

SEEKING JOY



DR. BERNARD HELLER MUSEUM
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION, NEW YORK

SEEKING JOY (AUGUST 23, 2024-JUNE 26, 2025)

This exhibition was conceived a year before October 7th, the Israel-Hamas war, and Hezbollah's attacks. Faced with the trauma of terrorism and war, we present these artists' works to express the human capacity for resilience and inspire hope for our broken world.

Amidst adversity, our tradition teaches us to choose life. It is written in the Talmud that if both a wedding procession and a funeral come to a crossroads, the wedding goes first. The ritual breaking of a glass, symbolizing the destruction of the Temple, accompanies the joyful blessings for the new couple under the wedding canopy. After their liberation, Holocaust survivors memorialized their tragic suffering, and yet had the courage to embrace life and create new families and communities.

And so, we present this celebration of life in all of its diverse moments, both personal and communal. Over fifty artists express a myriad of experiences – the delight in life cycle occasions and annual holidays, the beauty of the natural world, the thrill of music and sports, and the happiness binding family and friends. These works lighten our hearts as a source of strength, empathy, and faith in a peaceful future.

Jean Bloch Rosensaft
Director, Heller Museum

DEBBIE TEICHOLZ GUEDALIA

Tunnel, Hostage Square (top)

Hope, Hostage Square (bottom)

Car Cemetery

Nova Music Festival Site Memorial

Kibbutz Kfar Asa Home

Five photographs, each measuring 16" x 24"

Traveling to Israel in April 2024 during the Iranian 331 missiles attack, Guedalia documented the aftermath of October 7th six months later: the communal burial ground at the Nova Music Festival site, the “cemetery” for the 3500 burned and abandoned cars moved from the Nova site, the bullet-ravaged home of a young murdered resident of Kibbutz Kfar Asa on the Gaza border (where she volunteered for three days to clean up the houses), and the changing art installations at Hostage Square in front of the Tel Aviv Museum. “These photographs act as living memorials to an incomprehensible yet systematic attack on the people of Israel. Like the eyes of the hostages and victims on the yellow chairs, my photographs reflect and hold a mirror up to the world.”



SEEKING JOY

Celebrations are joyful yet humble in a world of broken glass.

--- Holly Berger Markhoff, artist

Why do we devote an exhibition to seeking joy when there is so much turmoil and sadness in the world? We celebrate because in times of distress, we need reasons to appreciate life's blessings more than ever.

Moments of joy are what help to make life meaningful. In Jewish tradition there are limitations on mourning. When the week of *shiva* is over, we go out, take a walk, and are told to return to the world. Life is a mixture of joy and sadness, sometimes feeling both at the same time.

The Torah reminds us to choose life. We need to be reminded. Life goes on. Babies are born, couples are wed, holidays occur, children give us joy, even the victory of a favorite sports team is a source of positive excitement. These events bring escape, hope, and much needed moments of elation to our lives.

Holiday traditions like Thanksgiving dinner, Fourth of July parades, and Hanukkah candles remind us that life does go on and we can look forward to these events every year.

Celebrations also mean connections with family and friends, an essential source of strength to weather life's upheavals. Even during the isolation of Covid, families and communities were able to join together through Zoom as they shared celebrations virtually. We need these connections even more in perilous times.

King Solomon's approach during his many challenges offers wisdom today. He wore a ring inscribed with three Hebrew letters: *gimel*, *zayen*, and *yud*, the abbreviation for *gam zeh ya'avor* – "this too shall pass." We continue to find comfort and reassurance in these words.

In this exhibition, over 50 artists share moments of happiness they have experienced. The *Schechyanu* prayer we recite to bless such moments reminds us to celebrate our joys and look forward to the ones that lie ahead.

Phyllis Freedman
Curator, Heller Museum



Jeffrey Schrier
Joy Not Babel, 2007
Montage print, 25" x 38"

DAVID ABECASSIS

Mimouna Table, 2023

Oil on linen, 14" x 11"

This bountiful feast celebrating the end of Passover recalls the artist's Sephardic Moroccan heritage. Featured are *muflata* pancakes with honey and fish (symbolizing birth and fertility). *Mimouna* may be derived from the Arabic word for wealth and good fortune, apt aspirations for the beginning of the agricultural year. It may also be the local Judeo dialect for the phrase *Ani ma'amin* (I believe), the classic expression of continued faith in the coming of the messiah.



