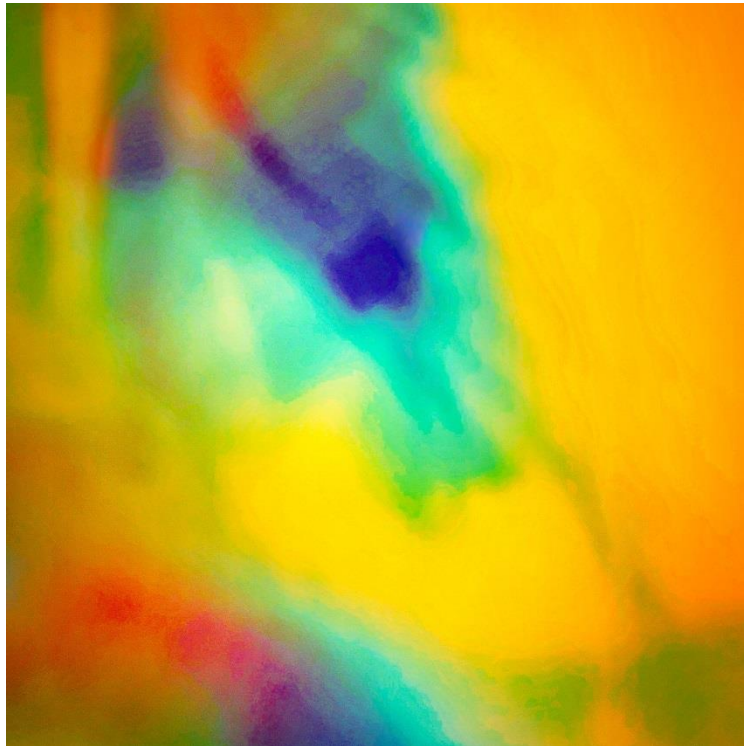


# **On the Edge:** Jewish Ideas about Margins, Marginality, and Marginalization

**AN EXHIBIT OF THE 2020 ARTISTS BEIT MIDRASH  
at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El  
Highland Park, Illinois**



Digital photography by Andrea Kamen

## **Featuring works by:**

Lois Baer Barr ▪ Nessia Frank  
Suzanne Horwitz ▪ Judith Joseph ▪ Andrea Kamen  
Charlotte Kaplan ▪ Judith Kaufman  
Ruti Modlin ▪ Judy Solomon ▪ Sandy Starkman  
Sandy Wasserman ▪ Chana Zelig

On the Edge:  
Jewish Ideas about Margins, Marginality, and Marginalization

An Exhibit of the 2020 Artists Beit Midrash  
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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.

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Exhibit Curator: Judith Joseph  
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Editors: Marcie Eskin and Rachel Kamin

The art and literary works in this exhibition catalog 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 of 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.

*The 2020 Artists Beit Midrash commenced in a period of confinement and isolation, due to the pandemic. We came together as a community, yet we were unable to gather together physically. It seemed the perfect time to consider the Jewish experience of being insiders/outsiders in society; to think about how our traditional rituals of clean/unclean, such as kashrut, create a fence around our beliefs and separate us as a community.*

*In this year of deep national divisions and rising anti-Semitism, we examined how we are perceived by others. We explored the dangers of the “us/them” paradigm, and how our faith directs us to treat “the other.” From a Jewish perspective, we considered the plight of refugees and displacement in our world, with echoes of our own wandering.*

*We talked about the isolating effects of a plague, and historical conspiracy theories, which accused the Jews of poisoning wells and causing pestilence during the Black Plague of the 14th century.*

*From a safe, cyber-distance, we offer art and writings about the edge, and the spaces on either side of it.*

### **Judith Joseph, Exhibition Curator and Artists Beit Midrash Facilitator**

*In spite of the limitations imposed by COVID-19, we were able to travel together with our imaginations to many places: to the Mishkan in the desert where Moses performed all sorts of rituals to enable people who had been quarantined outside of the camp to re-enter and draw near again. Then, to Naomi and Ruth — one woman who left her home to cross the border to a land that was not her own and then returned to her home, the other woman who was an outsider until acts of kindness brought her into the heart of the community. We read poetry by Yehuda ha Levi, Dan Pagis, Yehuda Amichai, Avraham Ibn Ezra, Rachel, and Chaim Bialik, all of whom were moving between identities personal and communal, in many eras and many times. Often outsider’s status has been a stimulus for great creativity.*

*Participants were inspired by the Biblical image of the well, an above-the-ground seam to life giving waters below and how this metaphor fits so well with the drawing out of inspiration so necessary for creating art.*

### **Jane Shapiro, Artists Beit Midrash Facilitator**

## **Leviticus: 13-14/COVID-19**

**Lois Baer Barr**

Two years ago, I read my poetry at a conference in Itta Bena, Mississippi at a Historically Black University. The call and response—*Amen, praised be*—to my poem about Hagar was gratifying. We were in the Bible Belt, so Hagar's life was well-known. In the Question and Answer session, a professor from a Baptist university asked, "Have you written poetry about Leviticus?"

— I avoid it like the plague.

That got the laughs I hoped for, and I wriggled out of his query aimed squarely, I felt, at the heart of Jewish ethical practice and at a core difference between Judaism and Christianity. In Leviticus our ancestors do not practice love and forgiveness but stone adulterers and blasphemers. Aaron's sons are incinerated for offering "strange" fire. I did not tell my questioner that I have always rebelled against such harsh laws, not to mention the homophobia. As a writer, I miss the drama of Genesis and Exodus.

Everything changed for me early in the pandemic, when our Artist Beit Midrash studied chapters thirteen and fourteen. Here we read a guide for the high priests dealing with a contagious skin disease. This time instead of being disgusted by the graphic descriptions of skin lesions, I was drawn into the text. At this point in the Biblical narrative, the Jews were living in close quarters, and their most authoritative leaders were called upon to risk their safety to ensure the survival of the community. Suddenly, quarantine, testing, and attention to hygiene did not seem intrusive, superstitious, nor repellant. It was instructive. Leviticus 13:45 requires covering the mouth!

