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Translations: Ancient Rules, Contemporary Visions

The 613

Current Arts Gallery
+The Jewish Art Salon

Translations: The 613

Ancient Rules, Contemporary Visions

Exhibition: Presented by Jewish Art Salon in collaboration with Current Arts | **Published by:** Jewish Art Salon
Distributed by: Current Arts / The Current Selection | **Curators:** Richard McBee, Joel Silverstein & Yona Verwer
Producers: Current Arts, Founder Ashley Frey and Director Samuel Abelow
Participating Artists: Samuel Abelow, Efrat Baler-Moses, Gabriella Boros, Mel Brown, Leah Caroline, Harriet Finck, Goldie Gross, Debbie Guedalia, Dan Harris, Ellen Holtzblatt, Susan Rosenberg Jones, Tobi Kahn, Omer Kaplan, Nancy Schwartz Katz, Shoshana Gugenheim Kedem, Carol Man, Paul Margolis, Richard McBee, Lenore Mizrachi-Cohen, Shani Nizan, Carmi Plaut, Archie Rand, Cynthia Beth Rubin, Joel Silverstein, Max Tzinman, Deborah Ugoretz, Yona Verwer, David Wander, Billha Zussman.
Catalog Design, Layout & Production: Samuel Abelow

We thank the UJA Federation New York, the Natan Foundation, and Danny Dannon, Israeli Ambassador to the UN.

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Translations: The 613

Ancient Rules, Contemporary Visions

Essay by Joel Silverstein, Richard McBee, and Yona Verwer

How does one take an ancient commandment, essentially a statute within the realm of legal discourse, and create a contemporary work of art? Why would a modern artist endeavor such a task? This groundbreaking exhibition presents personal responses and visionary interpretations of the classic 613 Mitzvot (Commandments) found in the Torah, the first five books of The Hebrew Bible.

Reaching out to both secular and religious audiences, these new works create an environment of contemplation and an aura of excitement, essentially merging the modern categories of law and art. Accepting these commandments as subject matter, the artists have agreed to employ their chosen mitzvot as an aesthetic imperative, quietly breaking the assumed boundaries of both categories of knowledge, much like the original text itself. The Torah majestically transcends the concepts of law, ritual, history, worship, and art, defying modern categories of thought entirely.

The results form a body of artworks with no single definitive style or signature, ranging from the figurative to the abstract,and to the fully conceptual. The full effect of the installation forms an integrative environment, as envisioned by the curators and artists, offering a uniquely modern take on The 613 as previously unseen, a conversation with a 3,000-year-old history of encounter, complete with discourse.

In total, the 613 Mitzvot forms a cornerstone of Jewish life, presenting codes of ethics, rules of behavior, rituals, history, iconography, and literary symbols. The material is pertinent toJews and, historically speaking, much of the world at large. As is often cited, The Hebrew Bible serves as a foundational text for the New Testament and informs much of the Quran as well. It has served as the conceptual blueprint for European rulers and limited monarchy, the American Revolution, the war against tyrants, the Civil Rights Movement, and even Liberation Theology. Observant Jews see the mitzvot as an essential way to interact with the world.

The commandments have functioned as a dynamic historical imperative, adapted as Jews traveled across the globe. Rather than being mired in rigid fundamentalism, rabbinic interpretation is tempered by communal response, thus creating a synergy of both stasis and flexibility for vastly different geographic and political environments. The results are not frozen in time, as rulings have often created prescient moral responses that predate the modern era by centuries.

Like the Jewish text itself, works may be examined in successive layers of interpretation from the concrete, to metaphorical, homiletic, and finally, to fully abstract ideas. Each mitzvah functions as a point of departure, an artistic response to the present including themes of identity, gender, immigration, ecology, technology, power, and justice as they collide with our current age. The result is a contemporary visual expression brimming with energy, leaping across time and space, presented as resonantly new, but in truth representing concepts older than millennia. While the 613 Mitzvot and subsequent interpretations are central to Jewish life, its presence is not well known or understood by the general public. By considering these visual expressions and their inspiration, we are encouraged to examine the twin themes of ethics and imagination that run through our lives.