MARLENE D'ORAZIO ADLER

Balancing the Hanukkah, 2023

Mixed media collage, 5.5" x 19"

The annual winter festival of lights recalls the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees in 164 BCE, after its desecration into a pagan shrine by the Syrian Greeks. Adler depicts a Maccabean soldier holding aloft an enormous Hanukkah lamp, whose burning lights illuminate the red sky.

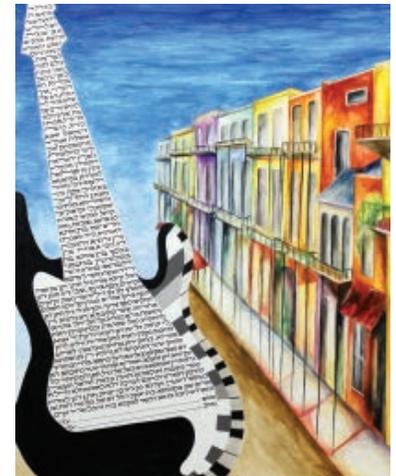


ELLEN ALT and MELISSA ALT

New Orleans Jazz Ketubah, 2019

Calligraphy, gouache, watercolor on paper, 30" x 23"

This very personal *ketubah* (wedding contract) was painted by the bride, Melissa Alt, and her aunt, Ellen Alt. The groom's bass guitar is filled with the Aramaic scribed text of the contract, while the distinctively colorful New Orleans street, where the couple got engaged, is ready for the celebration.



BILL ARON

Blessings, 2011-15 (back cover image)

Photograph, 17" x 20"

Wine is a significant component of many Jewish rituals, blessed by the Kiddush prayer, on Shabbat, holidays, and other festive events. Inscribed with the Hebrew letters for the word *borei* (creates) from the prayer over the wine, this Kiddush cup overflows with joy.



GAYLE ASCH

July 4th Parade, 2023

Digital painting on canvas, 11" x 26"

This patriotic small town parade scene, celebrating our nation and our democracy, depicts the community lining up along the parade route to get the best viewing spots. Originating with images captured on a webcam, Asch blurs the line between digital and traditional media through composition and rich coloration.

May the Fourth Be with You, 2023

Digital painting with acrylic, 8" x 20"

BONNIE ASTOR

Purim Parade in Israel, 2022

Photograph, 11" x 26"

The joyful Purim festival commemorates the rescue of the Jewish people living in 4th century BC Persia by Queen Esther and her uncle Mordechai. This clown on stilts reflects the levity of the costumed parades and carnivals throughout Israel.



MARK BERGHASH

Unexpected Guests, 2023

Digital photograph, 15" x 26"

This candid photograph captures both the privacy of the wedding ceremony and the curiosity of the three children peeking from the sidelines.



RACHEL BRAUN

World of Your Dreams, 2023

Blackwork embroidery, 23" x 12"

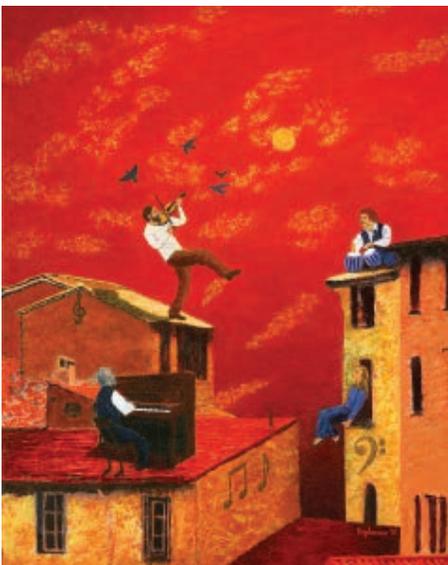
This embroidered gift for a bar mitzvah child resembles an opened Torah scroll and includes the English lyrics of Debbie Friedman's song, adapted from the Talmud in Berakhot 17a and excerpted in Hebrew on the right column: "May your eyes shine with the light of Torah; may your hope touch every generation to come."

