

The Stories We Tell: Narrative in the Torah and in Art

An Artists Beit Midrash Exhibition
curated by Judith Joseph

November 8, 2019 - January 5, 2020



Charlotte Kaplan



Barbara Shapiro

Featuring works by

Adrienne Aaronson ▪ Lois Baer Barr ▪ Dorit Jordan Dotan
Suzanne Horwitz ▪ Judith Joseph ▪ Andrea Kamen
Charlotte Kaplan ▪ Rose Kostan-Schwartz
Ricki Marks ▪ Susan Moss ▪ Barbara Shapiro
Marla Snyder ▪ Judy Solomon ▪ Sandy Starkman
Erica Weisz ▪ Laura Hodes Zacks

The Stories We Tell: Narrative in the Torah and in 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 Jewish Artists Collective Chicago 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 narrative in the Torah and in art, 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 personal narratives through multiple media.

Adrienne Aaronson

Preschool Seder • I Love the Sun

Acrylic on canvas



Passover is one of the four Jewish New Years. It is that special holiday that is intergenerational. The Passover Seder is a time when young and old celebrate and learn together. The patriarch usually leads the Seder, while the children participate in reciting the four questions and searching for the afikomen. This preschool Seder is special. You can see my four year old grandson Adam, proudly participating, while his Great Grandmother, Mommy Flo, looks proudly on. It was to be her last.

I do, really do love the warmth of the sun on my body. I have been lucky to be dark complected, so I haven't had to worry about burning. Now as an adult I realize all the dangers of sun exposure. I don't want to get skin cancer. (But on July 11 of this year I did the unthinkable: I threw on a polyester cover-up and fell asleep in the sun resulting in a 2nd degree burn on my abdomen.) I learned my lesson.



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

Two Forbears

Papier maché



Dad's Great Aunt Sadie Baer said our ancestors came from Spain, but I never asked her for details. My mother's family is from Bialystok, and the Baers, who came to Kentucky right before 1900, also came from what is now Poland. Since I've taught Spanish for forty-eight years, and I'm currently studying flamenco, I want to believe my father's aunt was right. For the sake of this project, I had a DNA test; however, the results were ambiguous. I'm 99% European Jewish and the map they sent included a large swathe of Europe as well as the northern half of Spain. As I struggled to build these two women, I realized the piece is also about a struggle between the bailaora in me and the aging woman. Am I the lithe dancer with the key to her home in Castille or the old lady at the kiddush, a founding member of Louisville's Hadassah?

An emerita professor of Spanish at Lake Forest College, a literacy tutor and reading buddy, **Lois Baer Barr** has published fiction, poetry, memoir and literary criticism in English and Spanish. Her poetry chapbook won *Poetica's* 2013 Chapbook Contest, and her fiction chapbook, *Lope de Vega's Daughter* is available at Red Bird Chapbooks.

Dorit Jordan Dotan

HomeBound: Shanghai Ghetto ▪ Rip in Time

Mixed media



My grandmother fled Vienna as a teenager, living in the Shanghai Ghetto for eleven years. Twenty thousand people were cut off from the rest of the world, had no passports, no nationality outside of the identity of “refugee,” yet they established a community, a home and a sense of cohesiveness. My mother was born there, and the end of World War II found them in Palestine. Where was home? Who were natives? The thorny weeds of Haifa were more native than my mother and grandmother. For generations, my family has not freely chosen where home is. The fear of losing one’s home has been passed down through my family to me, where the fear is still real. Can you really grow simply where you are planted, and call it home?

Images in my work connect layers of my family’s history, with the temporary Home as central to the dialog between past and present. An original map of 1938’s Shanghai Ghetto is integrated with the wilderness of Haifa’s Mount Carmel, where my family created their new home (Vienna-Shanghai-Haifa). The landscape with the native dandelions symbolizes the new settlement and spreading new seeds, new generations in the new land.

In the case of “Rip in Time,” a traditional Chinese rickshaw from 1938 is seen through the gap of a present-day apartment building, 2016.



Dorit Jordan Dotan lives and works in Chicago.

She is a Fellow with the Jewish Art Salon, and with the Artist’s Lab of Spertus. Her work has been exhibited in Israel and around the world. In recent years she has exhibited often in the Hebrew Union College Museum in New York, in a continuing process of creating modern Jewish art. Dorit has participated in the 2nd Jerusalem Biennale of Jewish Art. She is currently working on curating an exhibition during her artist residency in Berlin in 2020.