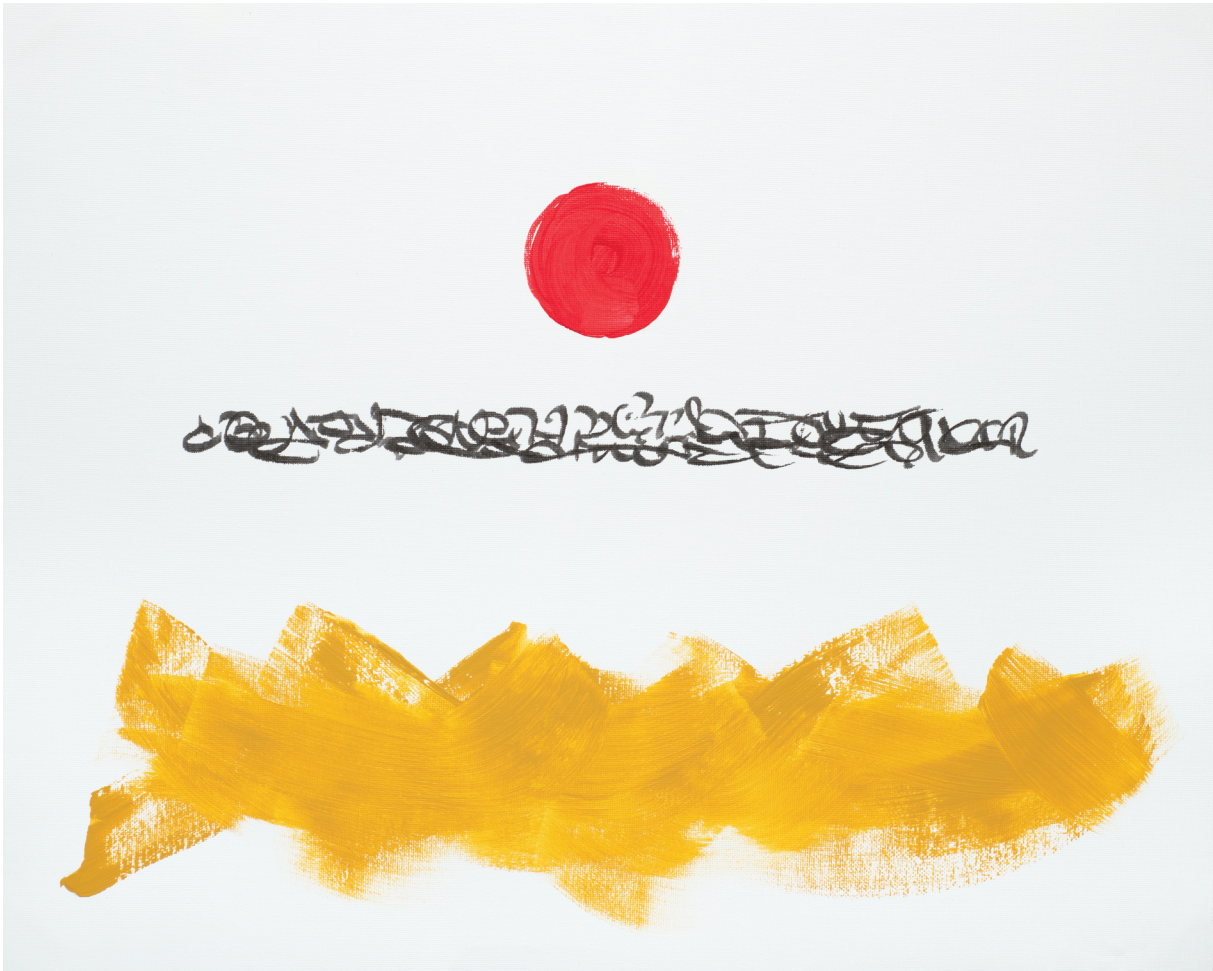
Artworks



Dan Harris
Al Tirah
Paper Collage, 33 x 17
Do Not be Terrified in War (#525)



Debbie Teicholz Guedalia,
Rainbow over Iguazu Falls, Argentina
Photograph; 24 x 16
The Command to Unify the Name of God