MICHAEL BOGDANOW

Fiddler, 2016

Acrylic on canvas, 16" x 20" x 12"

As a musician and artist, Bogdanow expresses the special bond of musicians as they all perform on rooftops together and the essential role of the listener in completing the musical experience.





MAYA BRODSKY

Saturday, April 28, 2023
Oil on panel, 18" x 14"

Celebrating the birth of Brodsky's daughter, this intimate portrait captures the precious, profound moments after the delivery.



ELLEN DENUTO

Candle Dancers, 2018
Photograph, 8" x 10"

Many cultures share the celebration of lights, symbolizing renewal, as vividly captured by Denuto's photograph of the candle-lit Thai celebration of the full moon.

PAULINE CHERNICHAW

A Day at the Beach, 2023
Acrylic on paper, 18" x 24"

Chernichaw captures the bliss of wiggling one's toes amid the tropical sea, flora, and fauna.



DORIT DOTAN

Embracing Diversity, Love, and Creativity, 2020
Mixed media, 24" x 16"

Dotan invites us into the non-binary community, saying: "Let's dance, let's laugh, let's embrace the beauty of our diversity, and let our hearts resonate with the rhythm of acceptance."

CAMILLE ESKELL

To Have and to Hold, 2017
Mixed media, 43" high

Eskell combines a man's wedding turban, printed with a *tallit* (prayer shawl) pattern, and a woman's bridal veil, bordered by family portraits and *tallit* fringes, to evoke her Baghdadi Jewish heritage from Mumbai. The *tallit* fringes are knotted in the Sephardic style and fastened with an evil eye amulet within a gold Star of David.



TULLY FILMUS

Couple Dancing, c.1949

Oil pastel on canvas, 30" x 25.5"

Recalling his early childhood shtetl life in Bessarabia, the American painter Tilly Filmus depicts a joyful couple dancing (although not touching), linked by a handkerchief.



YOLANDA RAMIREZ GOLDSACK

Hava Nagila, 2020

Acrylic, 30" x 24"

Hava Nagila (“Let us Rejoice”), the popular song and dance at Jewish celebrations, transports the listener in a private moment of jubilation.

JOY GREENBERG

Touchdown, 2007

Painting, 36" x 20"

Dedicated fans of all sports are tightly connected to their teams, celebrating when their favorite players accomplish great deeds of strength and skill. Greenberg captures a gravity-defying touchdown in bright, vivid color as the packed stadium’s fans share the thrill of the moment.

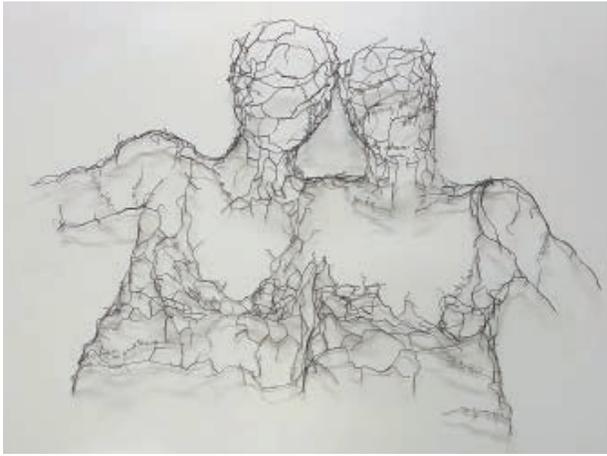


CARIN GREENSPAN

Treasured Gems, 2022

Jewelry mosaic, 11" x 14"

Greenspan’s loving relationship with her late mother is celebrated in an assemblage of their shared, memory-filled jewelry. The “tree of life” composition is a universal symbol of unity, connection, and strength. Also a metaphor for the Torah, it first appears in the story of the Garden of Eden, wittily evoked by the half-eaten apple pin.



