

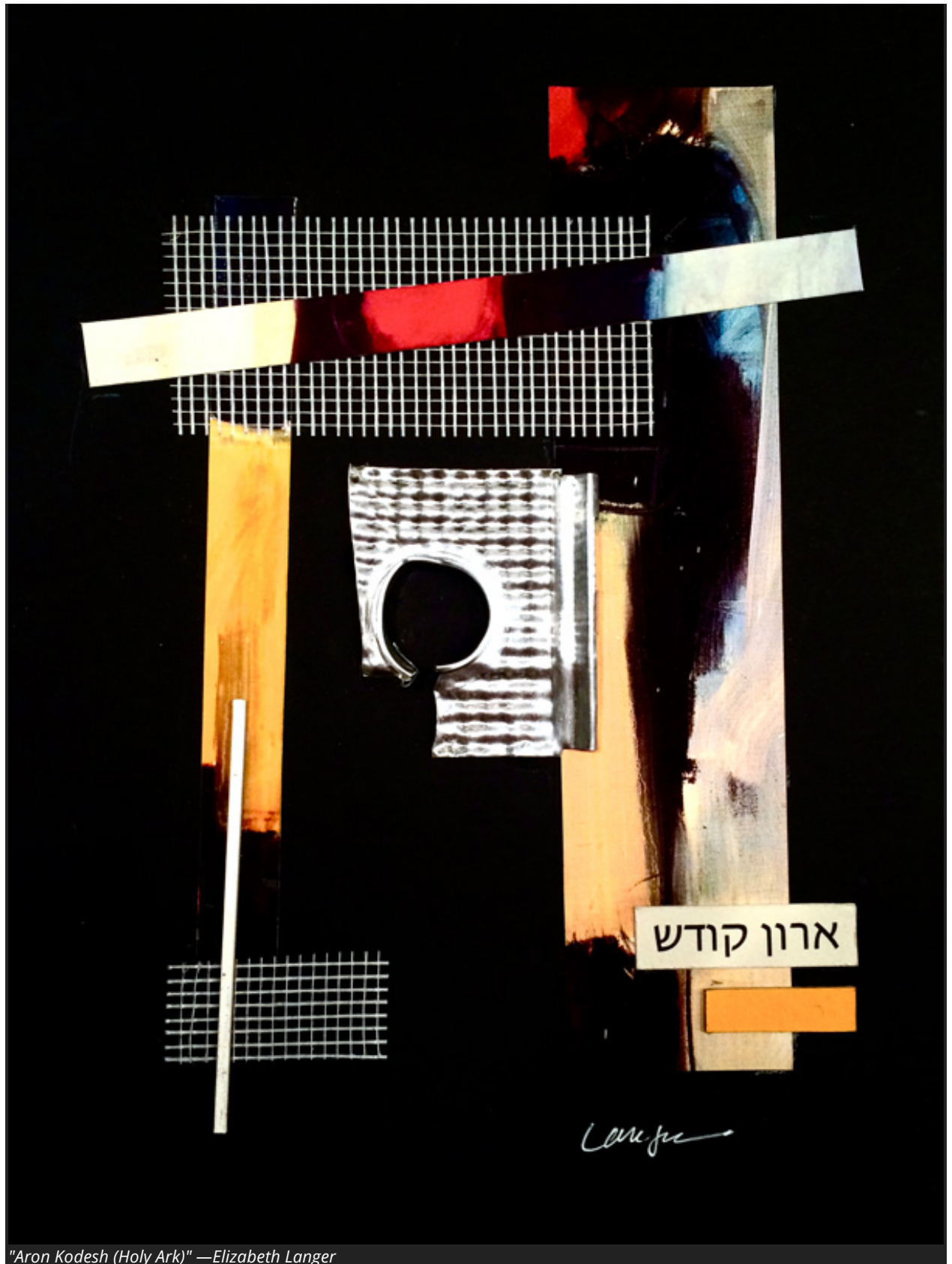
Art and spirituality merge at the Hebrew Center

By Abby Remer, Matha's Vineyard Times (May 21, 2025)

