Paint by Numbers

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York
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**Paint by Numbers**

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**Front Cover:** Tobia Rava, *Professio del Mar Rosso*, 2012, Silk and acetate, 76” x 52 ½”

**Back Cover:** Concinnitas Project, 2015:
Simon Donaldson, *Amperes Law*
Freeman Dyson, *The MacDonald Equation*
David Mumford, *Thirteen*
Stephen Smale, *Newton’s Method*
Four gravures on Rives paper, 26 ¼” x 31 ½” each
Jewish tradition is full of numbers. As we will read from curator Laura Kruger and Professors Wendy Zierler and Adriane Leveen, Jewish sources are replete with numbers that constitute the structure of our lives: days of the week, the number of our ranks, the very pillars of existence, and many more.

But we also have an interesting tradition of not counting. I grew up at a Reform synagogue and never joined a traditional minyan for prayer until entering rabbinical school. I was introduced to the notion of not reducing human beings to numbers by avoiding numbering the participants in a minyan. One way is to count by reciting a verse from Psalms with ten words in it. Or even to count “not one, not two…. The tattoos on the arms of some concentration camp survivors attest to the most extreme reduction of human beings to numbers.

So which is it? Are numbers the building blocks of life, or are they a dangerous impediment to life?

Perhaps the answer can be found in commentary to the first portion of the book of Bamidbar, Numbers. A census is ordered to count the people. Rashbam says the correct number was needed to determine, simply, how many half-shekels should be collected as a tax.

Rashi suggests a more tender motivation. He writes, “Because they were dear to God, God counts them all the time – when they went out of Egypt, God counted them; when many of them fell for having worshipped the golden calf, God counted them to ascertain how many were left, when the Shechina (divine presence) was about to dwell among them, God again took their census, for on the first day of Nisan the Tabernacle was erected, and shortly afterward, on the first day of Iyar, God counted them.”

Midrash Numbers Raba offers a balance. “When the Children of Israel are numbered for a proper purpose, their numbers are preserved. But, when they are not, their numbers are diminished.” The census will avail if it is conducted for the right reasons. In this way, numbers are like any technology. They are, themselves, morally neutral. Using them does not automatically support life, or destroy it. The result depends on the intention we bring. We are reminded to approach every person with curiosity and openness, to see in them the image of the Divine. We can be like Rashi’s version of God, and count out of love. That challenge is with us all the time.
The use of numbers in Jewish rituals, daily life, and belief harks back to ancient biblical times. Indeed, the creation of the world is counted in numbers as is the flood of Noah and so much more. Numbers and numerology have been at the core of biblical understanding since the Bible was first codified and possibly before.

The early cross-cultural impact of numerology most likely included the blending of Semitic, Sumerian, Pythagorean, and Babylonian numeric systems. In the Hebrew system each alphabetical letter was accorded a numerical value and those numbers carried further symbolic and spiritual significance. Each number became the means for understanding Divine imperatives.

Numbering creates a scaffold of order and continuity – virtually everything we are, do, and interface with is a number. Dates of disruption, disaster, triumph, or success are remembered with annual respect. Numbers underpin measurements of worth, marriage contracts, payments, mathematical equations, diary date entries, lottery tickets, passports, licenses, house numbers, Rx prescriptions, physicality, the counting of rhythmic time, and time itself.

The concept of numbering things is universal, encompassing every country and region of our planet. Numbers are how we organize the apparent chaos of our world and hence, the only truly universal ‘language.’

Historical epochs are recalled by their numerical dates – a shorthand for referencing of the entire event: 1492/Expulsion from Spain, 1648/Chmielnicki Massacres, 1654/First Jews arrive in the Western Hemisphere, 1938/Kristallnacht, 1945/Liberation, 1948/Founding of the State of Israel.

It is likely that human recognition of numeric order preceded articulated language. The skill of ‘counting’ began with the inventory of body parts; one head, one nose, and one neck proceeded to two eyes, two ears, two arms, two legs, and on to fingers and toes. It then focused on the changing phases of the moon. Stars and patterns were observed to be numerical formats. From the outset, people grouped numbers into repetitive sequences, and in time, invested them with power and mystical values, seven being the divine number of the days of creation. The repetition of lunar cycles was observed to be seven – the divine number of completion, and it became, to many, the most powerful of all numbers.
Biblical stories abound with sevens: seven days of creation, seven colors in the rainbow, seven ancestors of Israel. 

*Shabbat*, the seventh day; holidays of Passover and *Sukkot*, each seven days; the seven processions celebrating *Simchat Torah* are but a small sample. Seven is the sum of two other power numbers: three and four. Three represents the reconciliation of opposites and balance: the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph, the three matzot at the Passover *Seder*, the three judges constituting a *Beit Din*, a Jewish court. Four represents the balance of the earth: four corners of the world, four seasons, the four directions – north, south, east, and west.

