

Of the Body, In the Body: Torah and Art

An Artists Beit Midrash Exhibition
curated by Judith Joseph

November 2, 2018 - January 6, 2019



Featuring works by

Adrienne Aaronson ▪ Lois Baer Barr
Susan Dickman ▪ Sylvia Dresser ▪ Nessia Frank
Suzanne Horwitz ▪ Dorit Jordan Dotan
Judith Joseph ▪ Rose Kostan-Schwartz
Ruti Modlin ▪ Barbara Shapiro ▪ Marla Snyder
Judy Solomon ▪ Sandy Starkman ▪ Laura Hodes Zacks

Of the Body, In the Body: Torah and Art

The art in this exhibit resulted from an *Artists Beit Midrash*, a course of text study and art discussion at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, with support from the Gertrude Lederman Family Continuing Education program. The class was co-taught by **Judith Joseph** and **Dr. Jane Shapiro**. Judith is on the faculty of the Chicago Botanic Garden and the Art Center Highland Park, where she teaches painting and calligraphy. She is a member of the Midwest Jewish Artists' Lab and organizes the adult study program at Congregation Hakafa. Jane is a local Jewish educator. She is co-founder of Orot: Center for New Jewish Learning and the recipient of the 2017 Covenant Award for excellence in Jewish education.

Using sacred text study as a stepping-off point, the *Beit Midrash* participants studied ideas about the human body in the Bible, and viewed and discussed work by contemporary artists who explore similar concepts. They then went on to create their own works, inspired by and in response to the course discussions. The result is an exhibit in which sixteen artists express their connection with Judaism through paintings, prints, collage, new media, ceramic art, sculpture, fiber art, and poetry.

Adrienne Aaronson
Birthing Body ▪ Hagar
Sara Turning Away From Hagar

Acrylic



After recovering from a life altering illness in my early thirties, my entire being was transformed. I appreciated life and could see the world around me in new and wonderful ways. The grass is greener. Flowers are more fragrant and spectacular. The sky and every imaginable cloud are bluer and more mysterious. And I have an urgency to share my vision of nature's beauty.



My paintings run the gamut from realistic to abstraction. Yet all of them are painted with energy, and a sensitivity to color. Yes, color, and the wonders of the world. Landscapes, flowers, and the human body are my subjects. I hope the viewers of my art will feel my "Joy."

My most significant experience this year was participating in the Artists Beit Midrash. It turned me into a "believer." Studying with other like-minded women is something I haven't done for a long time. I found the leaders, - Jane Shapiro and Judith Joseph - inspiring, patient, and encouraging.

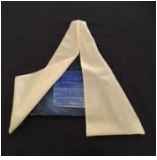


Adrienne Aaronson received a BFA in Art Education from the University of Illinois, Champaign, and through the years has studied extensively with some of the most talented artists in the fields of acrylic and watercolor painting, etching, and mixed media. She has taught art classes in Chicagoland area venues since 1986 and also enjoys teaching individuals privately. She is an active member of the American Jewish Artist Club and enjoys sharing her experience and love of art with fellow members.

Lois Baer Barr

**Hagar in the Tent ▪ Miriam's Drum/Tof Miriam
Ruth is ▪ Songs from the Threshing Floor**

Poetry with mixed media



Hagar in the Tent: Hagar was Sarah's ("Sarai" early in the narrative) Egyptian slave and became a surrogate mother when Sarai could not conceive. After she got pregnant, Hagar became insolent and Sarai punished her causing the concubine to flee. An angel told Hagar to go back as she would have Avram's son and that son would found a nation (Islam). Abraham's tent holds prophecy and portents; yet it is not big enough for Hagar and Ishmael. Please, open the tent door to read the poem.

Miriam's Drum/Tof Miriam: I imagined all Miriam had endured in body and spirit from Moses's birth to the Ten Plagues, to the Exodus with the Egyptians on chariots pursuing the Jews, to the safe crossing of the Sea of Reeds and the death of the pursuers.



Ruth is: The Moabite widow Ruth famously says to her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi, "Do not entreat me to leave thee... Whither thou goest, I shall go ... thy people shall be my people and thy God my God." When the two destitute women return to Bethlehem after a famine, Naomi instructs her daughter-in-law to glean from the corners of the field of her late husband's kinsman named Boaz. Boaz marries Ruth and their offspring is Obed whose son was Jesse who was father to King David. For Christians, Jesus is a descendent of David. Conflating the image of the swollen grain of barley with Ruth's pregnancy gave shape to this poem. Thanks to **Judy Solomon** for collaborating once again.