Mel Brown
B'reishis
Acrylic & Ink on canvas; 20 x 16
Do Not Bow Down to Idolatry (#28)



David Wander
Acrylic on canvas board, 14 x 18
Do not Covet. (#38)



Richard McBee
Joseph and Potiphar's Wife
Oil on canvas, 18 x 24
Do Not Covet Your Neighbor's Wife (#38)



Joel Silverstein,
Digital Gilcee Print
Do Not Raise the Dead or Consult With Them (#513)



Carmi Plaut
The New Calf
Mixed media, 34 x 24
Do Not Bow Down to Idolatry (#28)



Omer Kaplan
Lessons in Saying Goodbye
Photograph, 16 x 16
Honor the Old (#257)



Paul Margolis
Shabbat Table for the Hostages in Gaza, October 2023
Gelatin Silver Print, 11 x 14
Do Not Stand Idly by the Blood of Your Neighbor (#327)



Susan Rosenberg Jones
Photography, 19 x 25
Make Fringes for Yourself on the Four Corners of Your Garment (#386)



Deborah Ugoretz,
The Randomness of Justice
Acrylic, pastels, 36 x 24
Judge With Righteousness (#235)



Efrat Baler-Moses
As the World Turns
Oil on canvas, found objects, 22 x 24
Do Not be Terrified in War (#525)



Shani Nizan
Dachshund
Photography, 23 x 20
Do Not use the Fee of a Prostitute or a Price of a Dog
to Purchase a Sacrifice in the Temple (#571)



Tobi Kahn
Blessing the New Moon
Acrylic on wood, 11 x 9
Sanctify the New Month (#4)



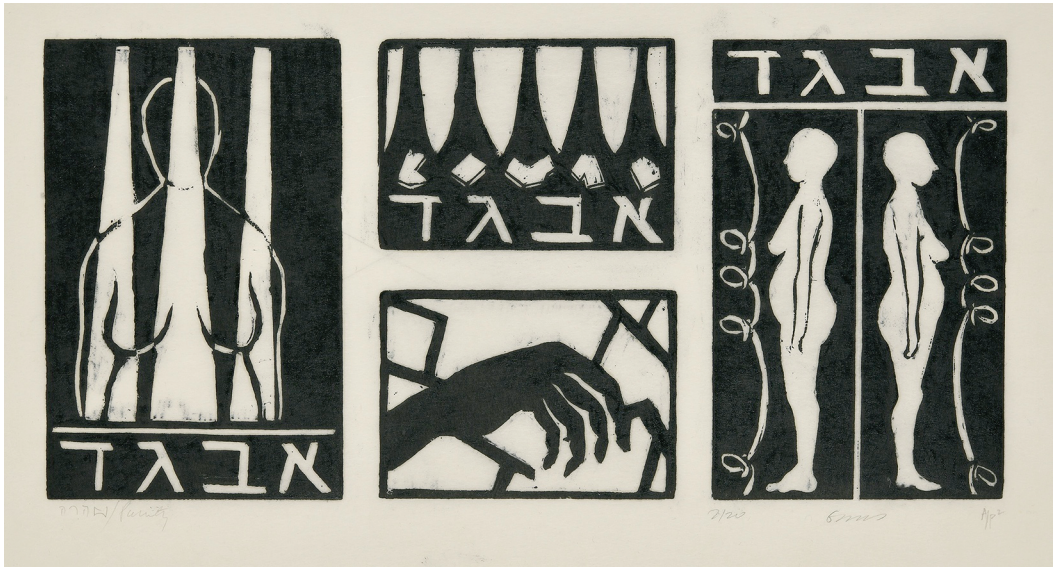
Yona Verwer
Book of Yona 15
Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 24
Immerse the Impure (#175)



Carol Man
Kosher Labels
Ceramic plates mounted on acrylic frames, 16 x 16
Do Not Eat Meat that was Not Ritually Slaughtered (#73)



Cynthia Beth Rubin
Pomegranates and Moon Cycles
Archival Digital Print, 32 x 24
Sanctify the New Month (#4)