The 21st-century artists contributing works to this exhibition represent a diversity of age, gender, nationality, and cultural heritage. Their materials and techniques include oil, acrylic, drawing, etching, lithography, wood block, collage, photography, found objects, assemblages, and textiles. Their styles span the fine art vocabulary of our day. Their passion and commitment to communicating through their art is urgent and forceful.

Some reference the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust by forcing the viewer to concentrate on the number 6,000,000, and grapple with the dehumanization effected by the branded concentration camp tattoo numbers. Others exult in the miracle of the eight lights during the rededication of the ancient temple that continue to offer light in the darkness of winter.

This exhibition illuminates the power of numbers as a source of inspiration and meaning for artists in our own time.

*The phrase ‘Paint by Number’ recognizes the commercial production in the early 1950s of pre-printed artist canvas craft sets that encouraged people to become artists. Acknowledged and collected by the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, the phrase, ‘Paint by Number’ has entered American vernacular speech.*

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**Tetsuya Noda**  
*Diary August 10, 1979: Child’s Homework*  
Wood block print  
27" x 21 1/2"  
*Collection of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum*
The number three holds a privileged place in rabbinic numerology. The first chapter of the mishnaic Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) includes not one, but two mishnayot that hinge on the number three. The second mishnah of the chapter is attributed to Shimon the Righteous, “among the last surviving members of the Great Assembly,” who declares: “Al shloshah devarim ha’olam omed – The world stands on three things: Torah, avodah (service of God), and gemilut hassadim (deeds of lovingkindness).

This tripod of Jewish values serves as a fitting motto for a man whose life and work straddled the biblical and rabbinic periods, for all three principles can be interpreted as emblematic of both periods in Jewish history. Torah, the principle of Jewish study, evokes the biblical leadership and legacy of Moses as well as Ezra the Priest and Scribe, who read the Torah of Moses before the entire people (Nehemiah 8) and, according to tradition, also founded the Great Assembly of which Shimon the Righteous was a part. Avodah connotes the cultic service of the Temple, but later gets repurposed by the rabbis as service of the heart, i.e., prayer. Gemilut hassadim, ethical and caring behavior, was often trumpeted by the prophets as greater in importance than the priestly sacrifices, and thus serves as an abiding carryover principle as well.

But this particularistic value trio was not sustainable or sustaining, it seems, for the second Simon of this chapter, whose life coincided with the rebellion against the Romans and the subsequent destruction of the Second Temple. According to Shimon ben Gamliel, Al shloshah devarim ha’olam kayam – the world is sustained by three principles – din (justice), emet (truth), and shalom (peace). It appears that Shimon ben Gamliel’s time was characterized by such communal dislocation and tragedy that it necessitated a more universalistic core than that formerly promoted by Simon the Righteous. All three of these new things, justice, truth, and peace, are of paramount importance to Jews and gentiles alike. The whole world needs them in order to survive. For Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel in particular, justice, truth, and peace were especially important because they were in such short supply in his world. As one of the ten rabbinic martyrs cruelly executed by the Romans, his own existence was cut short by the conspicuous absence of justice, truth, and peace in his own day.

The two Simons of this first chapter of Pirkei Avot set a precedent both for defining core principles as well as for re-defining them in the face of radically altered historical and communal circumstances. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was one such circumstance. On the one hand, the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine meant the possibility, after two millennia of Jewish exile, of structuring civic life around such Jewish values as study, service to God, and deeds of lovingkindness. The immense popularity of Haim Tzur’s musical setting of “Al shloshah devarim,” as performed by Yigal Bashan in the second Israeli Hassidic Song Festival (1970) [see huc.edu/YigalBashan] reflects the enthusiasm surrounding these core Jewish ideas.

On the other hand, the Labor Zionist underpinnings of the state compelled poet Leah Goldberg (1911-1970) to offer a radically secular, pluralistic reimagining of Simon the Righteous’ triad. To this day, Goldberg’s poem figures prominently in Israeli middle school curricula as teachers encourage students to determine and defend their own threesomes of core values:

Trix Rosen

Eternal Flame of the Shin, 2008
Photograph
15” x 21 ½”
אמר הדייג היורד לים
על שלושה דבריםeworld קיים-
על מי הימים,
על חוף היבשת
ועל דגי המצולה העולים ברשת.

אמר האיכר המוביל מחרשה:
עומד העולם על דברים שלושה-
על אדמת השדות,
על גسمي שמים
ועל לחם מוצא בזיעת אפיים.

אמר האמן בביתו הבודד
על שלושה דברים העולם עומד:
על ליבו של אדם,
על יפי הטבע,
על ביטוי הדברים בצליל וצבע.

אמר האדם הפוקח עיניו:
עושרו של עולם מה נפלא ומה רב-
בוקר בוקר נלכד בלבי כברשת
העולם ומלואו,
המצולה היבשת, ואורות וצללים
וחגים וחולין,
ומילים וצלילים ושדות שיבולים
וכל צבעי הקשת.