Songs from the Threshing Floor: Boaz and Ruth gather and are gathered. According to Midrash, Boaz died the day after he married the Moabite woman.



Lois Baer Barr (continued)

An emerita professor of Spanish at Lake Forest College and a literacy tutor at the Waukegan Public, **Lois Baer Barr** has published fiction, poetry, memoir and critical essays here and abroad. Her poetry chapbook won *Poetica's* 2013 Chapbook Contest and her fiction chapbook, *Lope de Vega's Daughter* is forthcoming from Red Bird Press.

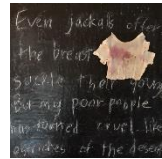
Susan Dickman

Lamentations I ▪ *Lamentations II*

Encaustic, oil stick, crayon, salt, wire



The topic of the Book of Lamentations is exile and is widely viewed as a metaphor for a Jerusalem whose children have been lost or stolen. My series, "Lamentations," takes its title to consider the forced separations at the border between the United States and Mexico. In such separations, the body of the grieving mother is subdued by physical and psychic violence, a cruel subversion of the natural order. Days, weeks, and months pass with only echoes of the body—a child's t-shirt, shoes, or jeans—relics of those taken away.



Susan Dickman is an artist, writer, teacher and founding member of the Jewish Artists Collective of Chicago. She has exhibited work in group shows at the Janice Charach Gallery in Michigan, The Friedman House, Chicago, Spertus Institute of Jewish Learning, the Evanston Art Center, the Art Center Highland Park, the Bridgeport Arts Center, and Morpho Gallery. An Illinois Arts Council Award recipient, she has published poetry, fiction, and essays in *Intellectual Refuge*, *Best of the Best American Poetry*, *Lilith*, *Zocalo Public Square*, *Brain*, *Child*, *Left Hooks*, and *Jewish Fiction*. Her encaustic piece, "Letter to the Future Nation-State," will appear in the group show this March in Amsterdam, *Spinoza: Marrano of Reason*.

Sylvia Dresser

Venus of Willendorf Contemplates Her Role in Today's World

Knitted and crocheted wool yarn and polyester fiber stuffing



The Venus of Willendorf figurine was found on the banks of the Danube in the early 1900's, and is thought to date from 30,000 BCE. At the time, the fertility or mother goddess figurine certainly depicted the primary role of women in society. It seemed to me a stark contrast to the role of women today, and the many conversations that are currently going on about exactly that topic.

Sylvia Dresser has held fiber in her hands since she was a child, learning to knit, crochet and embroider from her grandmother. She continues to learn new techniques and seeks out ways to express concepts using a variety of materials.

Suzanne Horwitz *Burden*

Graphite on cardboard



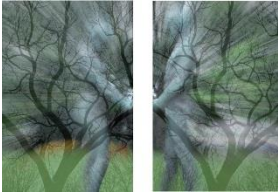
Almost every aspect of daily life in ancient Israel involved water: agriculture, animal care, cooking, bathing and hydration. Young women typically had the daily chore of drawing water from wells to supply the household. Today, around the world, 2.1 billion people are without access to clean water. Just as in ancient times, the water collecting task remains a job for women and girls, who often trek long distances to get water to meet their families' basic needs. The time demands are enormous. They travel to wells or pumps only to wait in line, and then carry heavy loads (40-100 lbs), often several times a day. These heavy loads carried over uneven terrain can result in injuries and risks to pregnancy. Fetching water can also be dangerous with conflicts at water points and the danger of physical or sexual assault. The aftereffect of this burdensome task is that it prevents many girls from being able to go to school regularly, and women lose opportunities for education, employment, leisure or even sleep. This image of a bare female back with a well is drawn on a cardboard mannequin used for storing formal dresses after cleaning. I drew this back on the front of the form, obscuring the form. Using a disposable medium reflects many societies' view of women and their work.

Suzanne Horwitz is a second generation artist focusing on viewer-object orientation, the implied use of materials and social-cultural commentary. She has produced a diverse body of sculpture, ranging from intimate portraits to large installations. Her works earned numerous awards, and have been exhibited in various venues. Her work is in the collections of both corporations and private collections. Suzanne was selected to be a Fellow of the Covenant at Spertus Institute and she is on the faculty of the Art Center Highland Park and the Evanston Arts Center. She received a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Michigan, studied drawing and sculpture at the Art Students League of New York, and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Dorit Jordan Dotan

Eve & Adam

New media



Eve and Adam were created together as one. But outside forces cut them in half; separated them artificially. How many more thousands of years will it take for them to re-connect as equals? Eye to eye, hand to hand, whole.