Suzanne Horwitz

Reconfigure Bas-Relief and Drawing

Fiberglass on acrylic and graphite on paper



As a sculptor, I have completed installations, figurative commissions, plus conceptual work. My art employs viewer-object orientation, historic meaning, and implied use of materials to create socio-cultural commentary. Artistically, faces and body parts are my vehicles of expression. Recently, I have been exploring the concept of fragmentation in bas-relief format. The reconfigured features representing our fungibility may collide, intersect, extrude, repel or conceal one another. In my work, abstract forms and representative features though disconnected and separated from each other, are anchored together by line and composition.

I have chosen the relief mode for several reasons. First, as a sculptural format it allows pictorial composition, enabling me to explore the boundaries between painting and sculpture. Also, it permits me to carve, cut, sculpt, and shape features from a surface without the limitations of creating a recognizable three-dimensional object. Finally, this format mirrors the concept of fragmentation because sculpturally it is not possible to represent a whole object, but only one view.



Suzanne Horwitz is a second-generation artist who has produced a diverse body of sculpture, ranging from intimate portraits to large installations and public sculpture. Horwitz's works earned numerous awards, and have been exhibited in various venues. Her work is in corporate and private collections, and is represented in the newly published book, *CAST: Art and Objects Made using Humanity's Most Transformative Process*, from Schiffer Publishing. She received a Bachelor of Science 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. Horwitz is on the faculty of The Art Center of Highland Park and the Evanston Art Center.

Judith Joseph

Marie Antoinette Visits the Border

Mylar “shock” blankets, digitally printed decals, barbed wire, manikin, wig



A common sight in photos of detainment centers and refugee camps is the shiny mylar “shock” blanket given to refugees and immigrants. Light and cheap, it offers thermal insulation but little comfort, especially in over-air-conditioned cement holding pens. It is a high tech product of the NASA space program. To me, it represents technological achievement and moral failure. I used this material to fashion a gown in the style of Marie Antoinette, the icon of privileged insensitivity.

Artist **Judith Joseph’s** paintings, woodblock prints and calligraphy (*ketubot*) are in numerous public and private collections. She exhibits widely, and currently has work at Woman-Made Gallery in Chicago and the Oranjekerk gallery in Amsterdam, Netherlands. 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. Judith 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.

Andrea Kamen

The Shadow of a Walk

Photograph



At twilight, we walk. As we move across our brick driveway and slowly turn left on the sidewalk, the conversation commences. He discusses the day's adventures, while teaching me a little calculus or quizzing me on competition statistics. But, the shadow of our walk tells a bigger story. While our personal details are not displayed, our motions and expressions are boldly projected. Just as our personalities are unique, so are our shadows. The walks continue.

When I first embarked on taking photographs, the ability to capture family memories excited me - my daughter with spaghetti sauce splashed over her face, my son playing with his favorite matchbox car. Then, family adventures encompassed my images – an afternoon exploring Amsterdam, a walk on the Great Wall of China, a stroll through the medieval streets of Lisbon. I cherish these photographs and constantly peruse through scrapbooks, reliving the memories they evoke. When I finally switched my camera off Auto and initiated my study of the photography, I realized who I truly was as a photographer and found my voice. I started to visualize all the scenes in my daily life as narratives, infusing my compositions with emotions and mood, conveying feelings of happiness, calmness, excitement, sadness, and even fear. My photographic journey continues. I am no longer encased by the constraints of the Auto feature.

Andrea Kamen is an avid photographer. In 2017, she earned a Fine Art Focus on Photography Certificate of Merit from the Chicago Botanic Garden and is currently working towards her Master's certification. Andrea's photos have been displayed at the Chicago Botanic Garden, Glencoe Festival of Arts and Black Box Gallery.

Charlotte Kaplan

God's Enduring Creation

Watercolor

Leaving Egypt to the Promised Land

New media



My great grandfather made button holes for the Russian Army in the late 1800's. My great Aunt, a seamstress, was paid to see Hollywood movies, and then create particular outfits of the "stars" of the 20's, 30's, and 40's for her clients. My mother could sew anything, and got rave reviews! I created a unique "knotted technique" using fabric, in my fiber artwork. Each piece has warmth and texture, and is enjoyable to view! My clients give me their cherished fabric from clothes or upholstery to incorporate into a memorable custom piece.

My watercolor is part of my ongoing artistic creations. Our Jewish history is enriched by the stories from the Torah. We learn wisdom, love, morals and character.



Charlotte Kaplan is a retired Graphic Artist/Art Director and freelancer. She worked in the corporate world, creating and revamping corporate identities, signage, logos, exhibitions, and business forms.

Rose Kostan-Schwartz

Howard Street 1 ▪ Howard Street 2

Collage



As a 14-year-old girl, my parents allowed me to take a class at the Art Institute. On my own, I'd take a bus to the Howard Street El and as I sat on the train, I loved looking out of the windows. Sometimes the buildings were really close to the train and as they sped by, I made up all kinds of stories looking in those windows. I use my papers to create a glimpse into the lives in those apartments. Perhaps this was a morning coffee with thoughts of what the sunny day might offer.

