ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER and his ARTISTS

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**Isaac Bashevis Singer and His Artists**
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Front Cover: Irene Liebliech, “Partisans in the Forest” from Isaac Bashevis Singer,

Back Cover: Ira Moscowitz, “Dance with Kerchief,” from Isaac Bashevis Singer,
ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER and his ARTISTS

Laura Kruger, Curator
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum

Isaac Bashevis Singer, winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize for Literature, created a legacy of 86 books and numerous stories that continue to delight people of every age, circumstance, and nationality. He depicted with a sense of humanity, humor, and clarity the vanished world of Polish Jews prior to and during the First World War, and in his collection of eleven short stories constituting The Spinoza of Market Street, published in 1961, and later novels he depicted a post-Holocaust world, no longer provincial but rife with contemporary chaos and paranoia. Based on his observations and genuine love of pious, superstitious, earthy, heroic, resourceful, and tragic figures, his works continue to live in our collective memories. The fictional characters blur the lines between folk tales, legends, supernatural powers, and the harsh reality, fear, anxiety, and despair of surviving.

Singer was born in Radzymin, an industrial suburb of Warsaw, Poland, in either 1902 or 1904. He grew up in Warsaw and in Bilgorai, his mother’s traditional Jewish village, and was educated by his Hasidic rabbi father and at a rabbinical seminary. In 1926, encouraged by his successful older brother, the novelist Joshua Singer, he became a translator and journalist for several Yiddish newspapers in Warsaw. Spurred by the increasing ferocity of rising anti-Semitism he immigrated to the United States in 1935. He commenced his career as a reporter for the Yiddish language newspaper Forverts (The Jewish Daily Forward), where he remained a critic and journalist throughout his life.

Singer’s protean imagination was grounded by the influence of his father’s fidelity to scripture and ritual. It was nourished by his passion for writers such as Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Tolstoy, and de Maupassant, whose complex chronicles on a grand scale, filled with numerous, diverse characters shaped his own works. Singer always wrote and published in Yiddish. He referred to the English translations, frequently serialized in newspapers, journals, and magazines, as his “second originals.” Amongst his notable translators was the novelist Saul Bellow who, in 1953, published his translation of Gimpel the Fool in Partisan Review. Yiddish was often the sole language of women during Singer’s childhood, and exotic, ferocious fairy tales and demonic terrorizing moral parables were told him by his mother. His acceptance of the 1978 Nobel Prize in Literature was made both in Yiddish and in English.

Amongst Singer’s many books and stories, more than 32 have been illustrated. Matching strong drawings to immemorial words takes courage and 17 artists have matched Singer image for image with their inventive illustrations.

Singer’s stories include people pushed by circumstances to the edge of reason. Surviving by their wits, they turn to prostitu-
tion, usury, robbery, gluttony, not missing a single deadly sin. Ira Moskowitz and Raphael Soyer, both friends of the writer, captured the bawdy, licentious, raucous and supernatural aspects of personalities ravaged by harsh conditions and their own consciences. These people are ever fighting with their moral rectitude and piety while giving way to the enjoyment of ‘sinful’ behavior. Moskowitz illustrated several books as well as portfolios inspired by individual personalities. His rabbinic series is one of ecstatic devotion and stands in stunning contrast to the licentious drawings. Soyer, who illustrated four seminal works, ranges from poignant contemporary New York street scenes to the provocative imagined world of visual storytelling.

Larry Rivers produced three illustrations for an edition of The Magician of Lublin, capturing the gravity of spiritual transformation inherent in the story. Reaching deeply into his own Jewish heritage, Rivers visually translated the dynamic tensions of the novel. Maurice Sendak illustrated two Singer works. In Zlateh the Goat, a collection of children’s stories that take place in a fantasy of the rural Polish landscape, there is a whimsical reality to these illustrations enabling readers to embed themselves in Singer’s world. Sendak’s unfamiliar illustration for The Saturday Evening Post in 1968 reveals his now signature manic style, dense with familiar but obsessed characters.

Irene Lieblich, a Holocaust survivor from Poland, shared a mutually life enhancing friendship with Singer. Her memories of village life captured with joyous naiveté the evocative landscape that was faithful to his own recollections of the shtetl. Singer wrote that “Her works are rooted in Jewish folklore and faithful to Jewish life and spirit.”


