

The Rissman Family Kol Ami Museum 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.

Artwork from the *Fountain of Gardens* exhibit is available for purchase. Contact Rachel Kamin at rkamin@nssbethel.org or 847/432-8900 x 242 for more information.

*North Suburban
Synagogue*
Beth El
בית כנסת בית אל



Artist Statement



Judith Joseph uses the traditional Jewish marriage contract (*ketubah*) as a vehicle to explore the beauty of letters and narrative illustration. Her hand-lettered, intricately painted works carry the seeds of historic *ketubot* while creating new, contemporary expressions of this art form.

Knowing that her *ketubot* become part of a family story, Joseph is mindful of the life span of a work of art. She packs every piece with detailed imagery and varied nuances of painting, with a mind to creating a work that will bring both immediate pleasure and sustained impact. Her goal is to elicit a gasp of pleasure upon first viewing, and also to have people see new little surprises years later, when they're not even looking for them. In a marriage, people will grow up and change, and the *ketubah* must hold up as an interesting, subtly complex work.

Joseph combines ancient techniques and modern media in her *ketubot* and paintings. Her favorite medium is *egg tempera*, a paint she mixes herself from fresh egg yolks and pure pigments, in the manner of medieval and renaissance artists. A painstaking technique, tempera provides intense, permanent color, exquisite detail and a perfect marriage with hand-written text in ink.



Joseph's love of detail, color and pattern is present in all her work – from her most traditional, ornamental works, to representational illustration and abstract styles. From the fractal pattern of a fiddle-head fern to a sunset on the Chicago skyline, the complexity of nature and the buzz of human life is present.

The Amulet Painting Series is inspired by the evil-eye amulet (*Hamsa*) found in North African and Mediterranean countries. Joseph rings the symbol with the names of Jewish guardian angels (Raphael, Gabriel, Uriel, et al.), and personalizes the imagery within, akin to her illustrated *ketubot*.

Ketubot



For many centuries the *ketubah* has been an integral part of Jewish marriages. This document records the bridegroom's financial and other obligations toward his bride. Ever since the Talmudic era – the period in which the text of the *ketubah* was formulated and crystallized – Rabbinic authorities have attributed extreme importance to this marriage document for a proper consummation of marriage. Not only was it decreed that the bridegroom is forbidden to cohabit with his bride following the wedding without having a *ketubah* written and delivered to her before marriage, but, according to Rabbi Meir (second century C.E.), even after they are married, “it is forbidden for the husband to live with his wife without a *ketubah* even for one hour.” Consequently, for nearly two millennia, the *ketubah* has been in the home of every married Jew, whether wealthy or poor, whether scholar or layman, whether living in the West under Christian governments or in the East under Muslim rule.

While rare examples of *ketubot* from the second half of the nineteenth century were hand decorated, most American *ketubot* were printed on standard, small sheets, which at times were accompanied by miniature, printed pictures of wedding scenes. However, during the late 1960s, young couples asked friends with artistic talents to design their *ketubot* for them. By the 1970s, this custom had spread, and with the growing market for custom-designed *ketubot*, both scribes and artists were called on professionally to carry out such commissions.



(from *Ketubbah* by Shalom Sabar)

Hamsa



A symbol used extensively in North African and Middle Eastern Jewish communities, but not in Ashkenazi ones, is the *hamsa* – “five” – the open palm of the hand warding off the evil eye. The “Hand of Fatima” is a favorite Muslim talisman that passed into Jewish practice. In practical kabbalistic lore, the number five (*heh*) ה, which stands for the Ineffable Name is considered a charm against evil. (from *Traditional Jewish Papercuts* by Joseph and Yehudit Shadur)