We learned about a highly choreographed eight-day ritual allowing those cured of skin disease to be reintegrated into the community. First, the quarantined person was reexamined in an area outside the camp. If the high priest determined she was cured, he held two live birds over clear water. One bird would be slaughtered, its blood falling into the clear water. Then the patient and the wings of the live bird were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrificed one. The surviving bird would be released to fly into the "open field." Reading that passage, I related to the bird who was spared. I could feel myself wriggling in the priest's bloody hand with an urgent desire to live.

Leviticus also hit home because I'd lost four close friends to cancer and a dear colleague to an AIDS related illness in the previous five months. My husband and I saw them suffer at home and in intensive care units. Before the pandemic, I'd begun to come out of a place of sadness. Now my disquiet stemmed from lack of human contact. On a conscious level I might not have felt endangered

because I am an active septuagenarian who dances, hikes and bikes. There's no denying, however, I identified with the bird that had faced fifty-fifty odds and gotten out alive.

In the final part of the class, we examined rituals for those who had been cured. They were performed inside the camp but outside the patient's home: a second cleansing which included shaving off all body hair, bathing and laundering clothing, anointment with oil and a burnt offering as atonement. In the course of the last ritual, the individual is daubed with the blood of a sacrificed sheep on the right earlobe, the right thumb and the right big toe. Then, and only then, can the recovered patient reenter his tent. Blood, oil, fire and water. High drama makes Purell and face masks seem the flimsy barriers they are.

This part of Leviticus reenacts the horror and helplessness we experience when illness attacks. It also prefigures how we will feel when, like the bird, we are released, bloodied and shaken, but free to return to our flock. What modern rituals will we devise to allow us to return to communal life free of fear? How will we relinquish our current boundaries? What new boundaries will we set to feel safe? Leviticus made me feel intimately tied to the Jews living in the desert—vulnerable, frightened and wayward.

Retirement gave me time to participate in the Artist Beit Midrash. The quarantine has given me time to sit down and read Leviticus in one sitting. Most important for me now, this book reminded me that humanity has faced catastrophes like Covid19 and survived. We've been here before.

**Lois Baer Barr** is a literacy tutor and an emerita professor of Spanish at Lake Forest College. Her publications include *Patriarchal Traditions in the Latin American Jewish Novel* (ASU Press), a chapbook of poetry *Biopoesis*, which won *Poetica Magazine's* first prize, and a chapbook of extremely short stories, *Lope de Vega's Daughter* (Red Bird Press). She has studied and exhibited with the Artist Beit Midrash since 2013. She was a finalist for the Rita Dove Poetry Prize in 2019 for her poem "Hagar" (Artists Beit Midrash 2018). Her story "The Substitution" was recently published by *The Jewish Literary Journal*. Her poetry for the Artists Beit Midrash has been published at *POMPA* (Proceedings of the Mississippi Philological Association), *East on Central* and "Ark of Colors" (Artists Beit Midrash 2015) was chosen for the *National Flash Fiction 2020 Anthology* (Great Britain) and was published online in Spanish at *Letralia*.

**Marginal**

**Nessia Frank**

Calligraphy on paper, 27 ½" x 20"



**Nessia Frank** was born and raised in Israel. She studied for two years at the Bezalel School of Art in Jerusalem, where she focused on graphic design and learned calligraphy. She came to the U.S. in 1963. She completed her bachelor's degree at Spertus College. Her artistic career included hand-lettered *ketubot* and hand-built ceramic work.

Nessia was married to Ed Frank (z"l) and has a son, daughter and four grand-daughters.

### **Artist Statement:**

In the early seventies, I listened to a lecture by Dr. Abraham Twerski, a psychiatrist. He opened his lecture by declaring "welcome to the age of the Nursing Home." He talked about the fact that for prior generations, parents raised children and supported them to adulthood. When the parents got old, many homes became multi-generational dwellings.

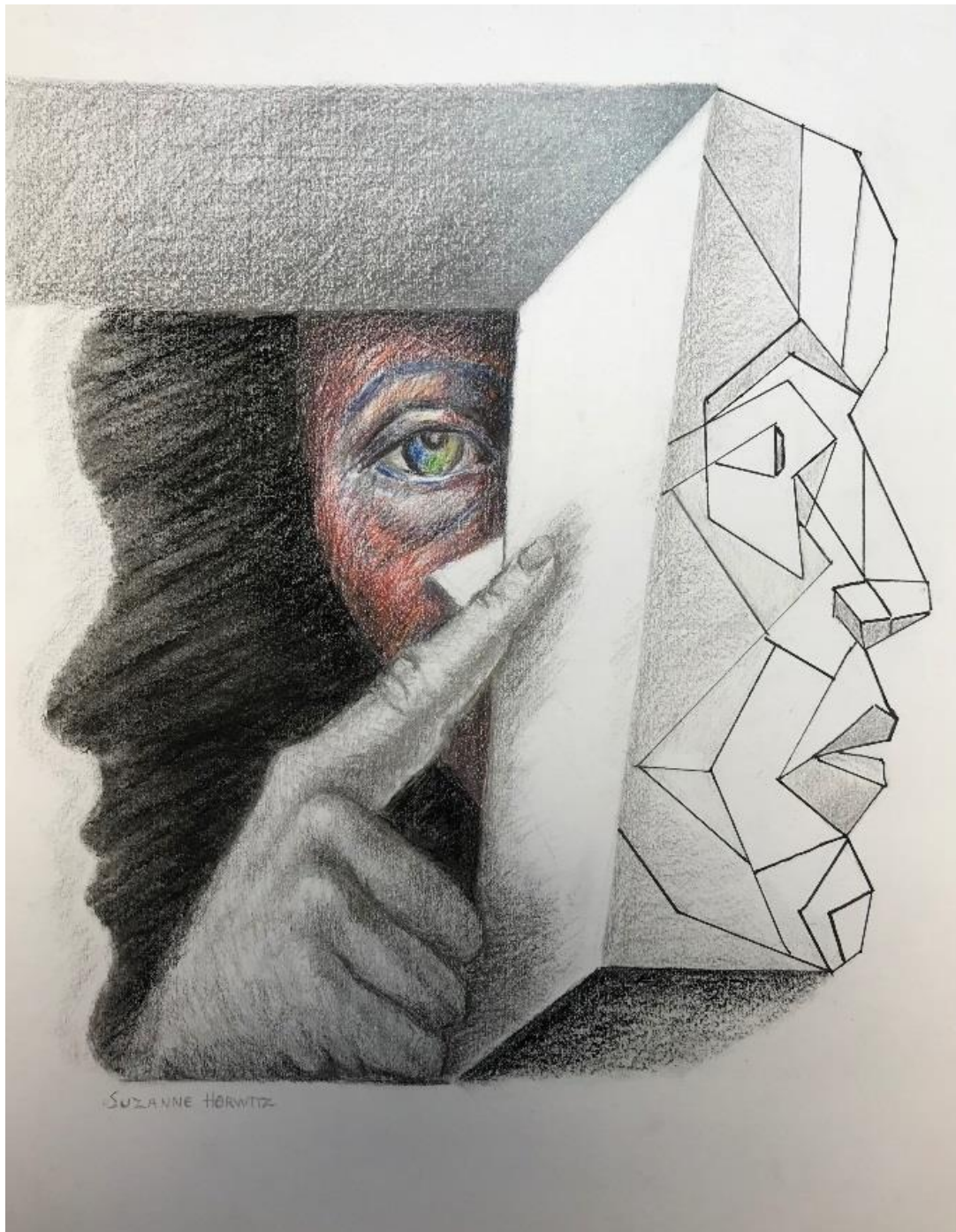
Today, it is quite expected that older parents move to live in nursing homes. I found it disturbing that older parents became marginal, and caring for them became entirely the business of the nursing homes' staff. The language in my work was taken from a disturbing TV commercial for a personal injury lawyer.