Antonio Frasconi uses an Italianate sensibility to explore the time, setting, and strength of Elijah the Slave, and, faithful to his signature woodcut technique, a Polish aspect to Yentl the Yeshiva Boy. The brooding, translucent quality of Nonny Hogrogian’s work reveals the inner turmoil of the characters, while the pure joy and silliness inherent in all of Margot Zemach’s illustrations captures the Yiddish wit of Singer’s stories.

The use of emotive photographs by Roman Vishniac jolts the viewer back to the stark reality at the source of Singer’s tales. In these introspective faces lie the tragedy, hopes, potential, and resilience of a lost era of adolescent dreams, imagined worlds, loss of innocence, and an ever reflective memory. Singer remarked that he wrote for young people because “they still believe in God, the family, angels, devils, witches, goblins, and other such obsolete stuff.”
ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER and his ARTISTS

DES ASMUSSEN (1913-2004)

Des Asmussen, a Danish artist, won several prizes for his work in Denmark including the Selskabet Bogvennernes Prize in 1973, the Hans Bendix Prize in 1988, and the Danske Blad Prize in 2003. Isaac Bashevis Singer’s short stories with Asmussen’s illustrations were published in The Saturday Evening Post: “My Father’s Courthouse” in May 4, 1963 and “The Prodigal Fool” in February 26, 1966.


ERIC CARLE (1929-)

Eric Carle was born in Syracuse, NY, and moved with his parents to Germany in 1935. He graduated from the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Stuttgart. Returning to New York in 1952, he found a job as a graphic designer in the promotion department of The New York Times and later became the art director of an advertising company. He is the international award-winning author/artist of such beloved children’s classics as The Very Hungry Caterpillar, The Lonely Firefly and the illustrator of I. B. Singer’s Why Noah Chose the Dove (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974). Carle won the Kurt Vonnegut Jr. Literature Award (2008), the Japan Picture Book Award for Lifetime Achievement (2000), the David McCord Children’s Literature Citation (1995) and The Nogscot Reading Council of the International Reading Association (1995). In 2002 Carle and his wife Barbara founded The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, in Amherst, MA, the first museum in the United States devoted to national and international picture book art.

“And the animals gathered around Noah’s Ark” from Why Noah Chose the Dove (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1974).

We gratefully acknowledge the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art.
WILLIAM PÈNE DUBOIS (1916-1993)

William Pène DuBois, born in Nutley, NJ, and son of American painter and art critic Guy Pène DuBois, was both an author and illustrator. He received most of his education in France at the Lycée Hoche in Versailles where the rigorous discipline gave him the sense of order and careful planning evident in the precision of his work. From 1953 to 1960, he worked with George Plimpton as the Art Editor for The Paris Review. He illustrated I. B. Singer’s The Topsy-Turvy Emperor of China (Harper & Row, 1971). Among the highlights of his career was winning the Newbery Award in 1948 for The Twenty-One Balloons, and Caldecott Honors in 1952 and 1957 for Bear Party and The Lion, respectively.

“...and their nails were painted black” from The Topsy-Turvy Emperor of China (Harper & Row, 1971).

LEONARD EVERETT FISHER (1924-)

Leonard Everett Fisher was born in New York City and raised in the Sea Gate section of Brooklyn where he began his formal art training with his father, Benjamin M. Fisher, a designer of naval vessels. Fisher studied at the Heckscher Foundation, the Art Students League of New York, and Brooklyn College. He received B.F.A. and M.F.A. degrees from Yale University. He has illustrated 260 books for young readers since 1955, including the I. B. Singer story, The Wicked City (Harper & Row, 1972). Among Fisher’s many awards and honors are the Pulitzer Prize in Painting (1950); Ten Best Illustrated Books award of The New York Times (1964); the Graphics Prize of the Fifth International Book Fair in Bologna, Italy (1968); the Christopher Medal for illustration (1981); the Children’s Book Guild/Washington Post Nonfiction Award (1979) and the Kellan Award, University of Minnesota (1991). He has illustrated two Newbery honor books.

“In Sodom it was the custom to drink excessively” from The Wicked City (Harper & Row, 1972).

Courtesy of Leonard Everett Fisher
ANTONIO FRASCONI (1919-)

Antonio Frasconi was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to Italian parents who had immigrated to South America during World War I. His family soon moved to Montevideo, Uruguay, where Frasconi was apprenticed to a printer at age twelve. He began to publish cartoons and drawings in satirical newspapers while still a teenager and experimented with woodcuts in the early 1940s. He moved to the United States in 1945 to study at the Art Students League and the New School for Social Research in New York City. He illustrated and designed over 100 books, including Langston Hughes’s Let America Be America Again, Pablo Neruda’s Bestiary/Bestiario, A Whitman Portrait and his magnum opus on the trials and tribulations of Uruguay under dictatorship, Los Desaparecidos (The Disappeared). Two of his renowned works are the illustrations for I. B. Singer’s Elijah the Slave (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970) and Yentl the Yeshiva Boy (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983).