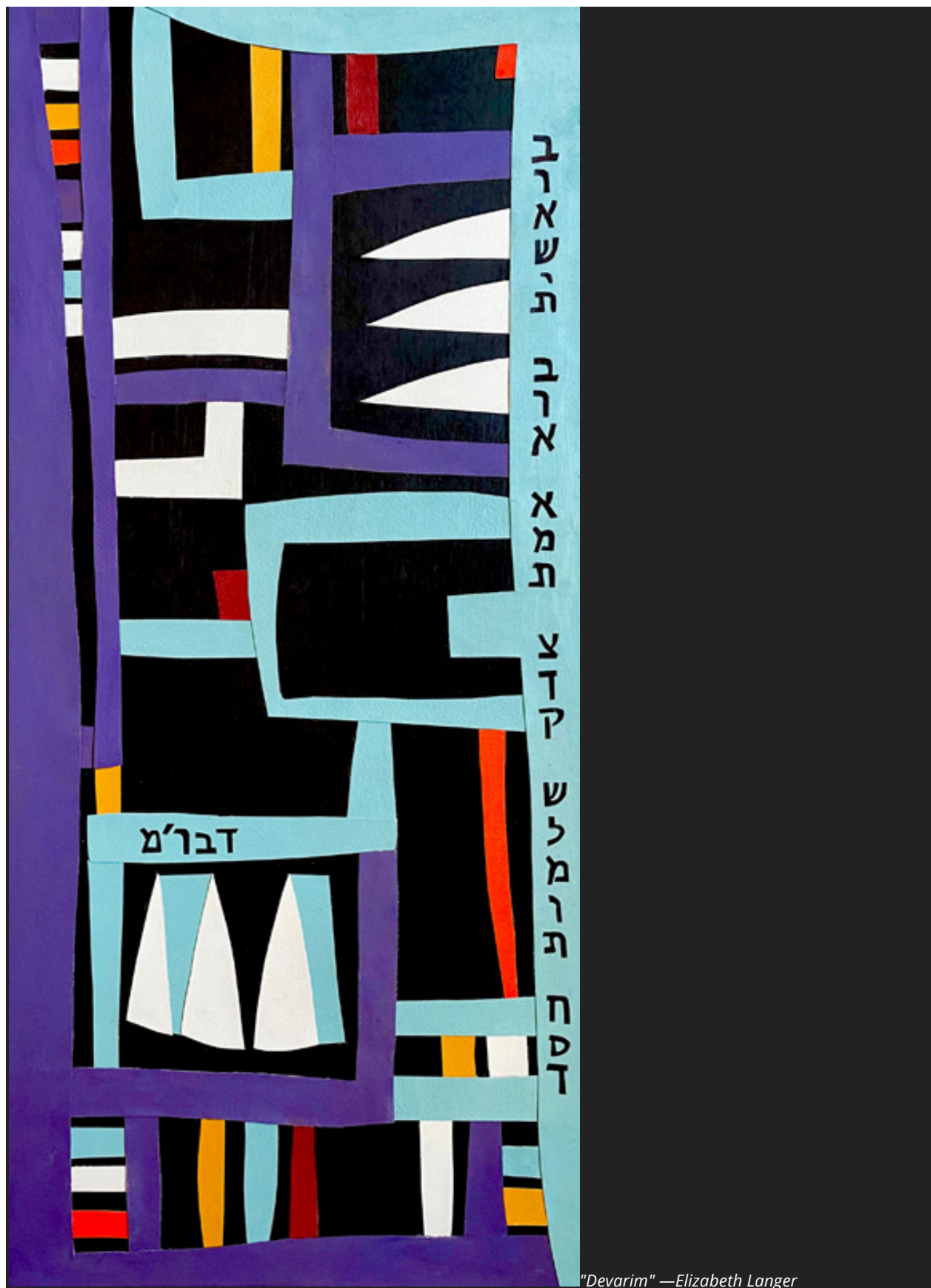
<https://www.mvtimes.com/2025/05/21/art-spirituality-merge-hebrew-center/>



"Kadosh (Holy)" —Elizabeth Langer



"Aron Kodesh (Holy Ark)" —Elizabeth Langer



"Devarim" —Elizabeth Langer

Both art and spirituality can be transcendent, and four artists will share how these intertwine for them at the Martha's Vineyard Hebrew Center. The program is the brainchild of Linda Vadász, who, with a strong background in art history, will facilitate the panel.]*"Art and Spirituality" will take place at the M.V. Hebrew Center on Sunday, May 25, at 4 pm.*]

Spirituality and religion have been central to art throughout history, in medieval and Renaissance Europe as well as in Byzantine, Buddhist, and Hindu cultures. In mid-19th-century America, the Hudson River School artists executed highly detailed and often idealized portrayals of nature to convey the belief that the American landscape reflected God.