In the case of the first three individuals surveyed by the poem, the concept of *avodah* is clearly transmuted from divine service to productive labor. In fact, it seems that for all three professionals featured here, only one principle sustains the world, and that is work. As such, the three items mentioned in each stanza relate integrally to their particular lines of work. For the fisherman, life depends on the two arenas where he labors – the sea and the shore – and on the product of this work, namely his yield of fish. Same thing with the farmer, whose life depends on the earth he ploughs, the rain, and the grain that produces his daily bread. And the artist’s work, defined here by Goldberg’s own artistic pursuits of poetry and painting, depends on artistic raw materials and products: on human emotion, the idea of beauty, and the expression of things in words and images.

So much, then, for Simon the Righteous’ principal emphases: namely study and religious devotion. Even ethical deeds seem conspicuously absent in Goldberg’s poem. Indeed, the final stanza of the poem, with its shift from people identified by particular professions to ha-Adam – humankind in general – seems closer in tenor to R. Shimon ben Gamliel’s more universalistic statement than that of the first Simon.

And yet, if one looks closely at this last, longer, differently rhymed stanza, one sees traces of all the elements from the previous stanzas and hints to Simon the Righteous’ values as well. Unlike the artist who seems to work and live alone, the human being in this stanza opens his eyes to a broader, more encompassing world view, his own sphere of study. Daily his heart is caught (like the fisherman’s fish) in a net of human emotions and concern. Like the farmer he makes references
to fields and their yield, and like the artist, he takes notice of and studies light, shadow, sounds, and words. And there are oblique references to God and religious practice as well.

His expression of wonder over the vast beauty of the created world, “ha’olam um’lo’o” (the world and the fullness thereof), brings to mind Psalm 24 (LeDavid: La’adonai ha’aretz umelo’ah), recited every Sunday as part of the traditional morning prayer service, and the practice of daily prayer. The terms hagim ve’hulin (holidays and everyday), call to mind the Jewish calendar cycle of weekdays and holy days, a cycle that can now be observed in the everyday life of the Jewish State. Finally, ha-Adam’s egalitarian recognition of the importance of all work, physical as well as spiritual, concrete as well as abstract, constitutes its own form of ethical awareness and lovingkindness, born of a recognition of the inherent dignity of each human being as created in the image of God. And so, on all these many iterations of three things the Jewish and human worlds will stand, we hope and pray, for many generations to come.

Hanukkah Lamps and Menorot
Collection of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum

(Counter-clockwise from right) The bronze seven-branched menorah, based on the depiction of the ancient Temple’s menorah in the Arch of Titus, became the inspiration for the symbol of the State of Israel.
Gift of Georgette Bennett in memory of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum

Maty Grunberg’s green-patinated bronze seven-branch menorah is enlivened with burgeoning plant life, alluding to the Torah, which is described as “the tree of life for all who uphold it.”
Gift of Richard J. and Joan Scheuer

Folk artist Manfred Anson created his “Statue of Liberty” Hanukkah lamp to express his gratitude for America’s freedoms.
Gift of the Michael B. Rukin Estate

Ann Sperry’s welded steel Hanukkah lamp combines a delicacy of silhouette with raw cartridge-like forms, evoking the Hanukkah Shabbat haftarah, which celebrates God’s saving spirit, “not by power nor by might.”
Gift of Ann Sperry

(On left) Oded Halahmy’s “Peace, Shalom, Salaam” Hanukkah lamp joins together the symbols of the pomegranate (evoking 613 mitzvot, fertility, prosperity, hope, and life) and the palm tree (symbolizing the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert, growth, and righteousness).
Gift of Oded Halahmy
How Biblical Numbers Created a People

Adriane Leveen, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer in Hebrew Bible and Lead Judaica Specialist in the Jim Joseph Initiatives, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, New York

“Who knows one? I know one…One is our God.” So starts a beloved song from the Passover Seder. The song goes on to describe the two tablets of the Covenant on which are written the Ten Commandments (mentioned later in the song), the three patriarchs and four matriarchs, etc., until the seven days of the week and the eight days of the brit milah or circumcision. It ends with the thirteen attributes of God, also the year of a bat/bar mitzvah. Our family sings this song every year with gusto. Easily remembered, each number from one to thirteen anchors a major concept of biblical narrative, ritual, or theology in our minds, hearts, and collective memories. “Who knows one?” reinforces where we came from and who we are now, and expresses our joy and gratitude that we are together again.

The astonishing amount of counting that goes on in the fourth of the Five Books of Moses, fittingly called “Numbers” in English, illustrates another way in which numbers in the Torah anchor the Jewish people. From the opening verses, the people are counted, by family and by tribe, name by name, number after number, in almost identical wording. Each one of us is indispensable to the project of shaping the people of Israel. A recurring Hebrew word used in the counting, pakad, means that one is not only counted but held to account. Each of us has an obligation, since freed by God, to build a better life, in justice and righteousness, than what we left behind in the narrow, enslaved spaces of Egypt. Pakad also reminds each of us that we are responsible, and therefore accountable, to meet that obligation, then and now.