Courtesy of Antonio Frasconi

NONNY HOGROGIAN (1932-)

Nonny Hogrogian born in New York City, received her Bachelor of Arts degree in fine arts from Hunter College in 1953, and studied woodcutting under Antonio Frasconi at the New School for Social Research in 1957. She worked as a production assistant and designer in the children’s literature department of Thomas Y. Crowell. Since then she has divided her time between freelance illustration and serving as designer for children’s books, first at Holt, Rinehart and Winston and later Charles Scribner’s Sons. In 1971 she married David Kherdian, a poet whose work she illustrates. Hogrogian is one of only five people to be awarded the Caldecott Medal twice. She illustrated I. B. Singer’s The Fearsome Inn (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967).

“This Was Leibel’s Nightmare,” from The Fearsome Inn (Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1967).
JULIAN JUSIM (1946- )

Julian Jusim is a Russian artist who was born in the small village of Kujbyschev and now lives in Bielefeld, Germany. He illustrated the new edition of I.B. Singer’s Der Kaiser von China, der alles auf den Kopf stellte (The Topsy-Turvy Emperor of China) (Carl Hanser, 1996) and Die Narren von Chelm (Fools of Chelm) (SansSouci, 1997). Jusim has written and illustrated many other German children’s books including Kopfunter Kopfüber (Upside-up Upside-down), the picture book Der Herr der schickt den Jockel aus (Out You Go, Jock, The Master Said), and Der Geschichten-erzähler (The Storyteller).


IRENE LIEBLICH (1923-2008)

A survivor of the Holocaust, Irene Lieblich was born in Zamosc, Poland. She married in 1946, immigrated to Chicago in 1952, and lived in Brooklyn from 1955 to 1980, where she wrote and published poetry in Jewish periodicals. Lieblich took up painting at the age of 48, enrolling in art classes at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. She won First Prize for painting at the Art Festival of the Farband in New York in 1972 and in 1973 and 1974 exhibited at Artists Equity in New York, where Isaac Bashevis Singer saw her work. Lieblich and Singer sustained a warm friendship and she illustrated two of his books, A Tale of Three Wishes (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976) and The Power of Light: Eight Stories for Hanukkah (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1980). Lieblich and her husband moved to Miami Beach, FL, in 1980.

“Old Man with Lantern” from A Tale of Three Wishes (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976). Courtesy of the Estate of Irene Lieblich
IRA MOSKOWITZ (1912-2001)

Isaac Bashevis Singer once said of his friend and confidant Ira Moskowitz, “Ira has recaptured the religious view of God and the world in his works.” Born in Poland, Moskowitz came to New York at the age of sixteen. Within a year, he received a scholarship to study at the Art Students League and his first paintings, etchings, and lithographs were exhibited in New York in the early 1930s. During the 1940s, he and his wife, the artist Anna Barry, lived in the American Southwest, where he became a prominent member of the Taos and Santa Fe group of artists. Moskowitz received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1943 and returned to live and work in New York in 1954. His compatible friendship with Singer launched several joint projects, including The Hasidim (Crown Publishers, 1973), A Little Boy in Search of God (Doubleday & Company, 1976), Reaches of Heaven (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1980), Satan in Goray (Streetwater Editions, 1981), and The Penitents (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983).

Courtesy of Diana Gordon

LARRY RIVERS (1925-2002)

Larry Rivers, whose art is renowned for bridging Abstract Expressionism’s gestural style and Pop Art’s irreverent references to popular culture, was an American polymath—a prolific artist, jazz musician, writer, documentary filmmaker, actor, and teacher. Born Yitzroch Loiza Grossberg in the Bronx, NY, in 1923 he began a career as a professional jazz saxophonist and soon changed his name after being introduced as “Larry Rivers and the Mudcats” at a New York City club. He served in 1942 in the United States Army Air corps, but within a year was honorably discharged from the armed forces for medical reasons. In 1944 he studied music theory and composition at the Juilliard School of Music, where he met and became friends with Miles Davis and Charlie Parker. In 1945, after being shown a cubist painting by Georges Braque, he started painting. His studies at the Hans Hofmann’s School of painting were followed by a B.A. in art education from New York University in 1951. His works are represented in major museum and private collections around the world. In 1984 Rivers mined his strong sense of Jewish heritage to illustrate I.B. Singer’s The Magician of Lublin for a deluxe edition published by The Limited Editions Club.

