

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