NAOMI GROSSMAN

The Wedding, 2023

Wire sculpture, 28" x 40" x 8"

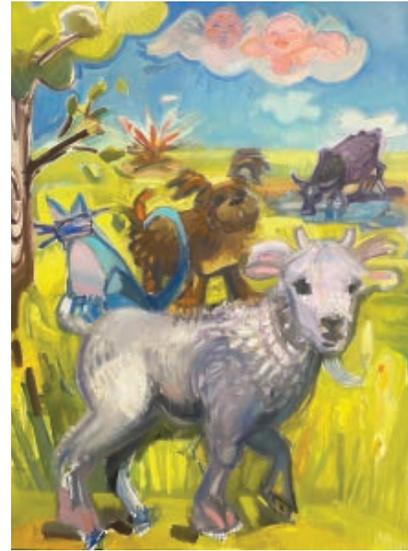
This delicate wire sculpture of two female forms, embedded with loving words as their skin, conveys strength and fragility, in a joyful celebration of the union of marriage. Grossman explains, "In this time of marriage equality I wanted a happy, positive piece giving voice to the joy of two people being able to share their lives together freely."

CARYL HULL-LEAVITT

Had Gadya Revisited, 2024

Oil painting, 36" x 48" x 1.5"

Hull-Leavitt reinterprets the Passover seder song's symbolism, traditionally explained as describing the many nations that have conquered Israel and our reliance on God, with a positive spirit of interdependence and coexistence in which all the protagonists abide in peace.



MELANIE KLINE

Preparing for Purim, 2024

Oil on canvas, 16" x 20"

Kline depicts her beloved grandmother baking *mishloach manot* - the Purim holiday gift tradition derived from the Book of Esther, which enjoins the Jewish people to observe the days of Purim "as days of feasting and gladness, and sending portions of food to one another, and gifts to the poor." (Esther 9:22).

CINDY LUTZ KORNET

The Band Played On, 2024

Acrylic paint with ink and lettering, 18" x 24"

Hebrew letters dance as a happy band urges us to find joy in the music, and dance to its tunes.



KSENIJA KOSTIC-PECARIC

Celebration of Sukkot: Four Spices 2023

Acrylic on canvas, 29" x 21"

Sukkot celebrates the autumn harvest and evokes the temporary outdoor structures (*sukkot*) that sheltered the Israelites in the wilderness after their escape from Egypt. Hebrew letters identify the four species integral to the ritual of shaking them together as a symbol of Jewish unity as one people: *etrog* (citron fruit), *lulav* (date palm frond), *hadass* (myrtle bough) and *aravah* (willow branch).



DIANA KURZ

Naming Baby Clara, 2023

Oil painting on linen, 34" x 32"

A grandmother holds her granddaughter in this *simchat bat* ceremony, which welcomes a newborn girl into the world with a blessing and announcement of the baby's name.

ELIZABETH LANGER

The House of Mirth, 2017

Collage, 20" x 15"

More than a shelter, a house is an extension of life, hosting family gatherings and communal celebrations. Langer depicts her house of mirth as a place of *simchah* (gladness or joy).



JOHN LAWSON

Street Songs - Constellation, 2022

Mixed media relief with trumpet, 40" x 24.8"

Lawson expresses how music and joy are intertwined in song and celebrations. His decades-long studio practice of sustainability and recycled materials incorporates Mardi Gras beads and found objects in his wall sculptures, as seen in this working trumpet assemblage.

ORA LERMAN

The Tree Goddess Offers Free Color to New York, 1991

Hand-ground oil on canvas, 64" x 48"

Lerman invites us into her vivid Garden of Eden (New York with its Chrysler building) where Eve, infused with the Mexican and Hindu folk art that enriched her Russian-Jewish heritage and travels, offers a universal fable celebrating the power of the feminist artistic spirit.



TANYA LEVINA

Ice Cream Memory, 2022

Oil painting on board, 11" x 14"

Simple everyday pleasures enrich our lives and enhance our memories. Levina depicts the memory of her late father and sister sharing an ice cream.

IRIS LEVINSON

Before the Celebration, 2023

Mixed media collage on canvas, 24" x 24"

When going to a celebration, half the fun is planning one's appearance to match one's mood. Levinson's lighthearted collage offers the myriad of decisions around makeup, hair, nails, and fashion. The woman in cautionary yellow at the upper left corner encourages women to choose wisely.



PEACHY LEVY

Shehecheyanu, 2023

Appliqué with embroidery, 20" x 26"

Levy invokes the *Shehecheyanu* prayer: thanking God, represented by the dominant Hebrew letter *shin* framing the home with its seven-branched menorah, symbolizing Judaism, for enabling us to celebrate moments large and small.