The prophet Ezekiel relies on numbers to anchor the musings of his imagination. Exiled to Babylon, Ezekiel mourns over the destruction of the First Temple until he recovers from his grief by designing a rebuilt temple in the Jerusalem of his mind. As Ezekiel guides us through each chamber, cubit by cubit, number by number, we can almost see the outline of his temple. In so doing, we ready ourselves for the day in which mourning turns to joy in a shared and holy space.

Biblical numbers anchor our essential concepts, call on us to make our lives count, and dare us to turn despair into hope and transform destruction into creativity.
Marlene Adler [28]

Priestly Blessings; Deuteronomy 28, 2016
Dry point, watercolor
10” x 6”

In Judaism, the hand represents power and strength. God often appears in the Torah visualized as a “strong hand and an outstretched arm.” Adler depicts hands forming the Jewish priestly blessing. The sum of each finger joint on both hands equals 28, the numerical value of Koach, which is the Hebrew word for strength.

DL Alvarez

Buzzing Earth/Creation, 1998
Pencil on paper
18 ¼” x 21 ½”

Alvarez uses the format of the original Paint by Number kits, invented in 1951 by Dan Robbins and based on an idea used by Leonardo da Vinci to teach painting. Instead of numbers denoting paint colors, Alvarez has replaced the colors with sensitivities and emotions, such as “the buzzing earth,” “whispering light,” or “logic and ceremony.”

Courtesy of Laura & Lewis Kruger
Debra Band [1]

*Aleph… The Radiant One*, 2016
Ink, gouache, 24k. gold leaf on paper
26 ½” x 26 ½”

The paramount value associated with God in Judaism is the number one, from the core belief in a singular God. The *Shema*, the quintessential prayer of the Judaism, proclaims, “Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One.” This prayer is inscribed by Band in Hebrew and English around the outside edge of the work.

Ed Baynard [3; 40]

*3 Rocks*, 2013
Acrylic on birch panel
40” x 30”

After the Israelites escaped from Egypt, they feared that they could not oust the inhabitants of the Promised Land. Because of their disbelief, God caused them to wander for 40 years in the desert. This work is evocative of the desert through which the Jewish people trekked. The number three represents the concept of “completeness” and has taken on magical powers.
After surviving the Holocaust, Polish-born Riva Bell found herself in Paris where she joined a Zionist youth group. When the group learned that the State of Israel had been established, they burst into song and dance. Bell’s remembrance of the joy of Israeli Independence suffuses this painting.

Bismuth expresses the symbolic nature of the numbers 613 and 14, which at first glance do not seem to be related. On Rosh Hashanah we customarily eat pomegranates which, according to Hebrew mysticism, have 613 seeds when they reach maturity. These seeds, representing the commandments, are divided into 2 groups: 248 positive, “you will do,” and 365 negative, “you will not do.” The sum of the digits in each number is the same, 14. Fourteen is also the number of bones in the fingers of each of our hands, linking this number further to the human condition and to the hands in the painting.
Matt Blackwell [10]

Moses - Stone News, 2011
Acrylic, oil, and collage on canvas
54 ¼” x 24 ½”

Blackwell depicts an angry Moses holding the Ten Commandments in his right hand. An image of the golden calf in the bottom left of the painting reminds us of why Moses looks exasperated. Irony and narrative are key components of Blackwell’s art.

Sandra Bowden [12]

Aaron’s Breast Plate, 1998
Embossed collage
40” x 30”

The Book of Exodus describes Aaron’s priestly garments as having been made “for beauty and for glory.” His breastplate was inset with 12 semiprecious stones inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel, named for each of Jacob’s sons. Bowden’s intaglio images representing these stones are made of richly deckled paper, embossed, textured, and etched with the Hebrew words of Jacob’s blessing for his sons and their names.

Gift of the artist to the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum
Ariel Burger [1648]

*Bli Ayin Hara: Fish Are Immune to the Evil Eye*, 2016: *Chmielnicki Massacre – 1648*

Print
11” x 9”

This series of four prints deals with the theme of *bli ayin hara*, Hebrew for “without an evil eye.” Burger refers to the mythical notion that fish are immune to the evil eye in order to explore horrific events in human history. In this work, Burger alludes to Ukrainian politician Bohdan Chmielnicki who instigated the uprising of the Cossacks against the Jews, resulting in the Chmielnicki Massacres in 1648.

Bunny Burson [537]

*Hanging Chads/Recount*, 2008

Chads, ink, and photoplex
15 ¼” x 16 ¼”

Chads are a paradoxical medium. On the one hand they are a colorful, discarded fragment of paper. But on the other hand they each represent a vote and the power created when votes are combined. Chads have become the universal symbol of the corrupted ballot. This work focuses on the U.S. presidential election of 2000 and the consequences of a failed electoral process. The 537 votes that separated Vice President Al Gore from George W. Bush in Florida changed history.
**Concinnitas Project, 2015** *(see images on back cover)*

Simon Donaldson, *Ampere’s Law*
Freeman Dyson, *The MacDonald Equation*
David Mumford, *Thirteen*
Stephen Smale, *Newton’s Method*

Four gravures on Rives paper
26 ¼” x 31 ½” each

The Concinnitas Project is the title of a portfolio of ten aquatints by mathematicians and physicists to transcribe their “most beautiful mathematical expression,” curated by Dan Rockmore. Each of these works is a response to the question, “What is your most beautiful mathematical expression?” These elegant streams of symbols and diagrams serve as moments of discovery and connection. In those connections these artists – mathematicians, computer scientists, and physicists – find beauty.