Dorit Jordan Dotan, Israeli-German multidisciplinary artist, lives and works in Chicago. Her work often expresses her social/political views, and calls attention to cultural issues. She is a long-time participant in many movements for social change, and is active in the areas of peace, co-existence, women's issues and human and animal rights. Her role as a documentary photographer and graphic designer has brought her images to the wider international and local community and media.

Her work has been exhibited in New York, Berlin, Chicago, Haifa, Jerusalem, and around the US. Dorit participated in the Jerusalem Biennale in 2015 and 2016. In 2017 she curated an exhibition about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the Evanston Art Center.

View Dorit Jordan Dotan's work here: www.doritjordan.com

Judith Joseph

Tied To Life

Woodblock steamroller print, embellished with embroidery



Tied To Life was inspired by my 91-year-old mother. In recent years her active life has been limited by physical frailty, memory loss and the passing of her friends and siblings. She has been a prolific crafter her entire life; creating exquisite and complex quilts, knitted afghans and sweaters, crocheted garments and needlepoint tapestries. She still works on needlepoint, and as I see her working with her needle and yarn, I admire her tenacity and will to create. Her advancing age makes me contemplate her mortality, and my own. The urge to create ties us both to life, and to each other, in loving understanding. I printed ***Tied To Life*** at a steamroller printing event at UW-Manitowoc in July 2018. I rolled it up with ink, placed it on the ground, covered it with muslin and a steamroller drove over it.

Artist **Judith Joseph's** paintings, woodblock prints and calligraphy (particularly *ketubot*) are in numerous public and private collections. She exhibits widely across the U.S. and Canada, and two of her woodblock prints will be shown in an international exhibit about Spinoza in Amsterdam in 2019. Judith is a two-time recipient of the Illinois Arts Council Fellowship Award. She is a Fellow Member of the Jewish Art Salon, the largest international artists' organization for contemporary Jewish visual art. She was one of twelve artists selected for the inaugural cohort of the Midwest Jewish Artists Lab for an exhibit at the Spertus Institute. She is on the art faculty at the Chicago Botanic Garden and the Art Center Highland Park. With Jane Shapiro, she has co-taught the Artists Beit Midrash since 2014. She is passionate about helping people explore and express their Jewish heritage through art.

Rose Kostan-Schwartz

Kirsten Walks ▪ We Get the Job Done

Collage



Kirsten walked with elephants in Thailand. Soon after, she was diagnosed with cancer. She was a true inspiration: she lived fully and with spirit the last years of her life. In spite of her pain she was full of laughter and joy, loving her children fiercely, and always caring about what others were doing in their lives. I share her knowledge with my

visionary sisters: Miriam, Paula and Ellen.

Women throughout the centuries have been strong and competent. Many women who served during World War II got little recognition. This image shows the WACs arriving in France in September of 1944. After serving, so many women returned to being homemakers, because the jobs were given back to the men.

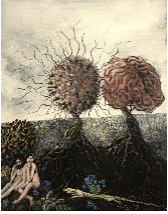


Rose Kostan-Schwartz became an artist when she was nine. When other kids played outside, she was told to play quietly...indoors. The risk of a heart condition often made her feel different from others. Today, she owns her history without the shame of feeling different; loves her ability to express herself openly. Rose's collages are made with recycled magazines. She has found herself drawn to creating images of strong women. She loves using materials that have second uses, like magazines.

Ruti Modlin

The Garden

Mixed media on canvas



This piece depicts Elohim's two coveted trees in the Garden of Eden – the tree of knowledge as a human brain, the tree of life as conception on a cellular level. Adam and Eve are seen reposing in the foreground in the shadow of the trees, while a four-legged snake is lurking.

Ruti Modlin is an independent artist who lives and works in Highland Park, Illinois. A *sabra*, she grew up in Holland, Italy and Belgium for her first 14 years, travelling with her family. After serving in the Israel Defense Forces, she studied Graphic Design and Fine Art at the Johannesburg Wits Technikon, South Africa, where she started a family until immigrating to the United States in 1998. Ruti has solo and group shows locally, nationally and internationally, owing her initial breakthroughs to the ever encouraging artist Judith Joseph. Many of her paintings have been sold to private collectors. Her public commission is on permanent display on Central Avenue, Highland Park. She's a Board member at the women's ARC Gallery & Educational Foundation in West Town, Chicago. She teaches classes at the Art Center Highland Park and is part of Chicago Dialogue.