LUCINDA LUVAAS

Waterfall, 2021

Oil pigment sticks on archival paper, 22" x 30"

Luvaas finds joy in nature's wonders and encourages the viewer to treasure and preserve them.



PAUL MARGOLIS

Orli, Ben, and Their Son Jonah, 2016

Gelatin silver black and white print, 11" x 14"

Documentary photographer Margolis captures a joyful moment of everyday life in Israel: a happy child with his parents in the park on a sunny day.

HOLLY BERGER MARKHOFF

Silent Celebration, 2022 (front cover image)

Mixed media, 36" x 36"

Although happy occasions are meant to be exuberantly celebrated, Markhoff captures the mixed emotions for those impacted by loss, struggle, or pain, saying "Celebrations are joyful yet humble in a world of broken glass."



MICHAEL MENDEL

Sandlot Heroes: Winning the Big One, 2017

Watercolor, 18" x 12"

Rediscovering his black and white snapshot from long ago, Mendel recalls these boys' hard-fought victorious season and the exuberant team's camaraderie and shared joy.

LILIANNE MILGROM

Childhood Joy (I and II), 2021

Acrylic on canvas, 12" x 12" each

Milgrom's diptych portrays the innocence of childhood. Her children's capacity for celebrating with unselfconscious abandon is bittersweet for the artist as a daughter of Holocaust survivors.



ARLENE MOLLOW

Beneath the Surface, 2022

Encaustic, 30" x 30"

Growing up in Bradley Beach, a small resort town on the Jersey shore, Mollow's earliest memories are of the ocean – mysterious, magnificent, and mesmerizing. Her encaustic technique of multiple layers of translucent wax captures the hidden depths of emotion and memory, and the sensation of meditation, rejuvenation, and joy to be found in the water's depths – flowing, concealing, and revealing.

LESLIE NOBLER

Havdalah with Sonia, 2023

Giclee print with painting, 29" x 25"

The Havdalah ritual, marking the end of Shabbat and the joyful beginning of a new week, involves all five senses by lighting a special candle with braided wicks, drinking a cup of wine, and smelling the scent of sweet spices, whose symbols are hidden in this work.



ANITA RABINOFF-GOLDMAN

The Tiles That Bind, 2010

Pieced, appliqued, quilted and embroidered cotton, 17" x 24"

Rabinoff-Goldman depicts her dear friends at their long-standing regular mahjong game, whose fun has deepened their close bonds.

ARCHIE RAND

Celebrating Hanukkah, 2002

Acrylic on canvas, 38" x 43"

Through extravagant scale and vibrant color, Rand evokes the multi-generational, annual festival celebration: the lighting of the Hanukkah lamp, potato pancakes, playing *dreidl*, exchanging gifts, and displaying the illuminated *hanukkiah* at the window to commemorate the recovery of Jerusalem and subsequent rededication of the Second Temple at the beginning of the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucid Empire in the 2nd century BCE.





GAIL REBHAN

Passover-Mother, 2014

Archival inkjet print, 16" x 20"

Rebhan evokes the sensation of her late mother's memory as she prepares the Passover seder. Layers of matzo and a box of matzo meal, a vintage photograph of her family around the table, and the decades-old seder plate and hand-made matzo cover link the generations.

PHILIP RILEY

A Celebration of Life, 2023

Photograph on plexiglass, 18" x 24"

"Everyday miracles that happen out of sight and under our feet" is Riley's description of this wild chrysalis that will soon emerge as a beautiful monarch butterfly. "The joy of creation is everywhere," he says, "if we only take time to see."



FLORA ROSEFSKY

Ketubah, 1999

Markers and ink on paper, 11" x 14"

Inspired by her daughters' weddings, Rosefsky depicts the bride and groom, their families, and the witnesses at the signing of the *ketubah* (wedding contract), as the prelude to the wedding ceremony and celebration.

Wedding Dance, 1997

Markers and ink on paper, 11" x 14"

RHODA (BATYA) RYBA

Stronger Together, 2018

Acrylic, collage, 20" x 26"

Inspired by "she is clothed in strength and honor" from Proverbs 31, Ryba depicts women of diverse cultural backgrounds. By dancing together, celebrating their differences, supporting each other, and caring for each other, they are women of valor.