*Courtesy of Parasol Press, Ltd.*

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**Melanie Dankowicz** [24]

*Hebrew Number Clock*, 2016

Anodized aluminum
9” diameter

“Movement and flow within the Hebrew letters is intended to resonate with the continuous exercise of the hands of the clock. Jewish thought encourages us to focus on small moments in our lives,” says Dankowicz.
Joelle Dautricourt [1-10]

From “Book of Happy Writing”, 2012:
Broken Tablets, 2012
Computer generated print
18” x 13”

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments and found the Israelites praying to a golden calf, he broke the stone tablets out of rage. When the tablets were broken, the letters flew away. Here those letters are represented by letters aleph through yod [or 1 through 10].

Damon Davis [2, 5, 10, 14, 28]

All Hands on Deck #1, 2015
Photolitho, graphite
32” x 48”

These images of hands in protest or supplication were created in reaction to the brutal attacks on African-American people by the police in Ferguson, MO, in 2014. The hands depicted here are hands that worked to protect human rights. The many numbers represented by hands, including 2 hands, 5 and 10 fingers, 14 joints, the amount of bones in each hand, adding up to 28, which is the numerical value of the Hebrew word for strength, koach.

Courtesy of Wildwood Press LLC
Gunter Demnig
& Peter Hess

*Stolpersteine (Stumbling Stones)*, 2012
Bronze covered concrete cubes
3 ¾” x 3 ¾” x 3 ¾”

Over 25,000 of these memorial cobblestones by artists Demnig and Hess have been embedded within the sidewalks of over 600 cities throughout Germany and across Europe. They are engraved with the names and fates of Jewish victims of the Holocaust and are situated in front of the buildings where they once lived. Today, pedestrians stumble upon these stones, which serve as individual, eternal memorials. These two stones memorialize Levi Lagovier (born 1870) and Rochmar Krieger Lagovier (born 1875), who were captured as they attempted to flee Nazi-occupied France, were deported in 1942 to the Drancy internment camp, and were murdered at Auschwitz.

*Gift of the artists to the Hebrew Union College - Hebrew Institute of Religion Museum*

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Dorit Jordan Dotan

[2x2, 40]

*Ark with Pigeon (Part II)*, 2016
Photography, digital art
26 ½” x 40”

In this two-part work (see page 7), the artist brings a modern interpretation to the familiar story of Noah’s ark. She depicts the struggle to board the ark, the flood lasting 40 days and nights, the landing on terra firma, and the promise of peace, and then tweaks the story by picturing what appears to be the ubiquitous pigeon rather than the expected dove of peace and survival.
2 Two Tablets
3 Three Patriarchs
7 Divine Creation
10 Ten Commandments
12 Twelve Tribes
18 “Chai” Life
22 Number of Letters in the Jewish Alphabet
28 Strength “Koach”
36 Number of Tzadikim in the World
40 Number of Years the Israelites Were in the Desert
49 Nights Counting the Omer
54 Total Number of Parashot
63 Total Tractates in The Six Books of the Mishnah
70 Life of King David
120 Life of Moses
147 Life of Jacob
175 Life of Abraham
180 Life of Isaac
248 Total Words in the Shema
374 Years the First Temple Stood
430 Years Israelites Dwelt in Egypt
586 Years the Second Temple Stood
613 Total Number of Mitzvot
304, 805 Total Number of Letters in the Torah

Leonard Everett Fisher

_There Came a Nation_, 1964
Acrylic, gesso on masonite
60” x 40”

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Patriarchs, are both the physical and spiritual ancestors of Judaism, and all three are mentioned often in daily prayer. Fisher has painted them as powerful and thoughtful men, each distinctive, yet linked in a vertical lineage.

_Gift of the artist to the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum_

Larry S. Frankel

_Kabbalah Bingo, the Winning Card_, 2016
Photo on aluminum
36” x 36”
**Saara Gallin** [50]  
*One People - One Nation - Am Echad*, 1998  
Glass  
58” x 25” x 3”

This glass stele was created for the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the State of Israel. Gallin’s concern was to recognize and honor the diverse expressions of what it means to be a Jew in Israel. She has dedicated the piece to individuals whose quiet and frequently anonymous efforts brought statehood into being. They are identified by their signatures with the word ‘Yes’ in Hebrew.