“He had seen the hand of God. He had reached the end of the road” from The Magician of Lublin (The Limited Editions Club, 1984).
We gratefully acknowledge the Larry Rivers Foundation.
MAURICE SENDAK (1928- )

Maurice Sendak was born in Brooklyn, NY, to Polish-Jewish immigrant parents. His illustrations were first published in 1947 in a textbook and he spent much of the 1950s illustrating children's books before beginning to write his own stories. His book Where the Wild Things Are won the 1964 Caldecott Medal and generations of children quote from In the Night Kitchen, Really Rosie, and Bumble Ardy. In 1970 he collaborated with playwright Tony Kushner to create the stage sets and a book for the children's opera, Brundibar, composed by Czech Jewish composer Hans Krása and performed in the Terezín concentration camp during the Holocaust. He created the illustrations for the tales included in I.B. Singer's book Zlateh the Goat (HarperCollins Publishers, 1966), and illustrated Singer's story Yash (The Saturday Evening Post, May 4, 1968). His collection of nearly 10,000 works of art, manuscripts, books, and ephemera has been the subject of many museum exhibitions, films and documentaries.

Cover for Zlateh the Goat, and Other Stories
All rights reserved.
Rosenbach Museum & Library, Philadelphia

SYMEON SHIMIN (1902-1984)

Symeon Shimin was born on the Caspian Sea in Astrakhan, Russia. His family immigrated to the United States in 1912. Shimin apprenticed himself to a commercial artist at age sixteen to help support his family and attended art classes at Cooper Union in the evenings. He was briefly a studio assistant to the artist George Luks and in 1929 left for travels in Spain and France. In 1938, under the WPA program, he was awarded a contract to paint a mural in the Department of Justice building in Washington. Beginning in 1950, Shimin illustrated more than 50 children's books, of which he also wrote two. His ferocious drawings for Joseph and Koza or the Sacrifice to the Vistula (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970) captured the text by I.B. Singer with surreal energy and mythological terrors.

"The word of God is stronger than witches and devils" from Joseph and Koza or the Sacrifice to the Vistula (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982).
URI SHULEVITZ (1935-)


Cover from *The Golem* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982).
Courtesy of Uri Shulevitz.

RAPHAEL SOYER (1899-1987)

Raphael Soyer and his twin brother Moses Soyer were born in Borisoglebsk, South Russia, and settled in the Bronx in 1912. He pursued his art education at Cooper Union, the National Academy of Design, and at the Art Students League. Associated with the Fourteenth Street School of painters, he was adamant about his belief in representational art and strongly opposed the dominant force of abstract art, saying “I choose to be a realist and a humanist in art.” He participated in the WPA Federal Arts Program in the 1930s, and was a painter, draftsman, printmaker, and author of several books on his own life and art. A close friend of Singer’s, he richly visualized the personae of Singer’s characters with his illustrations, at Singer’s request, for *A Young Man in Search of Love* (Doubleday & Company, 1978), *Lost in America* (Doubleday & Company, 1981), *Love and Exile* (Doubleday & Company, 1984), and *The Gentleman from Cracow* (Touchstone Publishers, 1970).

“It was a Jew, a tall young man...” from *The Gentleman from Cracow and The Mirror* (Touchstone Publishers, 1970).
The Sigmund R. Balka Collection at Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion Museum
PHERO THOMAS (1922-1984)

Phero Thomas of Chicago, IL., was a noted illustrator of children's books and numerous textbooks, working closely with author Julian May among others. He created a series of woodblock illustrations for Isaac Bashevis Singer’s collection of stories, *Gimpel the Fool and Other Stories* (The Franklin Library, 1980).

"The family of the little shoemakers was famous" from *Gimpel the Fool and Other Stories* (The Franklin Library, 1980).