I spoke with all four artists on the panel about their work, their relationship to spirituality, and the pieces they will present. Collage artist Elizabeth Langer began our discussion with a definition of spirituality that she discovered from Georgetown University's National Center for Cultural Competence: "a quality that goes beyond religious affiliation, that strives for inspiration, reverence, awe, meaning, and purpose, even in those who do not believe in God. The spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, strives for answers about the infinite, and comes essentially into focus in times of emotional stress, physical (and mental) illness, loss, bereavement, and death."

Langer explained that the first collage that came to her mind for the panel was "Devarim (Words)." The piece was created after curators at Hebrew Union College Museum asked her in 2019 to produce an artwork exemplifying the life and work of Rabbi Hara Person, the chief executive of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), which represents Reform rabbis worldwide. At the time, Langer happened to read an inspirational review by renowned art critic Roberta Smith, "The Radical Quilting of Rosie Lee Tompkins." The textiles in the exhibition included biblical imagery and were created by Black women from the South using found objects. Langer shared, "I thought that quilts are essentially collages, and I'm a collage artist."

For "Devarim (Words)," Langer used the colors found in the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary the Israelites carried in the desert while wandering toward the Promised Land. She also asked Rabbi Person for Hebrew words that were particularly meaningful to her, and incorporated them into the artwork. Langer explained that she also creates work that is not overtly tied to religion: "There are lots of paintings and drawings and prints I've made that are about the human condition, [which] encompass, in a sense, spirituality."

Hermine Hull, who paints landscapes and portraits, also discussed her relationship with Judaism when we began our conversation. Although she was raised Jewish, Hull noted, "It was not something I wanted to do, and at about 14, I was kicked out of confirmation class for asking too many questions." She reflected, "However, as an adult, I said

prayers every morning.” Hull currently attends services at the Martha’s Vineyard Hebrew Center. “I find it very spiritual,” she said. “Reading the prayer book, I realized how much of my moral compass is based on Judaism and the Torah.”

She continued, “All those years, I thought I was a spiritual person. I thought that human beings need something bigger than themselves. We should be humbled by the Earth and all that is on it and in it.” She added, “The decision of what to paint is purely visual, based on how I see things. My landscapes feel spiritual in that they’re something I can do that other people can’t, or don’t. The turning of the seasons, and daylight and darkness, cold and heat ... all that circular rhythm of life is all to me very spiritual.”

Barney Zeitz, who works in metal sculpture, stained glass, and drawing, has created commissions relating to Christianity and Judaism, but considers everything he does spiritual in one way or another. “Even a domestic object like a centerpiece or chandelier, although decorative, is very moving, ceremonial, and spiritual to me,” he said. One of the pieces he will bring is a forged and welded stainless steel sculpture titled “Lola.” Based on a photograph of flowers, “It is a sense of community, the reaching up of these figures,” he said. “One is winged. It’s not religious-looking, but very spiritual.”

Stained glass has a long tradition in religious buildings, with the light coming in to create a transformative air. Along these lines, Zeitz will also display his “German Study,” designed for large fused and laminated stained-glass windows he did for the Flieden German Church, a former synagogue in Germany. “It’s not religious. It’s a feeling of the landscape,” said Zeitz.

Jeanette Demeestere says her figurative work is more about soulfulness than spirituality: “It’s about feelings. When I complete the face, it’s something ethereal. I don’t know how that comes about. It does so unexpectedly.” She will be showing collages and a monotype; the latter is of Pina Bausch dancers. The German choreographer incorporates dance, spoken word, music, singing, theater, costumes, and props to create a unique theatrical experience. Bausch’s performances often explore emotions, relationships, and the complexities of the human condition. “You see something in their movement,” said Demeestere, “something very spiritual. The movement of their hands and their heads. Seeing a performance of hers leaves you with that feeling.”