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## [New Haven, CT, Dec-Jan 2009: Orchard Street Shul Arts Project](#)

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By [Jo Ellen Green Kaiser](#)

During the months of December 2009 and January 2010, the John Slade Ely House Center for Contemporary Art in New Haven, CT will come alive with the memories, recollections, and recreations of an important community heritage site, The Orchard Street Shul, in an innovative group installation designed to both stimulate reflection on the legacies of past generations and engage the public in dreams for the future.

**The Orchard Street Shul Cultural Heritage Artists Project** is an art exhibition, a history lesson, a point of cultural exchange, and meeting place for dreamers, both nostalgic and visionary. Artists, researchers, and scholars have joined together to celebrate an important historic New Haven landmark which was once central to the life of a large Jewish immigrant population in the Oak Street neighborhood.

Fifty years of urban development have all but erased evidence of the importance of the Oak Street neighborhood in the lives of the newly arrived immigrants and migrants who populated much of the area now known as the "Oak Street Connector", Route 34. Where some see open space, or a new hospital, or a school, or a parking lot, others with longer memories see shops bustling with activity, voices shouting in

Yiddish and Italian, sprinkled with a variety of accents from elsewhere, including near and distant regions within the USA.

Contributions to the installation offer a range of approaches. Some artists researched the history of the Orchard Street Shul and its neighborhood, uncovering multiple stories of this community: stories of women working together to aid refugees, stories of hard-working fathers and mothers who dedicated themselves to making a better life for their children, and stories of teenagers who giggled and mingled on the steps of the Shul. Others built on their own experiences, reaching into their hearts to create depictions of the Shul that are evocative of deeper connections with history and community. Still others focused on the issues of urban renewal, making real the shifts in our urban landscape that are difficult to imagine as we visit the site today.

Included in the Project are presentations by researchers from Yale University who developed innovative ways to document the building, including virtual reconstructions exploring new digital methods, groundbreaking research by computer scientists that promises to change the ways that cultural heritage sites will be documented in the future. Some contributing artists used this digital data in their work.

The Orchard Street Shul Cultural Heritage Project is organized by Cynthia Beth Rubin, a New Haven based artist, in collaboration with the participating artists and researchers: Nancy Austin, Meg Bloom, Donnataria Bruton, Jeanne Criscola, Roz Croog, Linda Drazen, Paul Duda, Gonzalo Escobar, **Zeek Editor [Maya Escobar](#)**, Alan Falk, Greg Garvey, Shalom Gorewitz, Jaime Kriksciun, Leslie J Klein, Beth Krensky, Seth Lamberton, Mary Lesser, Lisa Link, David Ottenstein, Bruce Oren, Robert Rattner, Cynthia Beth Rubin, Holly Rushmeier, Janet Shafner, Frank Shifreen, Suzan Shutan, Sharon Siskin, Christina Spiesel, Yona Verwer, **Zeek artist [Julian Voloj](#)**, Laurie Wohl, Chen Xu, Howard el-Yasin. The group includes artists from California, Florida, Utah, Missouri, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New York, who traveled to New Haven to contribute to the project alongside artists from the region.

A project book is being published in conjunction with the exhibition, including essays by Hasia R. Diner, the eminent historian of Jewish immigration history, Walter Cahn, renowned historian of art and architecture, and Hana Iverson, known for her remarkable multi-media installation “View from the Balcony” that was instrumental in helping attract attention to the renovation project of the Eldridge Street Shul. Karen Schiff contributed an insightful essay on our evolving relationship to art as we contemplate history. The book also features photographs and descriptions of the works in the exhibition.

The Public is Invited to the Opening Reception for the Participating Artists, on Sunday, December 6, from 12:00 Noon to 5:00 pm. To set the mood for the launch of “The Orchard Street Shul Artists Cultural Heritage Project”, the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale for Jewish Life at Yale will host a Jazz jam session on December 5 at 7:30, celebrating the swing dance music of 1924 and beyond, when the cornerstone of this Synagogue was put in place in a ceremony attended by Mayor Fitzgerald and much of the entire New Haven community.

The John Slade Ely House for contemporary art is open W-F, 11 am to 4 pm, and weekends 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Schools and other organizations who would like to arrange a group visit outside of regular hours may do so by sending an email to: [arts@orchardstreetshul-artistsproject.org](mailto:arts@orchardstreetshul-artistsproject.org) or calling 203-624-8055.

An exciting series of public events includes:

Saturday, December 5, 7:30 Music from the 1920s-1930s jam session Slifka Center for Jewish life

Sunday, December 6, noon - 5:00 Opening Reception with the Artists

Wednesday, December 9, noon Lunch and Learn, in Partnership with the Jewish Historical Society of Greater New Haven

Sunday, December 20, 2:00 pm Panel Discussion Topic to be Announced

Sunday, January 10, 2:00 pm Panel Discussion Topic to be Announced

Sunday, January 17, 2:00 pm Community Conversations

Thursday, January 21 Presentation by Yale Computer Science Graphics Group on The Orchard Street Shul: Case Study in Three - Dimensional Digital Representations of Culture Heritage Sites.

Sunday, January 31, 2010 Open Forum:  
Artists Reflect on Cultural Heritage Project as Process Closing Party

**[The John Slade Ely House for Contemporary Art](#)**

W-F, 11 am to 4 pm, and weekends 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm.  
51 Trumbull Street in New Haven, Connecticut.  
203-624-8055

For information on the Orchard Street Shul Cultural Heritage Project  
visit: [orchardstreetshul-artistsproject.org](http://orchardstreetshul-artistsproject.org) or contact: [arts@orchardstreetshul-artistsproject.org](mailto:arts@orchardstreetshul-artistsproject.org)

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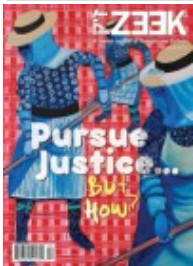
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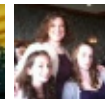
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