## *Our Eyes*

Suzanne Horwitz

Drawing, 18" x 12", 2020





**Suzanne Horwitz**, a second- generation artist, studied at the Art Students League of New York, received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a Bachelor of Science from the University of Michigan.

Suzanne's sculpture won recognition at the Montclair Art Museum, Montclair, New Jersey. Her work has been exhibited in numerous venues nationally and locally and represented in corporate and private collections. Horwitz was selected to be a Fellow of the Covenant at The Spertus Museum of Jewish Learning in Chicago, Illinois. Her work is represented in the newly published book, *CAST: Art and Objects Made using Humanity's Most Transformative Process*, from Schiffer Publishing.

Although primarily a figurative sculptor, she has produced a diverse and extensive body of work. Her pieces range from intimate portraits to large room sized installations and outdoor work. Horwitz is on the faculty of the Evanston and Highland Park art centers.

### **Artist Statement:**

The texts we studied this session confirmed my long held thought that although "we" as Jews have been citizens of innumerable countries, made major contributions to our adopted cultures, "we" are outsiders and always will be outsiders.

Throughout history, the Jewish people have been traditionally targeted for discrimination. As a targeted people, we are often the first to sympathize and come to the aid of other groups discriminated throughout the world. However, those efforts seem to be quickly forgotten or erased from memory.

The past two years has seen an open rise of white supremacy and a tremendous number of anti-Semitic incidents around the world. Currently, we are being attacked from the right and from the left. Because history repeats itself, we are wary of what's next.

I question why we aren't at "the table" and protest this discrimination as we have seen other groups do? Why?

Jewish people can never be comfortable in a place, but need to remain on high alert all the time. Why?

## ***The Border***

**Judith Joseph**

*What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? (Isaiah 5:3-4)*

From the other side of the fence

I see you.

Neatly lined up,

your fruit is full, unblemished, juicy.

A tangled snarl is on my side,

sour little grapes.

A stink arises from deep within my roots.

Your grapes look alike,

Like fingertips in rubber gloves.

Servile and uniform.

I envy their rectitude;

I revel in my riot.

***La Corona***

**Judith Joseph**

Woodblock print, 20" x 16", 2020



**Judith Joseph** is a Chicago based visual artist. She works in several media: woodblock prints, calligraphy, painting and installation. She has had numerous solo exhibitions and her art is in many private and public collections, including the Chicago Public Library, the Milwaukee Museum, Archives of MOMA, the Musée de la Poste in Paris and ARTPOOL in Budapest, Hungary. She exhibits widely, including solo and group exhibitions across the U.S. and recently in Amsterdam, Berlin, Vancouver and Douro, Portugal. She is on the faculty of the Chicago Botanic Garden, The Art Center Highland Park and Orot: Center for New Jewish Learning. With Jane Shapiro, she has taught the Artists' Beit Midrash for seven years. Her work may be seen at [www.judithjosephstudio.com](http://www.judithjosephstudio.com).