ROMAN VISHNIAC (1897-1990)

Vishniac was born in Pavlensk to a wealthy Jewish family. He grew up in Moscow, where his fascination with biology and photography began at age seven and he earned a Ph.D. in zoology and became an assistant professor of biology at the Shanyavsky Institute. In 1918 the Bolshevik Revolution triggered a rise in anti-Semitism that caused Vishniac’s family to relocate to Berlin. Between 1935 and 1939 Vishniac traveled to Eastern Europe where he took his acclaimed photographs in villages and urban ghettos. He immigrated to New York with his wife in 1940. Aware of Hitler’s mission to exterminate the Jews, Vishniac was intent on preserving the memory of the Jewish people. In 1947 *A Vanished World* was published, one of the first pictorial documentations of Jewish culture in Eastern Europe. Vishniac was appointed research associate at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine (1957) and professor of biology (1961). His close relationship with Singer encouraged the author to request the use of Vishniac’s photographs for *A Day of Pleasure: Stories of a Boy Growing Up in Warsaw* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969). These stories of Singer’s early days in Poland from 1908 to 1918 were captured in Vishniac’s photographs.


Mara Vishniac Kohn, courtesy of the International Center of Photography and Howard Greenberg Gallery
MARGOT ZEMACH (1931-1989)

Zemach was born in Los Angeles, studied at the Los Angeles County Art Institute, and won a Fulbright Scholarship to study drawing in Vienna in 1955. Zemach was the illustrator or author of more than 40 children’s books. She won a Caldecott Medal and was twice selected as the American nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Medal for illustration, the most prestigious international children’s book award. Zemach illustrated four of the most charming of Singer’s children’s stories, including Mazel and Shlimazel or the Milk of a Lioness (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967), When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw and Other Stories (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968), Alone in the Wild Forest (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), Naftali the Storyteller and his Horse. Sus (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976).

“Bal Makane saw that he was trapped” from Alone in the Wild Forest (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971).
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

ARTISTS WHO ILLUSTRATED ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER’S BOOKS

Asmussen, Des (1913-2004)
My Father’s Courthouse
The Saturday Evening Post, May 4, 1963

The Prodigal Fool
The Saturday Evening Post, February 26, 1966

Carle, Eric (1929- )
Why Noah Chose the Dove
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1974

The Topsy-Turvy Emperor of China
Harper & Row, 1971

Fisher, Leonard Everett (1924- )
The Wicked City
Harper & Row, 1972

Frasconi, Antonio (1919- )
Elijah the Slave
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970

Yentl the Yeshiva Boy
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983

Frogrogian, Nonny (1932- )
The Fearsome Inn
Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1967

Jusim, Julian (1946- )
The Topsy-Turvy Emperor of China
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967

Lieblich, Irene (1923-2008)
A Tale of Three Wishes
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976

The Power of Light: Eight Stories for Hanukkah
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1980

Moskowitz, Ira (1912-2001)
A Little Boy in Search of God
Doubleday & Company, 1976

Reaches of Heaven
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1980

Satan in Goray
Streetwater Editions, 1981

The Hasidim
Crown Publishers, 1973

The Penitent
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983

Rivers, Larry (1925-2002)
The Magician of Lublin
The Limited Editions Club, 1984

Sendak, Maurice (1928- )
Yash The Chimney Sweep
The Saturday Evening Post, May 4, 1968

Zlateh the Goat and Other Stories
HarperCollins Publishers, 1966

Shimin, Symeon (1902-1984)
Joseph and Koza or the Sacrifice to the Vistula
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970

Shulevitz, Uri (1935- )
The Fools of Chelm and their History
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1973

The Golem
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982

Soyer, Raphael (1899-1987)
A Young Man in Search of Love
Doubleday & Company, 1978

Lost in America
Doubleday & Company, 1981

Love and Exile
Doubleday & Company, 1984

The Gentleman from Cracow
and The Mirror
Touchstone Publishers, 1970

Thomas, Phero (1922-1984)
Gimpel the Fool and Other Stories
The Franklin Library, 1980

Vishniac, Roman (1897-1990)
A Day of Pleasure: Stories of a Boy
Growing Up in Warsaw
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969

Zemach, Margot (1931-1989)
Alone in the Wild Forest
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971

Mazel and Shlaimazel or
the Milk of a Lioness
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1967

Naftali the Storyteller and His Horse, Sus
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976

When Shlemiel Went to Warsaw
and Other Stories
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968

Additional Exhibition Material

Anna Barry
Portrait of Singer
Oil on canvas
Collection of Diana Gordon

Photographs of Isaac Bashevis Singer with
Ira Moskowitz, Raphael Soyer, and Anna Barry.
Collection of Diana Gordon

Original letters from isaac Bashevis Singer
to The Jewish Daily Forward. Courtesy of
the Archives of The Jewish Daily Forward.
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