Gabrielle Boros
Tahara
Woodblock Print, 27 x 13
Concerning the Ritual Impurity of the Menstruant (#181)



Harriet Finck
Love the Stranger, 1
Ink on Paper Collage, 30 x 22
Love the Convert (#431)



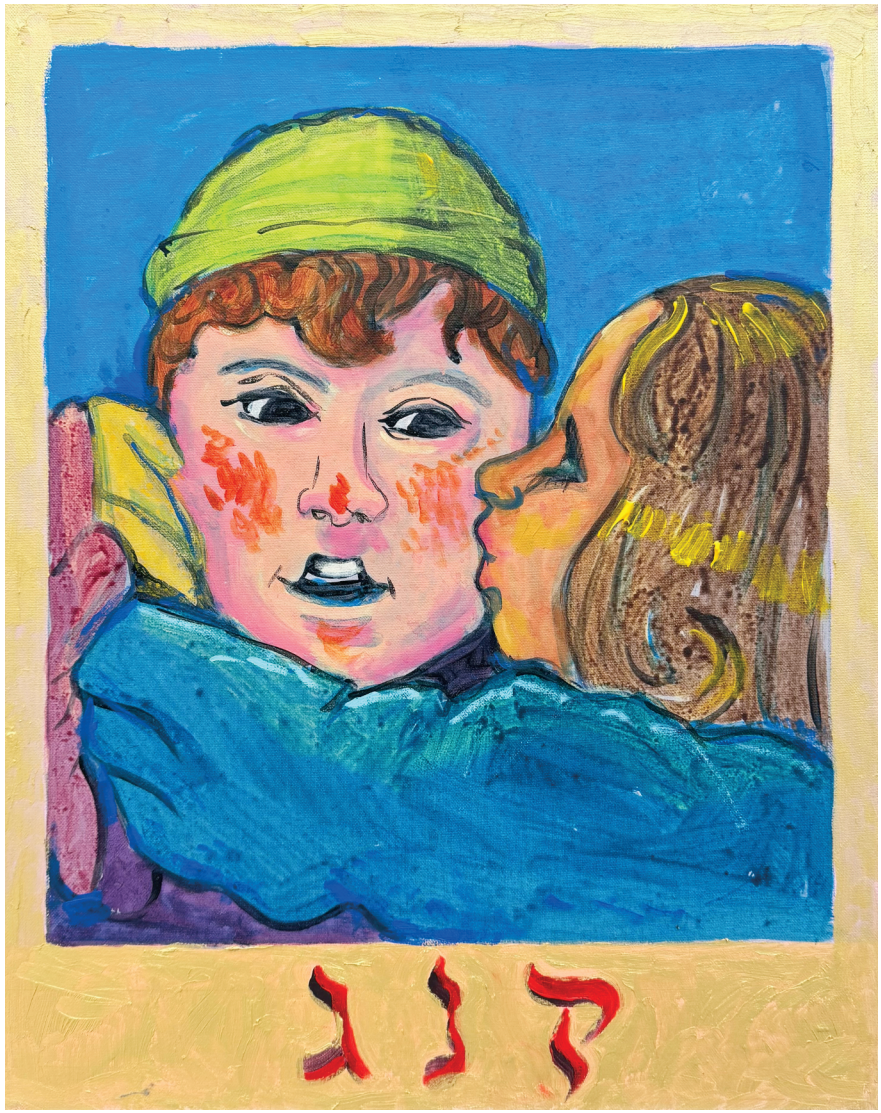
Max Tzinman
Eyeless
Metal print, 18 x 12
Do Not Bow Down to Idolatry (#28)



Leah Caroline
Maps
Inkjet Print, printed fabric, thread, pencil, kozo paper, book board, 23 x 17
Dwell in the Succah During the Holiday of Succos, (#325)



Samuel Abelow
Friday Afternoon Prayers
Oil on canvas, 36 x 48
Sanctify the Sabbath with Words (#31)



Archie Rand
#153 (Not to Have Relations with your Brother's Wife)
Acrylic on Canvas, 18 x 24
In our enumeration #202