### **Artist Statement:**

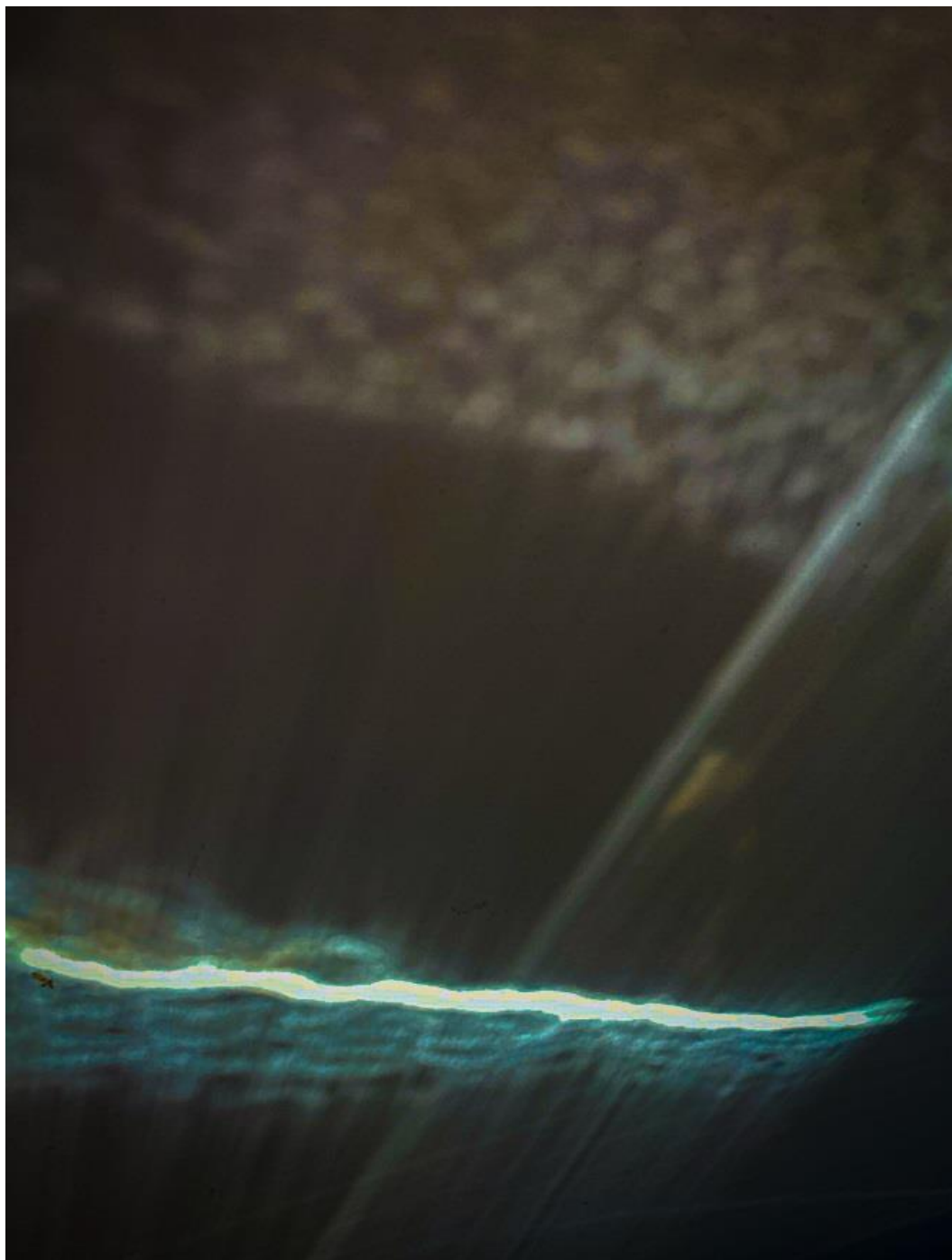
*La Corona* is a visceral response to the pandemic. It expresses my feeling of horror, of claustrophobia, and fear of death. I also find a glimmer of hope: because people are staying home, nature is rebounding in many ways. The dolphins in the piece were inspired by news stories that the canals of Venice, murky and choked with pollution for centuries, are running clear now that the boat traffic has ceased to churn up the waters. Dolphins from the ocean have been seen swimming into the newly clear canals for the first time. The air in many cities is cleaner, due to less traffic.

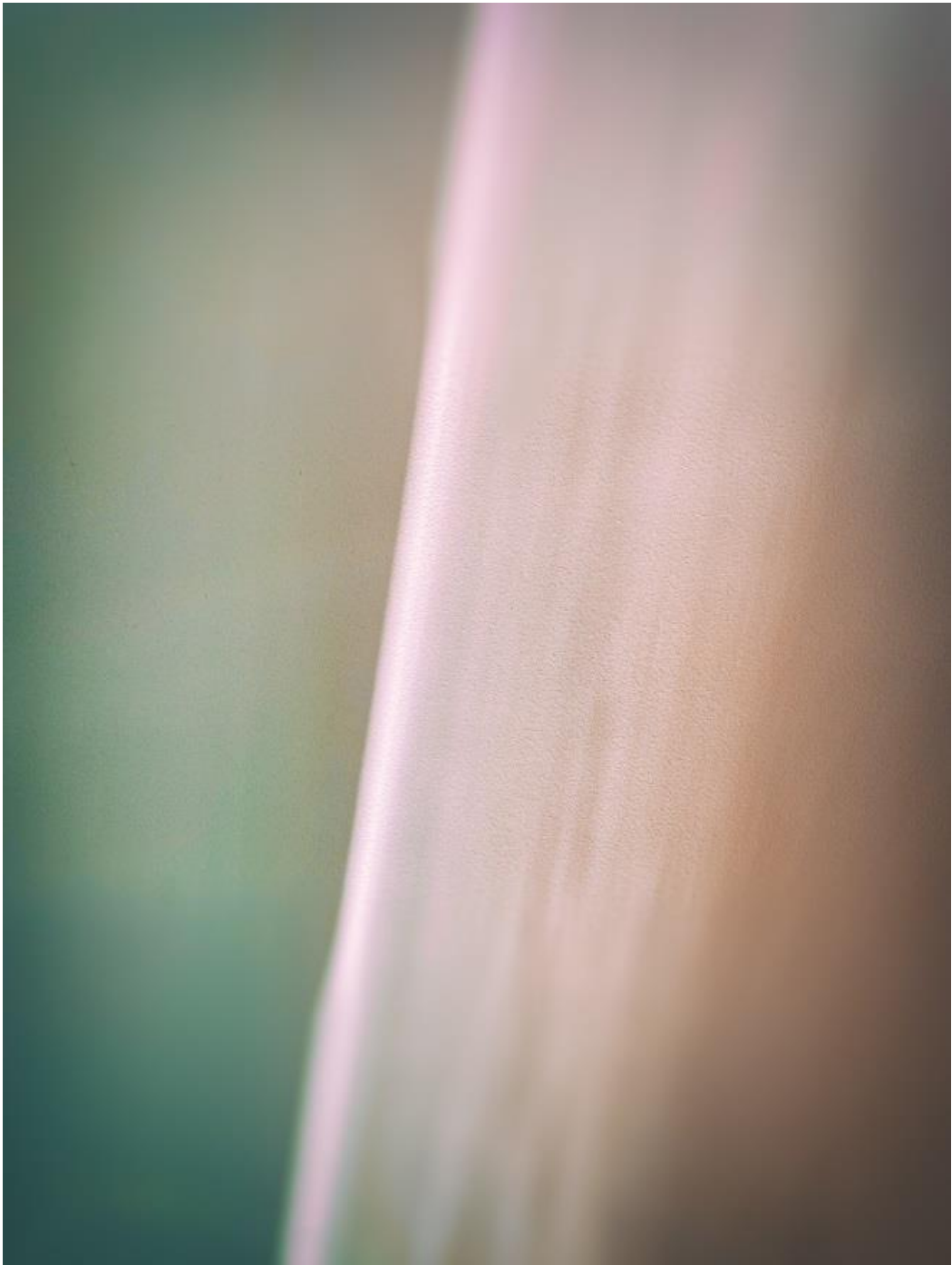
The pandemic, as it forces us indoors and out of public places, highlights interiority, contemplation and introspection; as we paradoxically contemplate our society and dream of venturing out.