RUTH SCHREIBER

Brit Milah, 2019

Inkjet print, 15" x 20"

A *brit milah* or *bris* is the circumcision ceremony performed on Jewish baby boys when they are eight-days-old. Derived from Genesis, it is a symbol and reminder of the covenant that God made with Abraham. The *mohel*, who will perform the ritual, awaits on the far right, and the expectant crowd watches as the baby is transferred from the *qvater* (godfather) to the father, wearing his *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin*, in the center.

FRED SPINOWITZ

Ketubah, 2016

Illumination and calligraphy on parchment, 20" x 28"

The *ketubah* is a marriage contract outlining the rights and responsibilities of the groom under Jewish law, including his payment in the case of a divorce. Read and delivered to the bride prior to the betrothal blessings, this *ketubah* depicts the wedding ceremony under the *huppah* (wedding canopy) and features elegant Hebrew calligraphy and inventive floral motifs.



JEFFREY SCHRIER

Joy Not Babel, 2007, (image on page 1)

Montage print, 25" x 38"

Schrier created this typographic work by experimentally manipulating and printing cutouts of the word for “joy” in four languages – Arabic, Ethiopian Amharic, Tibetan, and Hebrew – to emphasize the universal human experience. Ripped and burned edges evoke the October 7 attack on Israel, the Israel-Gaza war, and the Jewish custom of tearing a garment as an expression of mourning.

LISA TURTZ

Abraham’s Fête with the Angels, 2018

Watercolor, gouache, 22" x 30"

Finding out that a baby is expected is a cause for great joy for the aged Sarah and Abraham, in Genesis, who have long given up this hope. Standing outside of her tent on an oriental carpet, Sarah laughs when she overhears the three angels announcing her imminent pregnancy to Abraham.





DORON WOLF

Blowing Out the Candles, 2016

Oil on canvas, 23" x 31"

The three-year-old girl wearing a floral wreath is poised to extinguish her birthday candles, reminding us of the beauty within the smallest moments in life. Wolf is inspired by the baroque painter Caravaggio's dramatic lighting, as he contrasts the candle-lit child with the surrounding darkness.

LLOYD WOLF

Black Lives Matter, 2020

Archival chromogenic print, 9.5" x 13.5"

Award-winning photographer Wolf focuses primarily on social documentary photography, saying "I take pictures because they help to make sense of this world we're in." We share the joy and hope expressed by the two women who are standing up for justice.



Kiley with Hanukkah Candles, 2006

Archival chromogenic print; 10.5" x 10.5"

Biden Victory, 2020

Archival chromogenic print; 9.5" x 13.5"

Graduation, 2018

Archival chromogenic print; 10.5" x 10.5"

Wedding kiss, 2012

Archival chromogenic print; 10" x 13.5"

Our Seder Table, 2020

Archival chromogenic print; 9.5" x 13.5"