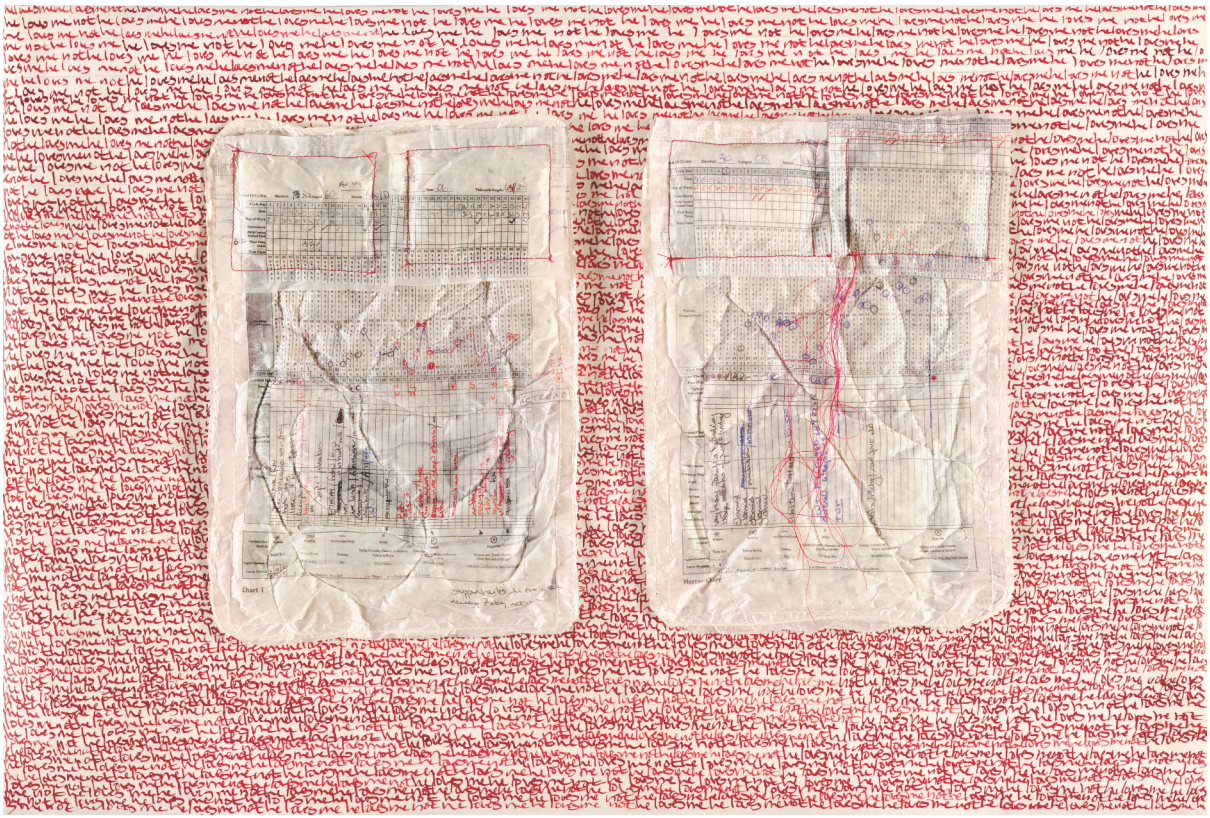
Archie Rand
#487 (One Must Save the Life of the Pursued even by Killing the Pursuer)
Acrylic on Canvas, 18 x 24
In our enumeration #600



Goldie Gross
Nose
Ceramic, 10”
Affix a Mezuzah on your Doorpost (#423)



Billha Zussman
Black Fire on White Fire
Photography, 42 x 60
Honor Your Father and Mother (#212)