# *Coming Out of the Dark*

Andrea Kamen

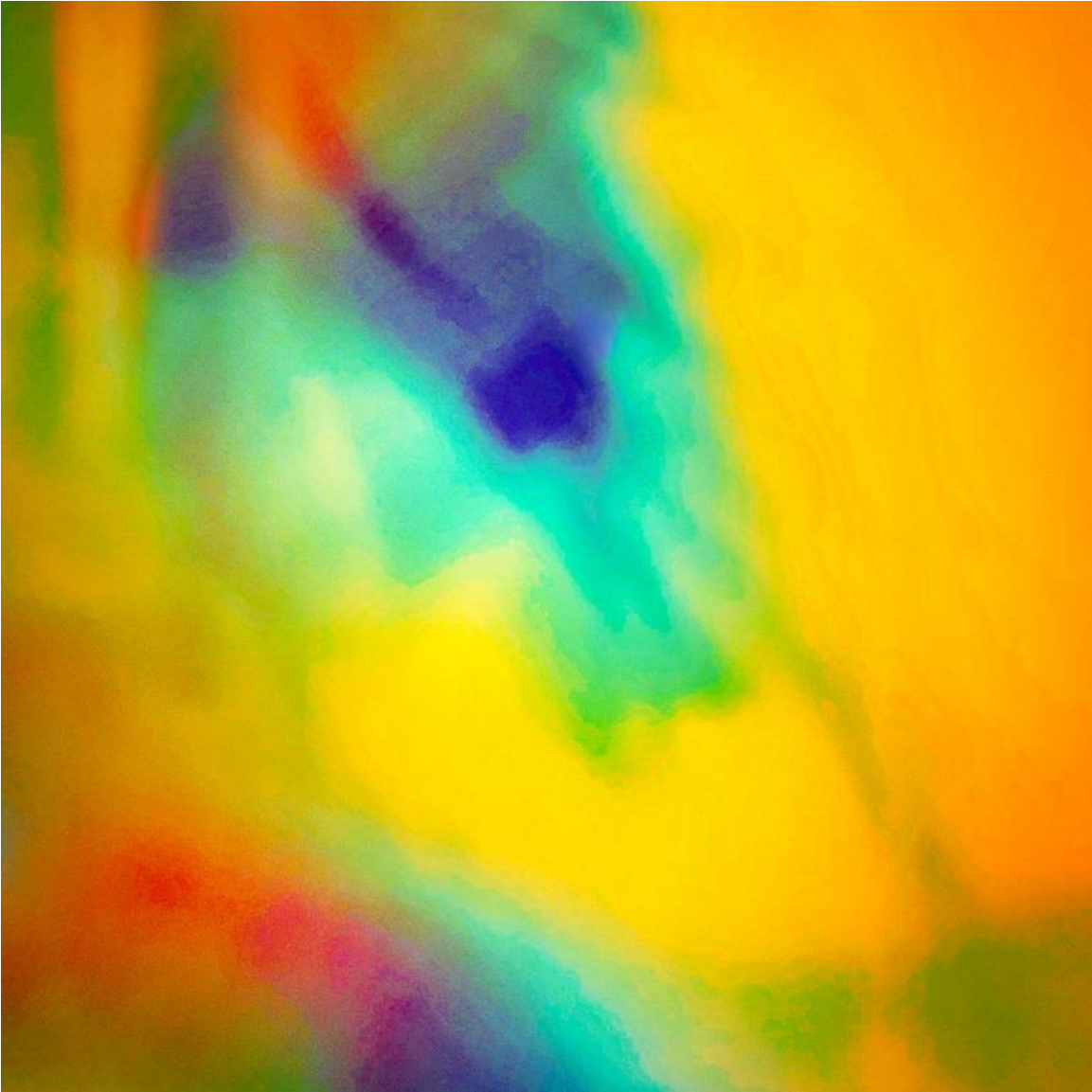
Digital photography, 2020











**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 completing her Master's certification. Andrea's photos have been displayed at the Chicago Botanic Garden, Glencoe Festival of Arts, Black Box Gallery and in the Rissman Kol Ami Collection at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El.

**Artist Statement:**

*Coming out of the dark, I finally see the light now  
And it's shining on me  
Coming out of the dark, I know the love that saved me  
Sharing with me*

*(Gloria Estefan - Out of the Dark)*

Shadows exist at the edge. They are mere undetailed reflections of our presence and society itself. A colorful existence still remains with the people who fall within these shadowy margins. I was inspired to compose by looking within the shadows to bring out life.

I use the changing light at dusk to arouse the mood. Out of the dancing shadows, color appears in my work, bringing vibrancy to the black and white images. I force myself to use my camera lens and aim it at my perceptions - to peel beneath the layers and find the spectrums they are made of.

*The Margins surrounding these words, illuminate our souls*  
**Charlotte Kaplan**

Watercolor on colored paper, paper images of the Gemara on paper, 27" x 33" framed



In my career as an Art Director for corporations, my best guide was to keep the message and design simple, and to the point. There was so much to put into an annual report for corporations, the graphics were there to complement the message. That knowledge keeps my message succinct. Today I work in watercolor and fabric. I love simplicity and texture. My work may be seen at [enjoytheknots.com](http://enjoytheknots.com).

