense of the book as a mutable object that travels—among languages, countries, and owners.

kind of historical tension: so many objects, so few Jews. The gap between the destruction of Jewish life—towns, people, and their stuff—and the enormous amount of leftovers littering Europe has spurred me to consider how materiality has figured in Jewish literary expression. And in order to really understand why materiality matters, it wasn't enough to write a book; I had to make one as well.¹ In recent years I have engaged in hands-on printing and bookmaking, always trying to replicate some of that initial haptic wonder of finding an olivewood photo album that once belonged to someone else.

My *Khad Gadye Pesach Benchers* (2019) is an artist's book inspired by the Russian Jewish artist El Lissitzky's *Khad Gadye* (1919)—an essential book in the history of Yiddish print, the history of modern Jewish literature and—given Lissitzky's stature and influence as an artist, designer, and typographer—possibly the entire trajectory of twentieth-century art. Now that is a lot to put on a book featuring a nonsense song about animals, not even a “real” part of the Haggadah, and often viewed as a kind of add-on, whose melodic concatenation of verses linked in associative style was guaranteed to keep the kids awake. Lissitzky's book is a dazzling amalgam of avant-garde forms and folkloric motifs, a tour-de-force statement of aesthetic and political possibility. My own project is more modest: a single limited edition of ten, enough to share around a family seder. Conceptualizing and creating them, at home and in New York's Center for

The fastener at the bottom allows for a windmill or fan-form that opens to mimic the cyclical quality of the song's violence.

Book Arts, allowed me to experience the physical side of creation—to face and solve design quandries, choosing materials to suit my own artistic aims, while creating books that would be pleasing to hold and easy to read at the end of a long Pesach meal.

I disassembled the components of the pages of Lissitzky's book—the letters, the Yiddish, the Aramaic and the Hebrew; the colored illustrations; the colophon and dust jacket—into their constituent material components, and rejiggered them in collage fashion on each slender *bencher* page. The text itself of the original song appears in progressively larger fonts, which eventually bleed off the page, uncontained. The fastener at the bottom allows for a windmill or fan-form that opens to mimic the cyclical quality of the song's violence. I made the cover using a technique called “blind emboss,” where type is set and paper is run through a letterpress printer without any ink on the roller. It may be read through touch, almost like Braille, enhancing the tactile quality of each *bencher*. I also corrected some of the spelling errors in Lissitzky's book.ⁱⁱ

Making stuff, using my hands to create books and prints, enriches my scholarship. This has been especially the case for my project on materiality and literary history, but I believe it could pertain to other kinds of work as well. For one thing, bookmaking is meditative. It allows for “slow time” to process my research's theoretical frame, while my hands are busy doing something automatic (sewing or gluing a seam, measuring or cutting paper), or experiencing the tactile qualities of various materials—their weight, texture, viscosity, and feel to the touch. I believe these kinds of activities promote the serendipitous connections that are sometimes elusive when focusing directly, more consciously, on the materials of one's research—connections that often prove essential to the work as a whole. Secondly, figuring out how different pieces of the book relate and fit together provides sensory data that become a kind of template for the conceptual frame of my research—allowing me to know what piece should come first and what should follow, what can be cut or deleted altogether, and where it all ends. Endings are especially challenging: How do you know when you are done with a monograph, an article? What is enough and where do you stop? Making physical books—which have a relatively clearly defined beginning,



Barbara Mann. *Khad Gadye Pesach Benchers*, 2019. Mixed media artist book.

middle, and end—has helped me better understand the contours and shape of my own scholarship. And while the finished composition may get sent to the publisher or journal long before I can actually hold it in my hands, the promise of the olivewood album, changing hands and accumulating new meaning over time, remains before me on the desk as I write these words.

BARBARA MANN is professor of Cultural Studies and Hebrew Literature and the Chana Kekst Professor of Jewish Literature at The Jewish Theological Seminary. She is the author of *Space and Place in Jewish Studies* (Rutgers University Press, 2012) and *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* (Stanford University Press, 2006). *The Object of Jewish Literature: A Material History* (Yale University Press, 2022) has been supported by fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

i See my “The Scholar and the Bookmaker: On Encountering the Material Side of Things,” *In geveb* (March 27, 2019), <https://ingeveb.org/blog/the-scholar-and-the-bookmaker>.

ii (cf. Samuel Spinner, “Reading Jewish,” *PMLA* 134., no. 1 (2019): 150–156.)