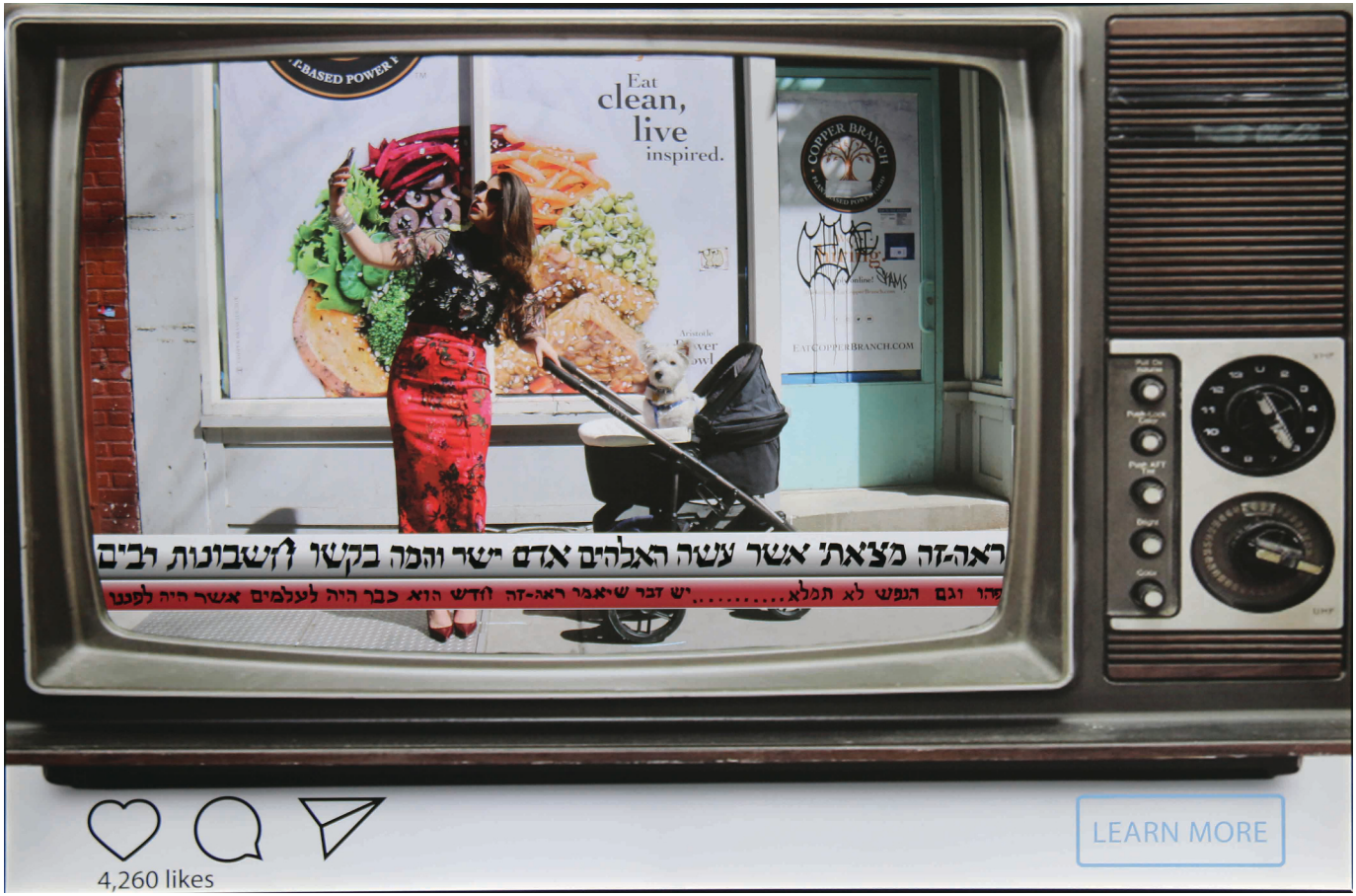
Shoshana Guggenheim Kedem
Va'yeira | *He Appeared*
Parchment, ink, thread, rice paper, 32 x 22
Be Fruitful and Multiply (#1)



Ellen Holtzblatt
Tazria
Woodbook print on Japanese paper, 26 x 34
Immersion of the Impure in a mikveh (#174)



Nancy Schwartz Katz
Homeland Promise Land
Mixed media- paper and paint, 18 x 22
Love the Convert (#431)



Lenore Mizrachi Cohen
Distraction (From Ecclesiastes series, Vanity of Vanities)
Mixed media (photography, Hebrew calligraphy, paper cut) 22 x 30 x 2"
Study Torah (#419)









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The Current Arts Foundation

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