**Artist Statement:**

This image came as a true connection between our cherished books of the rabbis and scholars throughout Jewish History, and the narrative of this project. It is an expression of my background in design, graphics, advertising and layout. Every page corresponds to an interpretation, idea or detail to the script. If you squint your eyes, you will see how the beautiful Hebrew, Aramaic and Rashi text fill in the pages, unlocking our heritage.

# ***Drink water from your own cistern***

**Judith MK Kaufman**

*Drink water from your own cistern* – Rashi

Chosen. We were chosen to be different.

Rejecting others' customs, the patriarch  
smashed his father's idols  
and chose Hashem.

When Abraham ascended Moriah  
to bring his son to sacrifice;  
did we think he'd do it?

Were we chosen, or did we choose?  
Did we build walls,  
did we give others reason ... to hate us?

Digging our own wells  
hamakor -- the source --  
taught us the paths to take.

But success is short-lived,  
and so my question is:  
Do our walls and wells make us

a light unto the nations?



**Judith MK Kaufman** is a transplanted New Yorker who has lived in Highland Park since 1976. A poet and memoirist, she believes her late-in-life pursuit of creative writing was the result of living in this town, where the arts are an integral part of the community. She holds a bachelor's degree in Hebraic Studies from Rutgers University and a masters in Jewish Communal Service from Spertus College of Judaica. Judith is a founding member and Editor-in-Chief of Highland Park's journal of literature and art, *East on Central*, now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year. Her own work has been published in *Poetica*, *Collage*, *the Journal of Modern Poetry* and online at *Pirene's Fountain* and *Highland Park Poetry*. A memoir about her parents, *Caught Laughing: the Esther and Bernie Story*, was published in 2017, and she is currently working on a book of poems about her grandchildren, tentatively titled *All My Cookies*.

## ***The Garden II***

**Ruti Modlin**

Acrylic on canvas, 28"x22", 2020



**Ruti Modlin** is an independent artist who lives and works in the Chicago area. She grew up in Holland, Italy, Belgium and Israel. Modlin studied Graphic Design and Fine Art at the Johannesburg Technikon Art School in South Africa. She has solo and group shows in North America and internationally. Many of her paintings have sold to private collections. She's a Board Member and Secretary at ARC Gallery & Educational Foundation in West Town, Chicago. She exhibits with the Chicago Dialogue and Art Makers North groups. She teaches painting and drawing at the Art Center Highland Park and Glencoe Park District.

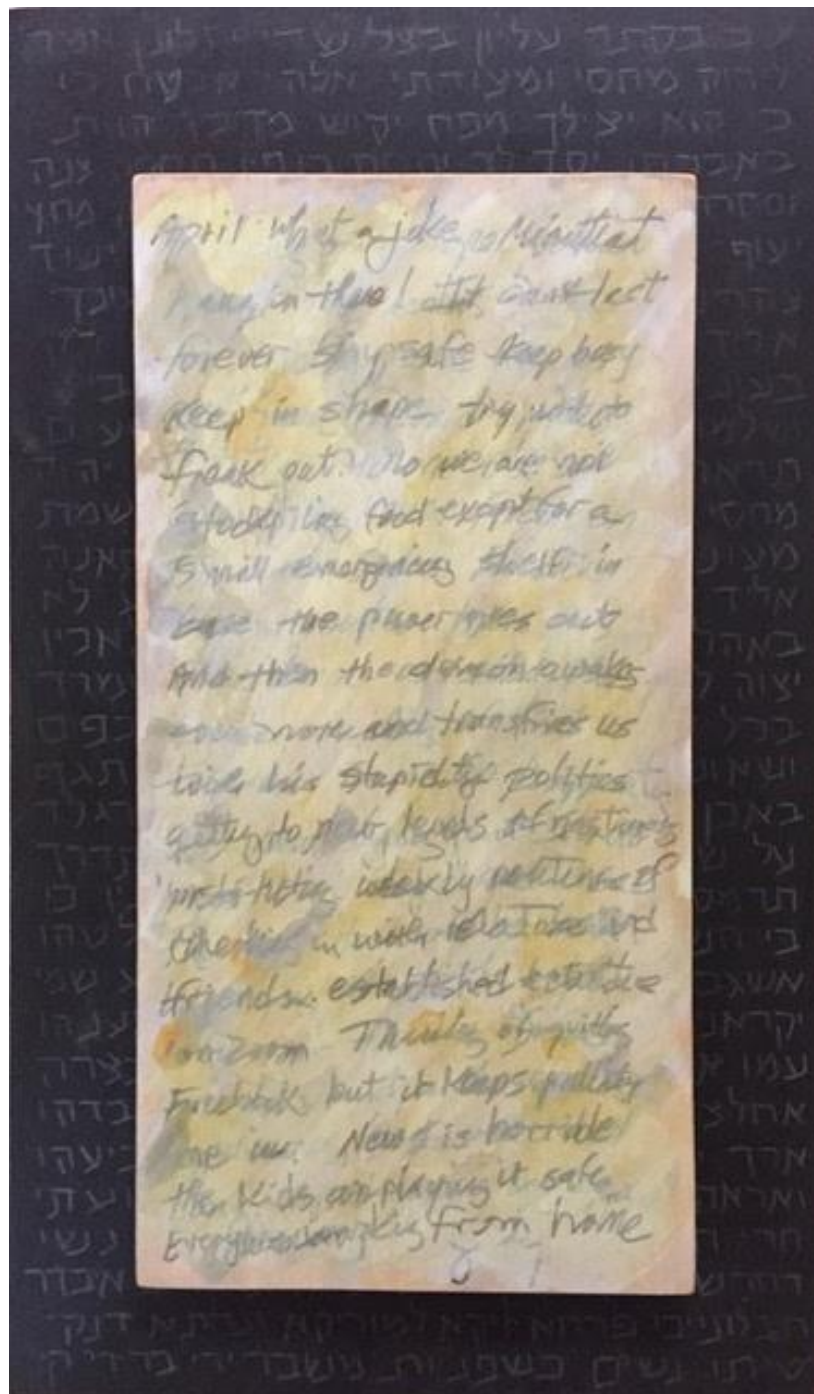
**Artist Statement:**

*The Garden II* is a painting about unearthing meaning. Brush in hand, I feel equipped to explore my personal reflections about the text in the Torah. *The Garden II* is one painting in a series, in which I seek to balance the surreal and mythological story of our human beginnings from a philosophical perspective.