MALCAH ZELDIS

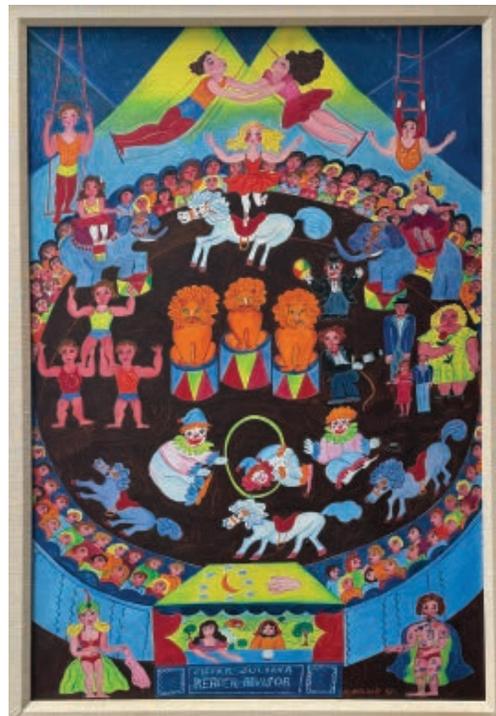
Circus, 1980

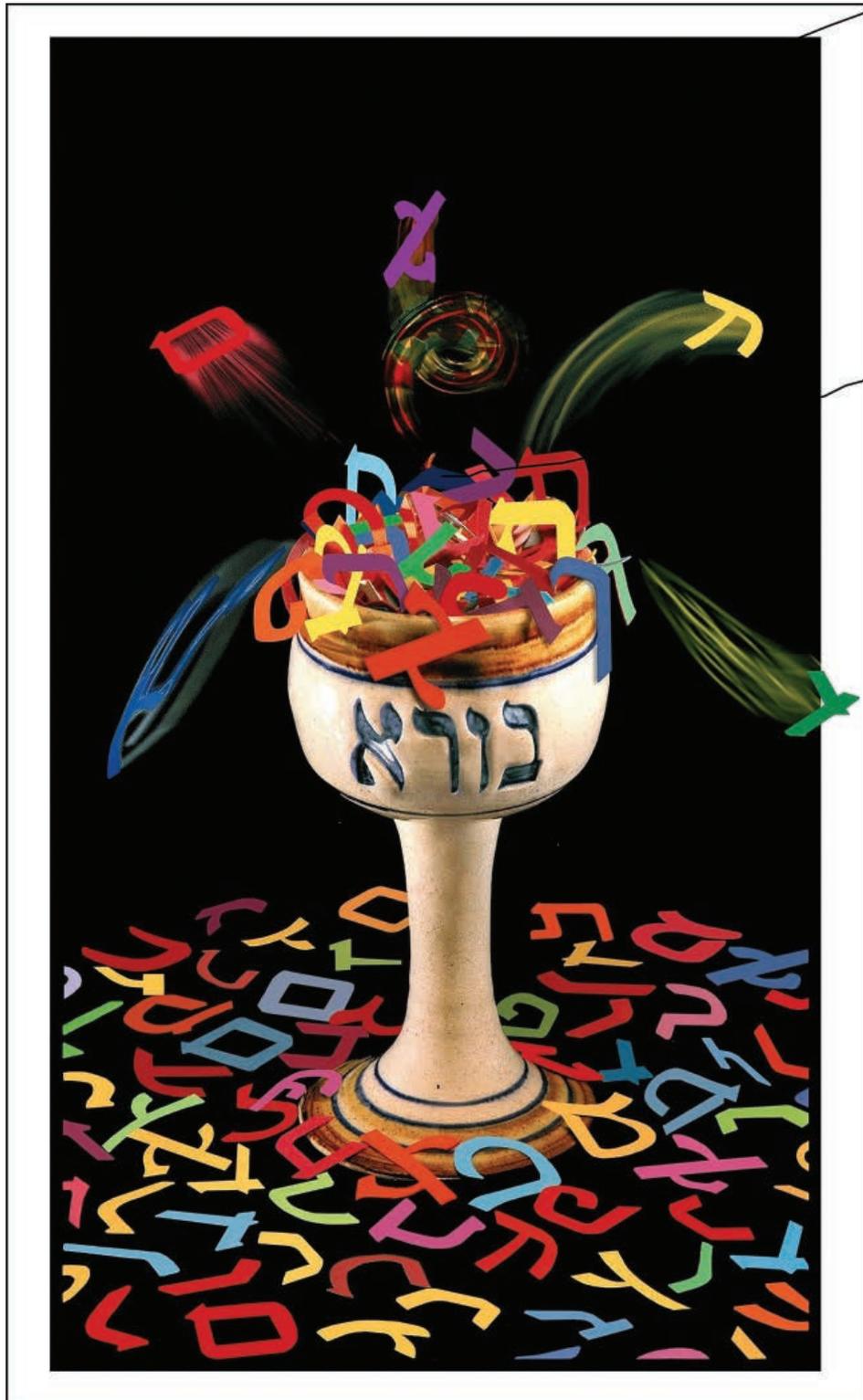
Acrylic on canvas, 40" x 28"

Zeldis captures the vivid color, energy, and enjoyment of a day at the circus, as a rapt audience watches the dazzling center ring's acrobats, clowns, and animal acts, with a fortune teller and tattooed man in the foreground.

Family Portrait, 1979

Acrylic on canvas, 12" x 14"





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