Riding the train above ground then going deep into the subway on my way to art class, I loved making up stories about the people living in the apartment buildings that came right up to the elevated tracks of The Loop—sometimes watching the front cars make the curving turns, more often taking in all of the apartment windows that told the stories of those living there. This dog had a comfy chair for his daily naps.



Rose Kostan-Schwartz became an artist at the age of nine. While other kids played outside, she was told to play quietly indoors. The diagnosis was Sydenham Coreia which caused loss of dexterity – inability to tie her shoes, write her name, walk without problems and speak without slurring. Rose was hospitalized on the far south side of Chicago, far from her home in Skokie. In those times, parents weren't allowed to stay with their child. "I've realized that my childhood wasn't typical. It was drawing that gave me peace. It allowed me to tell stories, draw famous people and eventually helped the pediatrician gauge my improvement. To this day, I love art and give back by volunteering with a group called Art Impact Project, a non-profit that partners with schools, behavioral and mental health facilities and community support groups by providing art therapy projects with the mission of enhancing emotional wellness through creative expression."

Ricki Marks

Family Treasures

Beaded jewelry, knitting, and family heirlooms



Our family treasures are much more than adornments and objects. Rather, they are the framework for the narratives of our lives. And so, these are some of mine. My display is an integration of family treasures that I have accumulated throughout my life combined with my love of knitting and beading. Both the black knitted cowl and the black bead crochet

bracelet incorporate pins that belonged to my grandmother. The 12-strand beaded lariat constructed with seed beads was a piece I made for my aunt many years ago. It was returned to me after she passed away. Also included in my display is a jewelry box and a paint-by-number that were gifts from my grandfather in the 1950s. Each of these treasures brings back precious memories, occasions and narratives that have occurred throughout my life. They are representative of the family who shaped me to be who I am. I was reminded of the importance of my narratives as I studied with my Beit Midrash class. I am honored to share just a few in this display.

Ricki Marks always liked to “make things.” As a child she learned to do paint-by-numbers with her maternal grandfather and after dinner on Friday nights learned to crochet with her paternal grandmother. From her mother she learned to knit and do needlepoint. As an adult Ricki continued knitting and developed an interest in beads in the 1990’s, taking classes from a wonderful bead artist. The joy of “making things” resulted in requests to sell her beaded jewelry and knitted projects. More recently she has taken classes in both painting and calligraphy and is thrilled that her granddaughter also loves to “make things.”

Susan Moss

B'reishit

Calligraphy on watercolor



“B’reishit” is based on verses from the book of Genesis by the same name. I have had the honor of reading on the bima from sacred texts two dozen times since my 2015 adult bat mitzvah at Congregation B’nai Jehoshua Beth

Elohim. Among the portions that I have chanted is B’reishit. The story that light and beauty were created from darkness and chaos is compelling to me and is implicit in my piece. It is my profound hope that contemporary manifestations of תהו ובהו (tohu vavohu) – those resulting in our bewildering perceptions of waste, vulgarity, injustice, environmental assault, erosion of values, and moral emptiness – will in my remaining lifetime be transformed by caring human creators of a brighter, more humane world.

Susan Moss is a retired LCSW and, previously, a college textbook developmental editor who attended her first Artists Beit Midrash at Beth El in 2019.

Barbara Shapiro

Kaddish ~ קַדִּיֵּשׁ

Watercolor and collage



My history of personal loss connects me to my Jewish roots. The Kaddish, the Jewish prayer of mourning, does not mention death but rather sanctifies God and life. It is, for me, a spiritual connection to my lost loved ones and a prayer of hope.

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

Chicken Soup: a parable

Mixed media and found objects



This piece is a tribute to my mother, Barbara Goldfarb Mills who taught in Beth El's Steinberg Pre-School for nearly 20 years in the 1960's and 1970's. Just being in the building conjures up memories. She had many struggles in her life but still managed to make chicken soup and take care of her children. Several years ago, she gave me her soup pot and I put it in my basement choosing to use my "better" pots. Painting it for this project was inspired by the seminar. I used an actual photo of my mother's hand to represent the chicken and her loving hand. I wrote the parable after much reflection.

Marla Snyder was the Studio Art teacher at Rochelle Zell/Chicagoland Jewish High School for 17 years. She has been involved with the Artists Beit Midrash for four years and continues to teach in her home and at The Art Center in Highland Park and The Women's Exchange. Marla also teaches her signature classes "Watercolor /Drawing for Those Who Don't Think They Can" aboard cruise ships and at resorts.