## Pandemic April

Judy Solomon

Pencil, wash on board, 20 ½" x 12", 2020



**Judy Solomon** is a retired art teacher who had been working exclusively in Ceramics since 2011. She is a member of the artists collective Space 900 Gallery in Evanston. She has attended all seven years of the Artists Beit Midrash at Beth El.

**Artist Statement:**

This spring found me unable to follow through with ideas in ceramics as I had in the previous years. I have been very experimental with media and connections since the beginning of the pandemic.

This piece references classical Jewish texts that have additional writings around the edges of the original document. But I have reversed the positions of the text and my annotations. As I am trying to process the reality of the pandemic, I find some comfort in the irony of knowing that our anxiety is the same that our Medieval ancestors felt while dealing with the plague. The inner board has fragments of my daily thoughts layered over one another, and the background contains Psalm 91 in Hebrew and an incantation against demons in the bottom quarter of the board in Aramaic.



## Sandy Starkman

Muslin and digital prints, 43" x 35", 2020





As Jews, we choose life. ("How good it is for people to dwell together." Numbers 24:5.) For me, that means being deeply involved in my synagogue community, learning Talmud weekly, hosting many Shabbat and *yom tov* meals in our home and sukkah, visiting the sick and comforting the mourners. Visiting family and friends near and far, and making visits to Israel is a priority. I work in advocacy toward making our world a better place, particularly for those in need and on the margins. We were strangers in *Mitzrayim*, therefore I try to "Love My Neighbor as Myself" (Leviticus 19:18). I love movies, museums, plays, sewing, cooking, walking, traveling and having fun, too. Knowing the journey is greater than the destination.

**Sandy Starkman** brought the Artists Beit Midrash program to North Suburban Synagogue Beth El and is pleased to once again participate with her fellow students, who with Dr. Jane Shapiro and Judith Joseph, continue to inspire her each summer.

### **Artist Statement:**

During this pandemic, home is not restorative to all, but confining, constraining. Many are isolated, in quarantine, on the margins of life, death and financial ruin. COVID-19 is seen as a captor, causing physical and social distance. There are lots of mental health issues. Kids, teens and young adults are robbed of their milestones. Spirituality may be portable, but Zoom *tefilah*/prayer services are not the same. We have memories of what was BC – before COVID-19. My "elbow shake" is now seen as smart. We are learning to be more compassionate, that we have much work to do to make this world better, as we still must choose life.

## ***Crossing Borders***

**Sandy Wasserman**

Crossing borders then  
No different from now.  
The borders are different and the skin tones-  
The hearts and minds are the same.  
Searching for a better life, beseeched in a multitude of languages  
Taking days or weeks.

How dare I now, in my chutzpah - in the 'time of COVID'  
decry my sorrow at not seeing my beloved daughters and grandchildren  
in person, with my phone in hand for Facetime, or my computer ready for Zoom.  
Even as the weeks stretch on into months.

As I think back at what my grandparents had the courage to do!  
Leave their parents and siblings!  
Leave their aunts and uncles, nieces, nephews, their grandparents.  
Taking so little- a few photos, a rolling pin, a favored table cloth,  
Two feather pillows,  
And *baynkes* -  
in case of illness, healing might be possible.

The totality of life they knew- changed!  
To cross a sea and realize...  
They'd most likely never see their loved ones again.  
And never did.  
Malka and Reuven.  
From their shtetels of Siedlce and Lukow  
To the shores of NYC- to America, the '*goldene medineh*.'

To embark on a life in a new land,  
With a new language,  
To learn to live with 'others' who also sought the same new opportunity,  
But left behind so much  
And lost so much.

Which now- a hundred years later,  
Six generations later...  
we are just realizing that loss.  
Sarah Feigah, Malka, Breindel, Sarah Feigah, Malka, Yael Breindel.

# ***My Grandmother's Noodles***

**Sandy Wasserman**

My grandmother Malka's gnarled hands  
Encircle the mound of flour in the center of the enamel table  
As my five year old face peers over the table's edge.  
A puff of flour floats over that mound  
As she presses into its center with two fingers, creating a well  
Into which I can't see  
Though I know it's there from the many previous times I watched this,  
The younger me, then standing on a chair, looking down.

Crack! Deftly her hands break an egg, which she guides into the well,  
Then another.  
Two jiggling yellows gliding into their place in the well,  
with a pinch of Kosher salt thrown in.

Her hands then gather it all together - the flour and the eggs,  
No longer dry, no longer white, no longer a puffy mound.

She presses and twists, pounds and stretches.  
The eggs magically gone.  
I imitate the motions from my vantage point beside the table.  
I am prepared, and wait patiently for my turn.

Soon a large ball of dough emerges, ready- and patted down.  
Deftly, she adds a bit of dry flour to her rolling pin,  
The very one that accompanied her on her journey from '*der alte heim*.'  
The old country-  
so that noodles in '*de goldene medineh*' might be as perfect as in her Polish shtetl.

As the dough is flattened and rolled, turned and flattened again and then again,  
It thins out and thins out, the rolling pin pressing and gliding  
so that the entire ball of dough has transformed.  
Wielding a sharp knife, she slices through and ribbons emerge-  
Ribbons of noodles, all one width, no measuring needed.  
Long strands, which then lie gathered across the fingers of one of her hands-  
Hanging strands of pearls.

Soon it's my turn, and my butter knife is ready with my own small ball of dough.  
I imitate, using her rolling pin and graze and press across the flat, lumpy, doughy surface.  
Creating a few short strands of pearls that join the other, longer ribbons drying...

Hanging from the three pull out bars of the kitchen towel rack  
Until it's their turn to gently glide into the chicken soup.  
I smell the soup now; I remember the flour mound. And the eggs. ... I can never forget.