*Gift of the artist to the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion Museum*

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**Grace Graupe-Pillard**

*Departures*, 2015  
Archival pigment print  
20” x 30”

In this manipulated photograph of the Penn Station Amtrak waiting area, the numbers are about time, destination, and train track. Graupe-Pillard alters her photo of the minor rigors of travel by embedding socially-significant scenes – a soldier in riot gear aiming his weapon, a homeless person seeking safety in the shelter of mass transportation. She draws the distinction between the minutia of daily life and the broader concerns of our era.
**Barbara Green [9]**

*The Ninth of Av, 1492*, 2016
Oil on linen
30" x 40"

*Tisha B’Av*, a day of mourning that falls on the ninth day (or Hebrew letter *tet*) in the month of *Av*, commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem by the Babylonians and Romans, respectively, and the Spanish Inquisition in 1492. In this striking and somber painting of a multi-generational family turned out of its home in Spain, one can see the edict of eviction posted on the wall. These faces are based on generations of the artist’s family and friends.

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**Laurie Gross [10]**

*The Covenant*, 1983
Woven linen
22" x 3 x 14"

This fiber sculpture focuses on our obligations to God and each other. The *tallit* (prayer shawl), which acts as a reminder of the covenant between the Israelites and God, is made up of many numerical reminders. The numerical value of the word *tzitzit* (fringes) is 600. Each of the fringes contains 8 threads and 5 knots, making a total of 613. This number corresponds to the 613 commandments contained in the Torah. In making the fringes, one winds the long thread around the other threads between the 5 knots 7, 8, 11, and 13 times, respectively. The first three numbers equal 26, which is the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew letters usually transliterated YHWH or JHVH that form a biblical proper name of God. The remaining number equals the numerical value of the word *ehad* (one) – the last word in the opening verse of the *Shema*. The fringes of the *tallit* thus not only remind the Jew of the 613 divine commandments, but also underscore the central doctrine of Judaism, that God is one.

*Gift of the artist to the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion Museum*
Carol Hamoy [4]

Four Questions, 2008
Mixed media
10” x 24” x 8”

The four questions at the Passover Seder are traditionally asked by the youngest child. These questions define the meaning of Passover. Hamoy has new questions for the 21st century. She is concerned about our planet and the lives of all those who inhabit it. She asks:

“Why must there be hunger in the world?
Why hasn’t a cure for cancer been found?
Why can’t we live in peace and harmony?
And, what’s with all these natural disasters?”

John Hirsch

Poppy-cock: Unlucky Numbers, 2016
Collage on canvas
30” x 40”

Some people believe that numbers have power, and certainly gamblers rely on the right number. Perhaps the rooster, the dominant image in this work, suggests that the superstitious belief in lucky numbers yields chicken feed.
Tobias Kahn [49]

*SAPHYR Omer Counter, Series IV, Variation 5, 2016*
Silver lacquer on wood
24” x 18”

Jews count the 49 days of the Omer (the seven-week period between Passover, the holiday of exodus, and Shavuot, the holiday of receiving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai), by reciting a blessing for each day and identifying the day’s place in the week and month. Although each day is distinct, the sequence of days and weeks is part of a grander whole. Kahn states, “Beginning with one, we become an ordered multitude – accruing the attributes of a people in our journey from slavery to redemption.”

Tamar Hirsch [2x2]

*Two by Two, 2016*
Mixed media
35” x 50 ½”

Hirsch’s use of animals as subject matter serves as a metaphor that resonates with viewers on a more universal level. The teal writing in the upper-right corner is echat, the feminine form of the number one in Hebrew. The masculine form, echad, means God. Thus in the midst of fulfilling God’s command to fill Noah’s ark two by two, we celebrate the Judaic concept of one God.
Judy Glickman Lauder

*Suitcases, Auschwitz*, 1990
Gelatin silver print
9” x 13 ¼”

Glickman Lauder’s affecting work depicts the battered luggage confiscated upon arrival at the Nazi death camps – each one a poignant representation of its Jewish owners who were annihilated during the Holocaust. Each piece of luggage, different in size, shape, and condition, reflects the individuality of those who perished.

John Lawson, 2006 [0]

*Exodus - Diminishing Numbers*, 2006
Triptych, encaustic wax process on damaged architectural drawings salvaged after Hurricane Katrina
3’ x 9’

Lawson states, “Overlaid on the drawings are 13 animals, insects, fish, and birds floating as if they are shadow puppets, all on the critical danger extinct list. The full moon in the center represents the number 0, the circle of life, and the shape of our celestial bodies, and acts as a reference for us all to acknowledge our responsibility not only to our immediate environment as humans but for all creatures who inhabit this glorious planet.”
Andrew Paul Leonard [6]

*Hexacontium I*, 2016
Electron micro-photography giclee print
19” x 19”

This photo is of a Hexacontium skeleton, a microscopic marine organism, which always has six radial spines of equal size. In the Middle Ages, Augustine and Alcuin wrote that God created the world in six days, not seven, because six was the perfect number. Modern Number Theory defines a perfect number as a positive integer that is equal to the sum of its proper divisors. Thus, the number six is the smallest perfect number – the sum of 1, 2, and 3.