The Jewish Art Salon: Celebrating and Promoting a Vibrant Jewish Art Community

Yona Verwer

The Jewish Art Salon, founded thirteen years ago and with a home base in New York, is the largest Jewish visual arts organization in the world. Primarily artist-run and numbering 450 members, it is responsible for creating over forty exhibitions in the United States, Europe, and Israel, as well as numerous professional and educational opportunities worldwide. These events explore contemporary Jewish themes related to current issues, reflecting popular interests and broader societal memes.

The Salon believes that contemporary Jewish visual culture is essential to modern Jewish life. Indeed, the visual arts communicate and explore our Jewish history, faith, and practice in a totally unique manner. In light of the fact that Jews have a very ancient and rich visual culture, largely unknown, today's Jewish artists deeply believe that the contribution we make with our artworks enrich and transform Jewish lives today.

As the founder of the Jewish Art Salon, my original intention was to provide a local New York City community for artists to meet and discuss their work. However, from the first meeting, art historians and curators were involved as well. Noted early artist members such as Helène Aylon, Siona Benjamin, Tobi Kahn, Archie Rand, Susan Schwalb, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles helped open doors and remain actively involved.

After its first exhibition and symposium, *Tzelem*, in downtown New York City in 2009, the group quickly attracted national and international attention. Current members reside in the Americas, Israel, Europe, Australia, South Africa, and the Far East. Shifting from a local to a global presence inspired the creation of an active online identity. Our extensive website www.jewishartsalon.org and Facebook group (over 2,700 followers) were created to facilitate member postings and exchanges about exhibitions and artist accomplish-



Second Jerusalem Biennale opening. Artworks from left to right: (1) Interactive Collaboration by Cynthia Beth Rubin and Yona Verwer; (2) artwork by Helène Aylon; (3) artwork by Siona Benjamin.

ments, and as a forum for questions and discussions. We have also created educational programs, connecting Jews with their heritage through art. The Salon recently became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit; this status allows us to apply for grants and be taken more seriously by grantees, as opposed to being under a financial umbrella of another nonprofit, as we were previously.

Membership includes artists from diverse backgrounds: Sephardic, Mizrahi, and Ashkenazic—secular to Haredi—who work in many styles and mediums. From painting and sculpture to conceptual art and new media, the Salon covers a wide range of artistic expressions. Art historian Matthew Baigell explains the organization's purpose well: "The Salon brings together a surprisingly large number of artists who choose to explore their religious and cultural heritage, examine what it means to create art with Jewish content in the contemporary world and, in effect, help create a contemporary Jewish culture."

Cofounders Richard McBee, Joel Silverstein, and I organized the majority of the early exhibitions and panels, with occasional guest curators and volunteers. In recent years the roster of steady curators has been broadened by Goldie Gross, an Art History master's student at New York University, who also introduced a student-membership initiative to involve more young artists and scholars with the Salon's activities.

Exhibitions and related panel discussions include such themes as Feminist Jewish Art; The Consequences of Hate Speech; Spinoza: Marrano of Reason; Jews and Comics; Through Compassionate Eyes: Animal Rights; Passover and Freedom; Contemporary Jewish Narratives; and Dura Europos: An Ancient Site Revisited through Twenty-First-Century Eyes. The Salon was proud to have participated in two Jerusalem Biennials (2015, 2017) as well as the 2019 Miami Art Week. Many of our exhibits are accompanied by catalog publications. All of these events have generated additional programs and resources, and developed lasting partnerships with the international Jewish art community as well as the general public. A number of our members received press exposure through our events, mentioned in *Haaretz*, the *Jerusalem Post*, *Ars Judaica* (an Israel-based academic journal), *Art Criticism* (a US-based academic journal), and many others.

