The exhibition entitled, "...L’chi lach, on your journey I will bless you..." was organized by the Jewish Artists Initiative (JAI) of Southern California, in partnership with the Enhancement Committee of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles. The theme, selected in the fall of 2010, is based upon the third line in the lyrics of "L’CHI LACH" composed by Debbie Friedman and Savina Teubal. With the passing of Debbie Friedman on Sunday, January 9, 2011, we hope that this exhibition will offer an opportunity to reflect on Debbie’s journey and our own journeys, as we seek comfort in our loss as a community.

The words of the song, L’CHI LACH, recall Genesis 12:1, when God says to Abram, “Go forth to the land I will show you.” Rashi, the medieval commentator, interprets this verse, translating it as, “Go for yourself from your land...to a land I will show you.” The Hebrew Lech l’cha is translated as “Go for yourself.” This translation offers an insight into this passage by suggesting that Abram’s journey is not simply to leave his father’s land and venture to Eretz Yisrael, but rather that his journey is deeper. It will also be a journey of self discovery, self-direction, and personal choosing. Friedman and Teubal’s song expands this biblical narrative by using the feminine form of the command - L’chi lach. The introduction of the feminine voice in this narrative allows for all to enter into this sacred text. It creates a space for all Jews to hear this imperative and explore their personal journey. Friedman and Teubal’s words, like God’s to Abram, remind us that no matter where the road leads we will be blessed, guided, and loved along the way.

Throughout our lives we chose paths for ourselves that lead to various lands. Sometimes these pathways lead to the home of our ancestors, such as those depicted by Pat Berger. She recasts Eve as a modern woman leading a child from a desert garden. Berger illuminates the more traditional narrative of Miriam with timbrel in hand guiding the Israelites in song. Debra Sokolow’s scenes of the ocean floor provide a pathway for the viewer to travel through the narrow straights of Mitzrayim towards freedom.

Sometimes these journeys are to places that hold meaning to us in our current lives. Jean Edelstein’s eight travel journals are a series of studies of three places: New York City, Los Angeles, and Guilin, China. Each of these spaces has become home to this artist, and she traces her children’s migration to New York City and Guilin. Nancy Goodman Lawrence uses collaged maps to create elaborate portraits. Whether capturing her father’s last birthday or a bride on her wedding day, the use of maps symbolizes the physicality of place as part of the memory process. Susan Gesundheit’s Elvis Tallis is a series of personal musings after a recent road trip through the South, including the quintessential stop at Graceland. During this visit, the artist noted how the Chai symbol worn by Elvis seemed to recall the musician’s hairstyle, and the burlap pieces in the images suggest Tallis strands.

Sometimes our reasons for beginning a journey can be a response to unpleasant situations and a belief that the world could and should be better. This is case with Eugene Yelchin whose six part drawing, "Proletariat of All Nations Unite," relates to his experiences as a child in the Former Soviet Union and the reasons he chose to leave.

When we “Go for ourselves,” these journeys can bless us and provide a deeper understanding of who we are within a larger Jewish world. Harriet Zeitlin’s life-size installation in the lobby, Boat of Passage, seems to beckon the viewer to climb aboard and head towards the uncharted horizon. One could image how this boat would feel gliding over the water while sheltered by her quilted sail made with strands of fabric collected over a lifetime.

The assembled artworks focus on the many journeys these artists and we as viewers will take throughout our lives. They are meant to give comfort along the way and remind us that, like for Abram, the end of our travels holds a promise of revelation, redemption, and the everlasting beauty of self-discovery along our journey.

L’chi lach! Go forth!

Anne Hromadka
Exhibition Curator