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Engaging Contemporary Art in Jewish Studies: A Scholars' Roundtable with Three Contemporary Toronto Artists

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Jews and the Arts

Schedule Information:

Scheduled Time: Sun, Dec 16 - 2:00pm - 4:00pm **Building/Room:** Sheraton Centre Toronto / Three

Title Displayed in Event Calendar: Engaging Contemporary Art in Jewish Studies: A Scholars' Roundtable with Three Contemporary Toronto Artists

Session Participants:

Session Organizer: Jeffrey A. Shandler (Rutgers University)

Chair: Jeffrey A. Shandler (Rutgers University)

Discussant: Jonathan Boyarin (University of Kansas)

Discussant: John M. Efron (University of California, Berkeley)

Discussant: Shelley Hornstein (York University)

Discussant: Olga Litvak (University at Albany, SUNY)

Discussant: Chava Weissler (Lehigh University)

Discussant: Carol Zemel (York University)

Discussant: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (New York University)

Abstract:

This roundtable will provide an opportunity for dialogue among contemporary Jewish artists and Jewish studies scholars working in an array of disciplines. The work of three artists (Rafael Goldchain, Mayer Kirshenblatt, Melissa Shiff) will be shown in brief presentations, followed by a roundtable discussion by scholars of modern Jewish history, anthropology, and art history. The goal of this session is to expand the discussion of Jewish art beyond the scope of those who are already engaged by it and to make the case for its importance in Jewish studies alongside texts and other phenomena that are recognized as central to Jewish experience. In this way, we hope to bring serious scholarly attention to the work of contemporary artists of interest to Jewish studies, while providing opportunities for artists to participate in conversation with Jewish studies scholars.

The three artists selected for this session all live and work in Toronto. They work in a variety of media (painting, photography, installation art) and engage an array of issues of interest, including pre-Holocaust East European Jewish experience, issues of personal, familial, and communal memory, the interrelation of art and ritual, and the possibilities of art as a force for social justice. Descriptions of the artists and their work follow:

Rafael Goldchain, a photographer and installation artist, reenacts family portraits taken in Poland during the interwar years in a project entitled "Familial Ground" This autobiographical installation work includes digitally altered self-portrait photographs,

reproductions of pages from an artist's book, videotapes, and aural works.

"Melissa Shiff," a video, performance, and installation artist, rethinks, reinvents, and reinvigorates Jewish ritual, engages with issues of cultural memory, and is informed by a commitment to social activism. Her most recent work, "ARK," was the keynote project for the Jewish Museum in Prague's centennial year celebration in 2006..

Self-taught artist Mayer Kirshenblatt recalls the world of his childhood in Poland in both words and pain in his forthcoming exhibition and book ""The Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust"; the project entails intergenerational memory practices through longstanding collaboration with his daughter, folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett.

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