Peachy Levy, 2016 [613]

*Many Paths to 613 Mitzvot*, 2016
Embroidery on linen, seed beads
23 ½” x 23 ½”

Judaism teaches that the pomegranate is a symbol for righteousness, because it is said to have 613 seeds, which corresponds with the 613 Commandments of the Torah. The Hebrew letters spell out (on the right) the alphabetical equivalent of 613, and (on the left) *mitzvot*, commandments.
Margalit Mannor [200]

Ketubah, 2015
Photographic ink jet print
19 ½” x 13 ½”

This Ketubah (Jewish marriage contract) is the artist’s own. Before her wedding ceremony in Tel Aviv, Israel, in March 1963, the rabbi asked the groom how much money he pledged in the event of divorce. His answer was eighteen to the eighteenth power. Since the Rabbi could not calculate such a large sum, he asked the groom for a real number, to which the groom replied, “200 Israeli lirot.”

Suzi Matthews

Barcoded, 2014
Paper collage on canvas
36” x 48”

Using receipts, discarded checks, ticket stubs, and shipping labels as her palette, Matthews has elevated otherwise mundane materials into a work of art with energy and movement. Just as contemporary painters are moving away from accepted forms, so has Matthews re-made seemingly random numbers and letters into an intellectually engaging collage and subtle work of art.
Richard McBee [10]

*Ten Trials of Abraham* (detail), 2016
Oil on canvas
83” x 27”

Abraham’s long, full life is recorded in the Torah and Midrash. Known as the ten tests of Abraham, these narrations illustrate his life-changing events. The artist based his schematic depiction on the Lorenzo Ghiberti bronze doors of the Florentine Baptistry (c. 1401). This detail depicts God telling Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac upon an altar.

Jacqueline Nicholls [49]

*Counting the Omer*, 2014
Lithograph
27 ½” x 27 ½”

Nicholls personalized a meaningful method for counting the days of the Omer, the period of time from the freedom festival of Passover to the commemoration of Shavuot, the receiving of the Ten Commandments. “Each day I draw barley grains that correspond to the number of the day, exploring the poetry of the numbers.”
**Tetsuya Noda** [3]

*Diary June 11, 1971: Beit Din for Conversion*

Wood block print  
29” x 23 ½”

In 1971 the Japanese artist Tetsuya Noda converted to Judaism. In this self-portrait depiction of his religious conversion are the figures of the three rabbis (Chaplains Victor Solomon and Mark Shrager, USAF, and Rabbi Marvin Tokayer) conducting the *Beit Din* for his conversion in Okinowa. In June 1971 Noda married Dorit Bartur, daughter of the Israeli ambassador to Japan. Noda created an art discipline by painting one piece per day as a personal diary.

*Collection of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum*

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**Mark Podwal** [1654]

*1654, First Jews in Western Hemisphere*, 2006  
Etching, artist’s proof  
12” x 9 ¾”

Threatened by the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, numerous Jewish families escaped Spain and Portugal, some ultimately finding sanctuary in Brazil. They were not safe for long before they were again evicted by the Portuguese. Amongst them were the fleeing Brazilian founders of Congregation Shearith Israel, the first Jewish congregation to be established in the United States of America in New York in 1654.
Archie Rand [8]

Hanukkah, 2002
Acrylic on canvas
38” x 43”

Archie Rand has been creating radical Jewish art for the last 20 years, challenging both the contemporary art establishment and the purveyors of Jewish culture. He has articulated in both words and images, to a greater extent than anybody else, a loose-jointed attempt to assure the viability, visibility, and continuity of this art. This painting about the joyous holiday of Hanukkah uses vibrant color to depict delight.

Tobia Rava

Profezia del Mar Rosso, 2012
Silk and acetate
76” x 52 ½”
(see image on front cover)

This remarkable Italian artist has been carrying out research for some years on the very essence of Hebrew culture and its scholarly archetypes, gematria, and the Kabbalah, Jewish mystical tradition. This research has led him to create a fusion between numbers and Hebrew letters that is composed following a mathematical-philosophical train of thought and leads the viewer to discover the seduction of numbers.

Trix Rosen [2x7]

Two Generations x Seven Emotions, 2016
Archival pigmented ink, fine art paper
14 ¼” x 17 ½”

Rosen explains, “To create this work, I photographed a mother and her daughter as they were wrapping their arms seven times, while learning to lay tefillin… According to Kabbalah, there are seven primary emotions. The arm tefillin represents the channeling of our emotions toward God, therefore one wraps the straps seven times around our arm, representing the seven emotions.”
Judy Sirota Rosenthal

The Tribes of Israel, 1989-94
Branches of wood with colored silk
72” x 36”

The 12 tribes of Israel in the Bible were named for Jacob’s sons: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali, and Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Dina, their sister, does not have a tribe, nor do Levi and Joseph. Rosenthal states, “There are only 12 tribes. So while I do believe the last 3 would be invited to a family dinner, they are not the tribes – there are only 12.” This sculptural piece is created of tree limbs and all the ‘ur’ family is represented.