Judy Solomon

Memorial for My Brother Carl

Weaving and found objects



“Memorial for my Brother Carl” is a concept that I have been carrying with me since our Artists Beit Midrash theme of two summers ago: Family Relationships. At that time, the image of broken dishes came to me as a metaphor for his sudden, untimely death at 57. Although I pursued a different project that year, I felt that I needed to communicate that vision. This year’s emphasis on conceptual art strengthened my

skills of observation, and a second element appeared to me, a weaving representing his creative endeavors. I could immediately see the finished project before me synthesizing those two elements. Gathering materials for the weaving from things that I had in the house was cathartic, letting me relive our relationship and make this a memorial to him.

Judy Solomon’s art focus is ceramics, but she returned to weaving for this year’s project. She is a core member of Space 900 Artists Collective in Evanston where she now shows her work regularly. She has attended all six years of the Artists Beit Midrash. She holds an MFA (Printmaking) from Temple University Tyler School of Art, and has taught art in the Philadelphia and Highland Park schools.

Sandy Starkman

The Family That Nests Together: My Ancestors and Their Stories

Photos and mixed media with wooden Russian nesting dolls



I am the tallest doll, as my ancestors are a part of me. The larger ones had direct impact on me until their deaths. I have their DNA, values, language, history, strengths, etc. The stories and narratives I have heard from and/or about these

ancestors have been instrumental in forming my identity, along with my study of Jewish texts since childhood and my extensive secular education. My ancestors had sparse time, inclination or ability to search for their own personal identity. Tragically, many were too busy surviving pogroms and persecution. Making a living was their main goal until my family was established in Chicago and knew they wouldn't starve or be murdered. Their stories includes trauma, dispersion, strength, healing, and creativity.

My family was created and driven by Genesis 12:1- ". . . Lech L'cha . . . leave the house of your father. . ." and Deut. 26:5- "My father was a wandering Aramean. . ." My family exists because they left those homes and wandered.

Sandy Starkman has been a member of NSS Beth El since 1982. She is proud to be a "founder" of the Beth El Artists Beit Midrash along with Jane Shapiro and Judith Joseph. Sandy is an experienced seamstress, intermediate quilter, amateur photographer, and creative cook and baker. Her first quilt was published in *East on Central*. She enjoys Hebrew text study and is an admirer of art, especially glass, textiles, photographs and ceramics. She doesn't consider herself an artist quite yet!

Erica Weisz

Gene Pool

Water color, ink, mixed media, and story



As a storyteller, I illustrate the everyday moments of childhood in watercolor, ink, and mixed media, exploring the mundane, and uncovering the unexpected. My newest children's book, "Gene Pool," looks at family

history from the perspective of a young child, who struggles to identify with his name. A name is the first way you introduce yourself, your signature, how somebody else identifies you, how someone calls your attention: it all starts with a single label of a name. But what happens when you, yourself, do not identify with your given name? "Gene Pool" explores the personal journey to discovering the significance of a name, what it means to search deeply into who you are, and to find out what connects you to your past.

Erica Weisz is an author, illustrator and the co-founder of the children's book publishing house, Trism Books. Her own love of storytelling has grown into helping others find their voice to share within the world. Erica visits schools, libraries, and community centers, leading writing and illustrating workshops for youth, as well as adults.

Laura Hodes Zacks

Mezuzah Tracing ▪ *Loss on an Evanston Bench*

Photography



In my writing I am interested in how experiences of loss and trauma, as well as memory, work their way through the generations. I have been working on a novel, “Arrivals and Departures,” on these themes. Inspired by this year's Artists Beit Midrash, in these photographic images I am interested in this same interplay of memory and loss and how one can see the narrative of loss and trauma and memory at work on the everyday surfaces of buildings and things. In 2015 I wrote a piece for the Forward about an artist couple, Helena Czernek and Aleksander Prugar, who search for traces of mezuzas on Jewish homes in Poland that were abandoned or destroyed during the Holocaust. These artists then crafted bronze casts of these empty hollows which in turn became new mezuzahs, many of which have been commissioned by the relatives of Polish Jews who had to flee their homes or were murdered. Their project inspired my photo, Mezuzah Tracing, of the markings left behind by a mezuzah at a north suburban home.

In 2016 I wrote a review for the Forward of an exhibit of Aaron Siskind's photography at the Art Institute. In writing the review I became familiar with the work of this Chicago Jewish abstract expressionist artist, and I was taken with his obsession with the surfaces of things, with peeling and fading paint, and particularly with writing on walls, and how he invested the inanimate with pathos. His work inspired my photo, “Loss on an Evanston Bench.”



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 published in the Fall 2018 issue of *Lilith* magazine.

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

**Trudy Isbitz Brodsky
Sylvia Dresser
Nessia Frank**

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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