

***Lidové Noviny* 16.9.2006**

The ark lightens up after Dark: the Canadian artist Melissa Shiff's work in the area of the Pinkas Synagogue

The video sculpture takes the form of a four and a half meter tall ship made of acrylic and aluminum. Placed in the former Malá Pinkasová Street, the art work is illuminated in the evenings. The symbolic ark celebrating the centennial of the Jewish Museum was created by the Canadian artist Melissa Shiff. In projects exhibited around the world ("The medium is the Matzo," "Elijah's Chair," "Gender Cuts/The Jew under the Knife"...), she has devoted herself to the renewal of Jewish traditions. Her work addresses current themes by remodeling and redeploying Jewish traditions. The artist imagines her work in Prague as a visual metaphor in which the ark both preserves evidence of Jewish culture and, as a museum, forms part of the history of the 20th Century.

After dark, the ark's sides turn into a three-dimensional projection screen which serves as the backdrop for a 30 minute video narrative. It explores the dramatic fate of the Jewish museum and the local Jewish community in the last century as well as the story of the preservation of Jewish cultural monuments and Jews' spiritual heritage. It reminds us of the adversity, whether in the form of the Holocaust or the Flood, which obstructed [the museum's] mission in the past.

As Noah's ark

"The museum's mission is similar to that of Noah's Ark as recorded in the Tanach," explains Melissa Shiff. "Its task is to preserve valuable artifacts which would otherwise have been destroyed by natural disasters or other catastrophes. Therefore, the Ark serves as a useful metaphor for museums in general and for this museum in particular which saved many thousand objects during the Holocaust."

The Canadian artist is not completely unknown here. Last spring, visitors to the Spanish Synagogue in Prague could see her video installation "Post-modern Jewish Wedding." Recently, she has also established the remarkable online [Sic. video store] store JAP – Jewish Art Projects/Products/Politics www.melissashiff.com