Jeffrey Schrier

Wings of Witness, 2003
Splattered acrylic on joined electrostatic prints
35” x 46”

Tons of soda can tabs were collected in 1996 and 1997 from each of the fifty states and eight countries by Mahomet-Seymour Junior High School students to bear witness to the six million Jews and five million non-Jews whose lives were destroyed in the Shoah. The tabs were given to Schrier, who used them to invent a feather-like armature that, unintentionally, contained 613 tabs and could be made by participants in workshops. During the following 18 years, Schrier’s workshops logged in over 60,000 project participants who formed the tabs into approximately 20,000 feather-like elements for his massive wing-like works. The work has been exhibited widely.
Uri Shulevitz [9/1/1939]

*War*, 2015
Charcoal, paper
18” x 24”

*War* captures the artist’s nightmare memory of the Nazi blitz over Warsaw on September 1, 1939. Although he was only four years old, the horrific memory remains vivid. Now at 80 years of age and an award-winning artist/illustrator, Shulevitz is still haunted by the bombings of his childhood.

Fred Spinowitz [18]

*Chai*, 2004
Watercolor
16” x 12”

Spinowitz creates a relationship between Hebrew calligraphy and abstract painting. “The parts of my paintings that use Hebrew letters are as much a part of the art as any other element of painting. The calligraphic forms become a counterpoint to more abstract forms in the work.” The Hebrew letters for *chai* add up to 18, and symbolize life.
Arthur Szyk [5/14/1948]

Shehecheyanu, 1948
Print
11 ½” x 10”

This work celebrates the creation of the State of Israel with the blessing for special occasions, and includes images of Jewish heroes through the ages: King David with his harp and psalms, the prophet Ezekiel, Bar Kochba (leader of the Revolt against the Romans), and a modern day Israeli soldier and farmer.

Collection of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum

Meryl Taradash [13]

My Grandfather’s Bar Mitzvah - 1912, 1971
Oil, wash on canvas
61” x 40”

The bar mitzvah ceremony publicly marks the assumption of responsibility to uphold the commandments, along with the corresponding right to take part in leading religious services and to count in a minyan, the minimum number of ten people required to perform parts of religious services, to form binding contracts, to testify before religious courts, and to marry. This portrait was based on a vintage photograph, c. 1912.
Joyce Ellen Weinstein

**#31: Kovno Ghetto**, 2001
Collage, watercolor
22” x 30”

Kaunas, Lithuania, once known as Kovno before the Holocaust, is largely unchanged since the days prior to the Second World War. The difference between 1939 and the present day is the people who live in these houses. In this work one can see the ghost-portrait images of Jews who previously resided in Kovno. The tiny, barely perceptible house numbers lend reality to the lives of the former residents who perished in the Shoah.

David Wander

**Seven Fat Years, Seven Lean Years**, 2016
Acrylic on canvas
40” x 30”

The Biblical Joseph story: an innocent Joseph languishes in an Egyptian jail. Pharaoh is troubled by recurrent dreams where seven healthy cows are eaten by seven lean cows, and seven healthy ears of grain are eaten by seven shriveled ears of grain. Joseph, his prisoner and a renowned dream interpreter, is summoned. Joseph informs Pharaoh that the dreams are an omen of seven-years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. He advises Pharaoh to find a man to collect grain in the next seven years, to be meted out to the public during the years of famine. Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge over the land of Egypt.
Ruth Weisberg

Counting Out, 2015-2016
Acrylic on linen
42” x 65”

In 1912 the Russian playwright and ethnographer S. Ansky conducted a study of Jewish children's games. This research inspired Weisberg’s painting, which begs the question, what are these children playing?

*Courtesy of Esther Cohen & Barry Schwartz*

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Paul Weissman [55]

Caesium, 2006
Lithograph, woodcut
28” x 22 ½”

Inspired by *The Periodic Table* by Primo Levi, Weissman chose to depict elements that warned of impending disaster. In addition to igniting spontaneously in air, Caesium (a metal, periodic table number 55) reacts explosively with water even at low temperatures. The Hebrew word *Yemah*, gematria numerical value 55, is defined as “hot, bright, or warm.”

*Gift of the artist to the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion Museum*
During the Second World War, the Nazis tattooed inmate identification numbers on their victims in the concentration camps. These tattoos were a visible manifestation of the Nazis’ brutality as they dehumanized their victims. These indelible numbers are a testament to the resilience of those who survived and bear them.

Estelle Kessler Yarinsky

[11/9-10/1938]

November 9-10, 1938, Kristallnacht, 1995
Textile
40” x 28”

Yarinsky’s quilt depicts a Jewish milliner’s shop interior looking out at the anti-Semitic destruction wreaked during Kristallnacht (The Night of Broken Glass), November 9-10, 1938. The violent anti-Jewish pogroms resulted in the destruction of 267 synagogues, the arrest of 30,000 Jewish males sent to concentration camps, and the shattering of the windows and looting of over 7,500 Jewish-owned commercial establishments.