During the COVID-virus lockdown I created a weekly Sunday Open Studios program on the Zoom platform, featuring artists, curators, and other guests. These sessions strengthened bonds between members worldwide. Participants appreciated the opportunity to discover work they could never access otherwise, and to meet others from around the world who engage with the varieties of Jewish experience. The current Zoom art series "After the Flood: ReGenesis," curated by artists Judith Joseph and Dorit Jordan Dotan, features twice-a-month art events that generate lively discussions by dozens of participants.

Currently, the Jewish Art Salon is excited to partner with The Israelite Samaritans Project of the Yeshiva University Center for Israel Studies in the creation of a unique exhibition, *The Samaritans: A Biblical People*, which explores the Samaritans, their complex culture and

religion, and their relationships with Jews, Christians, and Muslims across time. The traveling exhibition opens at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC, in fall 2022 (preceded by pop-up events in New York), will include Jewish contemporary art created by eight of our members. Steven Fine, professor at Yeshiva University, teamed up with Jewish Art Salon leadership to invite specially created contemporary artworks that reflect upon the experience and history of the Samaritan people as seen through Jewish eyes.

In partnership with CARAVAN (an international interfaith arts nonprofit), the Salon is at present working on the exhibition *Genesis: The Beginning of Creativity*, with art from all traditions and faith backgrounds, to be mounted in spring 2023 at the Interchurch Center in New York and at a second venue yet to be determined. Visual artists of all beliefs and philosophies were selected to respond to Creation narratives in the book of Genesis, the Gospel of John, and relevant suras of the Quran, encouraging a conversation between artists of the three major monotheistic faiths, and secular and nondenominational artists as well. The Salon remains ever committed to using texts, commentaries, and culture in the quest for social dialogue between diverse peoples and perspectives.

At our base in the New York area, the Salon continues to organize well-attended and popular salon sessions with international artists and scholars at artist studios, galleries, and museums. Locally and globally, the Jewish Art Salon creates an actual community of kindred spirits—of artists and scholars engaged in Jewish subject matter. We have become an extended family that provides support for continued engagement in Jewish visual creativity.

YONA VERWER is the founding director of the Jewish Art Salon and a Dutch-born, New-York-based multimedia artist whose works explore personal and collective identity, history, *tikkun 'olam*, and *kabbalah*.



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2023-2024 Fellowship Opportunity Jewish Visual Cultures

Studies of visual imagination in Jewish life have exploded in recent years. From the growth of Jewish museums throughout the USA and Europe to the founding of new journals devoted to Jewish art, Jewish visual culture has engaged broad audiences. Scholarly and popular studies, exhibitions and films, have enlightened us on a range of themes in various periods, from the medieval past to the present day. In diverse formats they depict the way Jews and Jewish culture and religion were seen, extending our understanding of the intricate relations between Jews and others. How these portrayals framed images and understanding of Jewish life have added important dimensions to the contexts of Jewish life as a minority throughout history and recently as a majority.

This theme year at the Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies recognizes historical precedents even as it builds upon and departs from them. In the 19th century Jews commissioned and collected art; patronized art and institutions that collected art; served as benefactors of archaeological missions and excavations; and dealt commercially in art of different cultures. Individual, universalist, and integrationist orientations drove Jews' engagement with art. But Jewish art, in all its manifestations, seldom drew their interest and they had little knowledge of what constituted the Jewish visual world prior to the 19th century. Oblivious to what had been produced for centuries in the realm of monuments, manuscripts, synagogue architecture, ephemera, ceremonial art (Judaica), printed books, drawings, and fabrics, they and others remained aloof from how visual culture occupied a significant place in Jewish historical development.

By the 21st century, these attitudes and assumptions had changed radically.

The Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies seeks to explore many facets of Jewish visual imagination. How did Jewish experiences with and attitudes toward the visual intersect with those of the majority populations, and with minority populations in Israel? How did Jewish visibility challenge or coexist with the hallmark of Jewish culture – the literary text? How does visual culture broaden the Jewish narrative? The Frankel Institute theme year on Jewish visual cultures will address these and other questions. The Institute invites applications from senior and junior scholars from a wide range of disciplines, as well as artists and curators, to investigate and explicate Jewish visual cultures from the medieval period to the present.

Applications due November 7, 2022

For more information, and complete application materials go to

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