Barbara Shapiro

Self Portrait with Pelvis ▪ Bones

Oil on canvas



Bones connect me to my personal history and to my Jewish roots. The pelvis has been a recurrent theme in my paintings for 35 years. Besides being visually beautiful to me, the pelvis becomes a metaphor for creativity



and creation, femininity and birth.

Barbara Shapiro has been drawing and painting her whole adult life. She received a degree in art history (minor in studio art) from Barat College in 1985. She has exhibited locally at the College of Lake County, the Evanston Library, and the Art Center Highland Park. Barbara lives in Deerfield with her husband, Ben. To her great pleasure, her children and five grandchildren reside locally and are an integral part of her life.

Marla Snyder

Fruit of the Womb

Mixed Media - gouache, pen & ink



***Fruit of the Womb** speaks to the 'thorns and thistles' from childbirth to the end of life. As we discussed in our seminar, learning to navigate the difficult choices and life's struggles makes us stronger.*

Marla Snyder worked as a graphic artist for 30 years before turning her attention to teaching. She is now retired from her second career as Studio Art teacher at Rochelle Zell Jewish High School but is actively teaching adults in the north shore community.

Judy Solomon

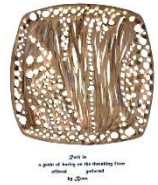
The Guarded Womb ▪ *Ruth is* ▪ *Ruth (womb offering)*

Ceramic



The Guarded Womb is a subtle expression of anger over patriarchy. This is a subject that I will now be able to explore visually because of this summer's theme. I have always felt that my low, round bowls have a womblike quality. Adding the treelike towering cylinders is a way to voice my anger about the threatening and sinister now overt behavior and direction that the government is going.

Ruth is is a collaboration with **Lois Baer Barr** and her poem with the same name. I wanted to present a plate covered with grains in various stages of being gathered and threshed that would represent Ruth's efforts as she chose life with Naomi and the Jewish people.



Ruth (womb offering) is my offering of peace to a biblical character and her unique place in our story and family.

Judy Solomon is a retired art teacher who has been working exclusively in ceramics since 2011. She has attended all 5 years of the Artists Beit Midrash at Beth El. This year even more than ever, the theme has been a challenge to stretch and learn more about herself and her medium as she searches for connections.

Sandy Starkman

First Bodies ▪ Birthing Bodies

Working Bodies ▪ Listening Bodies

Quilts



This fifth year of participating in the Artists Beit Midrash brought the need for me to make a political statement with my quilts. Perhaps it was a combination of the subject matter and the times, as I have never been moved to mix my feelings on these topics with my Artists Beit Midrash quilts.



Sandy Starkman of Highland Park doesn't yet consider herself an artist, but she thoroughly enjoyed being part of the Artist's Beit Midrash the past five years at NSS Beth El. She is proud to have put this program together with Jane and Judith after hearing about the original New York City Artists' Beit Midrash. Her first quilt was published in the 2009-10 edition of ***East on Central Journal of Arts and Letters***. She wishes she had more time to make quilts and other art!

Laura Hodes Zacks

Whose Sleeves? My Father's Bris

Bris outfit and poem



My poem plays off the Japanese concept of tagasode byobu which Judith Joseph presented to our Artists Beit Midrash one day; the phrase “tagasode byobu” means “Whose sleeves,” and in the late nineteenth century the idea inspired Japanese artists to create paintings of clothing stands from which hung fancy garments. In some of these paintings, the figures have disappeared, leaving only a hint of their former presence amid the draped garments, in the same way that the scent of a loved one, whether they have just left the room, or left the living, remains in their discarded clothes. On display is the actual outfit worn by my father, of blessed memory, Meyer Hodes, at his bris in Cape Town, South Africa on January 26, 1934, which inspired this poem.

Laura Hodes Zacks writes frequently for the arts and culture section of *The Forward*. A chapter of her book-in-progress, *Arrivals and Departures*, was recently published in the Fall 2018 issue of *Lilith* magazine.

**Additional participants in the
2018 Artists Beit Midrash were:**

**Trudy Isbitz Brodsky
Wynne Harrison
Arlyn Miller
Gili Sherman**

The Rissman Kol Ami Collection is a unique collection of Jewish art, artifacts and ritual objects. In addition to preserving significant objects for posterity, the museum seeks to develop programs and exhibitions that are designed to educate the congregation and promote an appreciation for works of Judaica.

North Suburban Synagogue

Beth El

בית כנסת בית אל

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