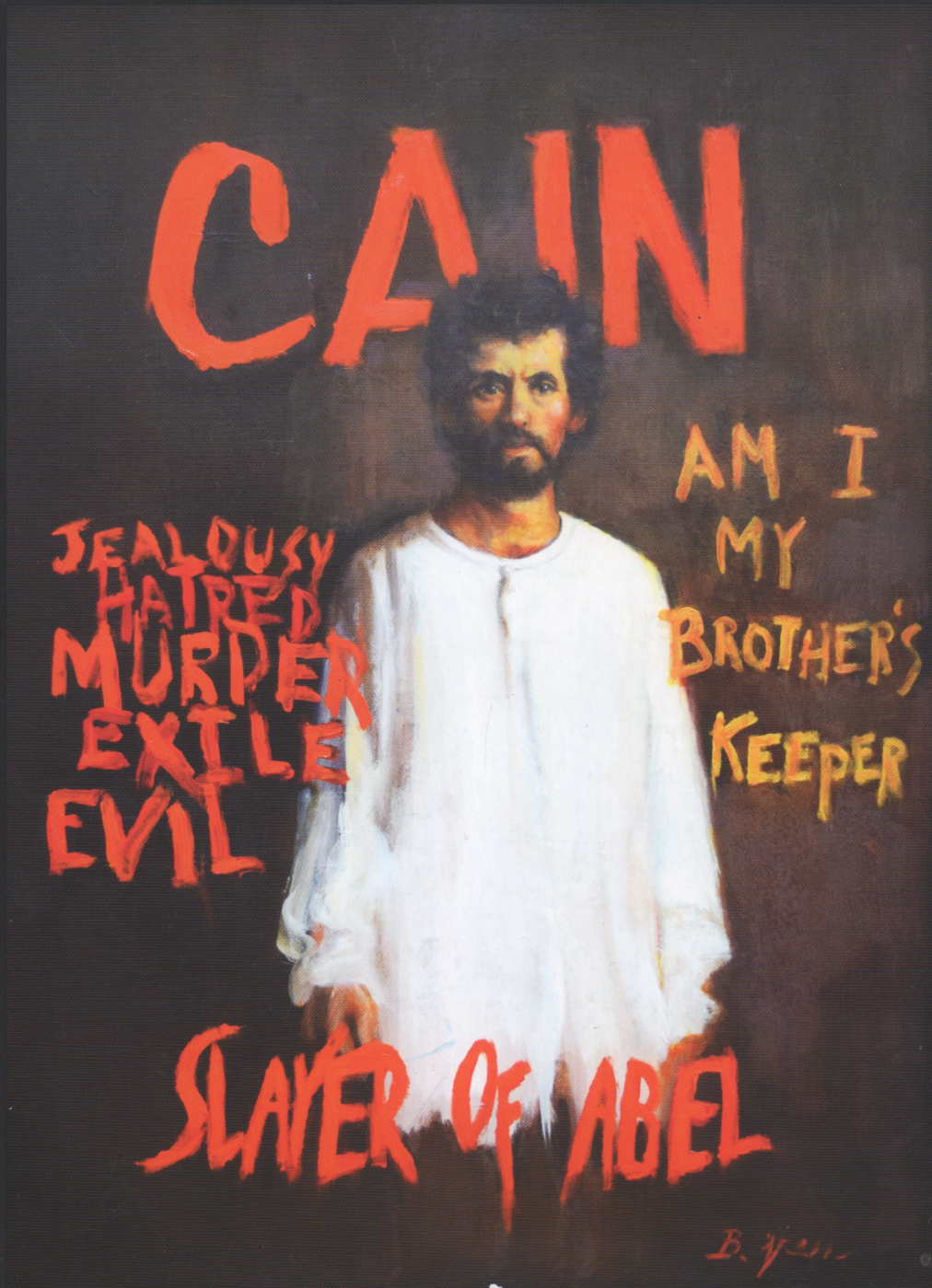


# EVIL: A Matter of Intent



Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York



# EVIL: A Matter of Intent

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Evil is not a cosmic accident. It does not just happen. Natural disasters happen. Disease, drought, accidents, epidemics happen. Evil is the conscious act of an individual or group committing inhumanity upon another individual or group in an effort to achieve a personal goal. Evil is not an idea or a concept, it is deliberate action or inaction. Evil is defined as a selfish act or behavior with the intent to benefit one's self or one's interests irrespective of harm to others and without responsibility and remorse.

with genocides: the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur, Cambodia, the Trail of Tears, to name atrocities of the past two centuries. Pogroms, murder, rape, sex slavery, domestic abuse, trafficking in drugs, enslavement, lynchings, terrorist acts, destruction of knowledge and culture, obliteration of cultural heritage, kidnapping, child abuse, and deliberate poisoning of environment are rampant and unceasing. Evil is fueled by indifference, intimidation, gossip, lying, bullying, and



Judy Chicago and Donald Woodman

*What Would You Have Done? Study for Wall of Indifference*, 1989

Sprayed acrylic, oil, and photography on photo linen

32" x 64"

The Holocaust Project© Judy Chicago and Donald Woodman

The Hebrew Bible and rabbinic tradition view human beings as born with an inclination to evil (*yetzer ha-ra*) spurred by sexual impulses and the desire to acquire material goods. In fact, these inclinations are necessary to procreate and build stable societies. If unrestrained, these natural impulses can become excessive and potentially evil. The inclination to good acts (*yetzer hatov*) occurs with the tension between physical and intellectual development, to reason and choose. It is an ongoing struggle in which Jews cannot and should not be passive. Jews perceive the active struggle against evil as a primary task of humanity.

The artists included in this exhibition address with clarity and passion the many faces of inhumanity. History is replete

denigration. It is achieved through drastic physical action, inflicting pain, injury, starvation, denial of education, violence, and murder. Is overcoming evil an active or passive process? Are we "delivered from evil" by a higher power? Must individuals in any society engage in a direct, adversarial struggle to quell wrong and establish right?

Evil is the violation of our common humanity. Human morality requires direct action against evil. Can we develop a society able to embrace selfless acts and behavior to benefit others irrespective of harm to one's person or interests? The Peace Corps, Médecins sans Frontières, The Southern Poverty Law Center, Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels, amongst many others, strive to defeat evil.

The artists in this exhibition, using an international visual language, challenge the concept of heroes and villains. Who is the hero? Who is the tyrant? Are the seeds of evil latent in a hero? Many of us have a vision of how to proceed. Less rhetoric. More action. It is up to each of us to wage war on evil.



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## Tamar Hirschl

*Exodus II*, 2005

Mixed media on vinyl

94" x 33½"

This large work, with the map of France as the background, depicts the Nazis' conquering of both land and people in their insidious march across Europe and North Africa. Hirschl builds on memories of her childhood during the Holocaust to highlight the misery and destruction that accompany imperialistic and genocidal ventures. Her work comments on the evil that continues to divide and destroy human connections.

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## Elizabeth Langer

*The Mothers of Beslan*, 2004

Lithograph, A/P

11" x 14"

On September 1, 2004, armed Islamic separatist militants took over a school in the town of Beslan in the Republic of North Ossetia. The militants took hundreds of young children as hostages. On the third day of the standoff, Russian security forces attempted a rescue. The rescue failed and 334 were killed, including 186 children. Three days later, a photograph of the mothers of Beslan grieving for their dead children appeared in the *International Herald Tribune*.