## ***Migration Shapes our Generations***

**Sandy Wasserman**

Collage, 30" square, 2020



## Artist Statement:

My husband Mel and I often visit Highland Park, and North Suburban Synagogue Beth El where we enjoy spending time with our family, Michelle Wasserman and David Smith and our precious grandchildren, Yael Smith and Ari Smith. I'm a retired teacher. My maternal grandparents left Poland, '*der alter heim*'/ the old country, and immigrated to New York at the beginning of the 20th Century, leaving their parents and siblings behind. Forever. Just as today's immigrants do. Immigrants of all ethnicities live part of some of their lives on the margins, as did my grandparents, speaking Yiddish at home in the Bronx for their entire lives here, even to me. Their lives consisted of love for their family, and yet maintaining connection to the family they left behind, in their times, via HIAS... They took with them on the boat they boarded in Hamburg, what was the most important: the small square colorful tablecloth made in Warsaw, a smooth and well used rolling pin for making '*lukshen*'/noodles, and a tin box containing '*baynkes*' [glass cups]. Should they fall ill in the new land, my grandmother could handle it! I often joke and say that she was the start of my interest in alternative medicine!

I very much enjoyed participating 'virtually' in the Artists Beit Midrash in the summer of 2020, during the pandemic, where it seems, all of us were and remain, 'living on the margins.'

# ***Moonleak***

**Chana Zelig**

Acrylic and glass beads on muslin, 20" x 10", 2020





**Tzimtzum**

**Chana Zelig**

Acrylic, gold leaf, glass and mirror shards on canvas, 36" x 24", 2020



## ***Vocal Chords***

### **Chana Zelig**

A poem about an Inferno.

In Hebrew?

In Hebrew my fluency declares, "Look!

I belong here

in this language!"

But I don't.

My accent betrays me:

Brashly American,

pronouncing me in-between.

People cross over,

called "Resident Aliens."

But they're neither.

Like my three aunts,

--greenhorns, all,

clotheslines pulled tight between tenements.

Three blessed women,

none named *Mary*.

Green cards call out "See us!

We live in this place!"

But they don't really.

Tired, poor, huddled

suspended

between part

and apart.

*But I, why should I go? Who gives permission?*

*I am not Aeneas, nor am I Paul!*

*Not I nor anyone else would judge me worthy.*

When I was eleven,

I spoke Hebrew *and* English with a Queens accent

--the borough, not the monarch--

And a foreign man,

yelled "I'm up here!"

and walked a tightrope

stretched between New Colossal Towers

that, heavenward, besought *Lucia*.

Some say that made Philippe Petit

an honorary citizen.

But even so.

*Io era tra color che son sospesi*

I say in a vulgar intonation.

I don't even belong in this poem.

And yet...

*I am Beatrice who urges you to journey,*

*Come from a place to which I long to return.*

*Love moved me to speak my heart to you.*

Writes Dante.

There is a Paradiso, I've heard,

unpronounceable

in any accent.

Inspired by Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy: Inferno, Canto 2* —Three Blessed Women: Virgene Maria, Beatrice and Santa Lucia.

: שלוש נשים ברוכות: מרים הבתולה, ביאטריצ'ה, ולוצ'יה הקדושה וּמזמור

## מיתרי קול

שיר על תופת

בעברית?

שטף דיבורי בעברית מצהיר: "ראה!

אני שייכת לכאן

בשפה הזאת!"

אך איני.

מבטאי מסגירני:

אמריקאי פזיז,

להסגירני "בין".

אנשים שמגיעים לכאן

נקראים "תושבים זרים".

אך הם לא זה ולא זה.

כמו שלוש דודותיי

מהגרות כולן,

חבלי כביסה מתוחים בין השיכונים.

שלוש נשים ברוכות

אך אף אחת אינה מריה.

"גרין קארד" זועק: "הסתכלו בנו!

אנו גרות כאן!

אך בעצם לא.

עניות, עייפות, מצטופפות  
תלויות  
בין שייך ללא שייך.  
אך אני, מדוע עלי ללכת? מי מתיר לי?  
אינני איניאס וגם אינני פאולוס!  
לא אני ולא אחר יכיר בערכי  
כשהייתי בת אחת עשרה,  
דיברתי עברית ואנגלית במבטא של Queens  
הרובע, לא המלכות)  
וגבר זר  
צעק: אני פה למעלה!"  
וצעד על חבל דק  
מתוח בין מגדלים עצומים  
אשר פנו השמיימה אל לוצ'יה.  
אמרו שזה הפך את פיליף לאמריקאי.  
אך...אף על פי כן.  
*lo era tra color che son sospesi*  
אני אומרת בהגייה זולה.  
איני אפילו שייכת לשיר הזה.  
בכל זאת...  
אני ביאטריצ'ה הדוחקת בכך למסע,  
באה ממקום אליו אני מייחלת לחזור  
האהבה משפיעה עלי לשפוך לפניך את ליבי.  
כותב דנטה.  
יש גן עדן, כך שמעתי.  
שאינו ניתן לביטוי  
בשום מבטא.

**Chana Zelig** integrates her religious scholarship and spirituality to bring an engaging perspective on Judaism and Jewish art. Her work ranges broadly from paintings and custom Judaica pieces to large installations at synagogues and schools across the US. Chana was raised strictly Orthodox, attended Michlala Jerusalem Seminary for Women and is a graduate of the Wexner Heritage Foundation.

Chana resides in Chicago and has her studio in a converted barn in southwestern Michigan. She is a member of the Jewish Arts Salon and joined the Artists Beit Midrash in the spring of 2020.

**Artist Statement:**

Chana Zelig creates visual midrash. A self-taught artist and a soulful, original thinker, she expresses herself in her work and finds insight into Judaism. Zelig combines images and texts to form meditations on sacred literature, ritual, tradition, and history. Her work ranges from small devotional pieces to large installations. Her art is in private collections, synagogues, and educational institutions across the United States. "Exploring great ideas and making lovely things is what animates me," says Chana Zelig. "My Jewish artwork uses the language of color, symbol, composition and words to discuss the wisdom of Torah and engage the experience of holiness."