Leonard Everett Fisher: Seventy Years an Artist

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**Leonard Everett Fisher: Seventy Years an Artist**

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**Front Cover:**
*Moses Now*, 1963; India ink, titanium white gouache/self-toned paper, 60" x 40"; Collection of the artist.

**Back Cover:**
*The Lancers*, 1968; acrylic, gesso/masonite, 40” x 64”; Gift of Rosalyn and Irwin Engelman to the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum.
The words that we use to define a style, genre, career, or profession are frequently arbitrary. If a person is highly successful in several areas or has developed a professional reputation in more than one field, which of these identifiers should take precedence? Such is the conundrum with respect to artist Leonard Everett Fisher.

Excelling almost beyond measure, Fisher is a world-renowned illustrator, having to his credit about 260 illustrated books, 90 of them written by him. The government commissioned him to design and create seminal postage stamps and widely distributed commemorative posters. At the same time, Fisher is a prolific sought-after fine artist, specializing in the almost lost technique of painting with tempera.

From his earliest years, Fisher exhibited a precocious art talent. Perhaps a familial inheritance from his father, a marine and civil engineer whose professional naval designs included plans for the USS Arizona, the USS Honolulu, and the USS North Carolina, Fisher’s meticulous ‘line’ and detailed images echo his father’s necessary perfection of military blueprints. He himself served as a cartographer with the 30th Topographic Engineers during the Second World War and participated in the tactical topographic mapping of major Allied campaigns in the Mediterranean, European, and Pacific Theaters.

Fisher produced some 6,000 soft engravings or ‘scratchboards’ for illustrations in children’s books. The ‘scratchboard’ technique involves coating a piece of cardboard with gesso, a thin ground of dazzling white hard clay, and over-layering a coat of dark India ink. Scratching away at the ink with the X-acto knife reveals the white below. The resulting thin lines are finely crisp and, like an engraving, deliberate, hard, and unyielding. The resulting white lines on black background are similar to engravings and woodcuts. Fisher uses this technique in various illustrated books, including the 19-volume classic collection of Colonial American Craftsmen (1964-1979) and The Wicked City.

Above: Tanners, from the Colonial American Craftsmen series, 1964-1966; published by Franklin Watts; scratchboard drawing, 8½” x 7½”

Left: Cabinetmakers, from the Colonial American Craftsmen series, 1964-1966; published by Franklin Watts; scratchboard drawing, 8½” x 7½”
Employing a similar style and a variety of techniques, Fisher designed a series of 8-cent postage stamps in celebration of the 1976 American Bicentennial, which were commissioned in 1974. In his images, Fisher honored glass blowing, wig making, hat making, and silversmithing, among the oldest American trades. His other postage stamps include the Skilled Hands for Independence and the American Folklore series.

Colonial American Craftsman,
July 4, 1976, United States Postage Stamps, 8 cents

Fisher’s paintings may ultimately define his place in contemporary American art. Using the ancient technique of egg tempera, Fisher creates deliberate, radiant canvases with a powerful resonance of Renaissance imagery. Egg tempera is a mixture of egg yolk and pigment and was the primary medium of painting through the 15th century. The exquisite surface of the paintings is achieved by the time-consuming layering of this thin paint.

Fisher’s series of Jewish biblical prophets is majestic, vibrant, and highly energized, presenting an idealization of masculine perfection. Calling to mind the Mannerist muscular style of Michelangelo paintings, Fisher depicts Jewish biblical prophets and leaders as athletic, vital beings and, in most instances, has provided a visual symbol to identify each of them.

In Daniel and Jeremiah (page 5), Daniel is over-painted with the letters standing in for Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin, God’s hand writing on the wall, a portent of doom, while Jeremiah bears the handprint of God. Moses (page 10) holds the Tablets of the Covenant while descending from Mount Sinai. In Isaiah and Ezekiel (page 4), Ezekiel is symbolized by a chariot wheel and Isaiah with a fleur-de-lis, a symbol of the coming of the Messiah. Job bears the inscription of yud, yud, God’s unspoken name.

Fisher’s scenic paintings convey the same awe and majesty as do his spiritual and political work. In these, we note his signature effect of objects levitating in air. Repeated visual themes and variations are as much a hallmark of Fisher’s work as are his distinctive techniques. From the earliest examples of his teenage paintings and sketches Fisher revisits images of rock jetties, stone walls, stone mountain formations, bodies of water and waves, and objects suspended in air…everything from scarves and balloons, to seaweed, paper airplanes, baseballs, juggling apparatus, and canopies billowing in the wind.

Lest these images conjure up visions of frivolity, Fisher’s choice of subject matter is most serious. His depictions of biblical Jewish prophets, significant world events, turning points of history, mythological gods, and heroes are a testament to his profound sense of permanence.

Laura Kruger
Curator
Cockenoe Island Moonrise, 2008; acrylic/canvas, 36” x 48”; Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

Sky, Sea, Jetty and Me from Sky, Sea, the Jetty, and Me, 2001; published by Marshall Cavendish; acrylic/paper drawings, 10” x 19”
Jonah, 1964;  
gelatin tempera/board, 40” x 40”;
Collection of Peter and Carol Mack

Isaiah and Ezekiel, 1963;  
diptych, gelatin tempera/board,  
39” x 29 ½” each
Daniel and Jeremiah, 1964; diptych, gelatin tempera/board, 39” x 29 ½”each

There Came A Nation, 1964; acrylic, gesso/masonite, 60” x 40”
The Center Fielder, 2010; acrylic/canvas, 48” x 36”;
Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc.,
Greenwich, CT

Noonan, 1978; published by Avon Books;
mixed media, 18”x 12”
Brothers from *A Russian Farewell*, 1980; published by Four Winds; scratchboard drawing, 7 ½” x 5½”

The Roman Conquest from *The Wailing Wall*, 1989; published by Atheneum; acrylic/paper, 12” x 18”

Celebration from *Dybbuk*, 2005; published by Holiday House; acrylic/paper, 12” x 18”
The Wave, 2009;
acrylic on canvas, 36” x 48”;
Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

Summerscape, 1982;
acrylic/masonite, 50” x 48”;
Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

Boy with Paper Airplane, 1993;
acrylic/canvas, 30” x 36”;
Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT
**Archangels** (study), 1962;  
India ink, titanium white gouache/self-toned paper, 28” x 22”;  
Collection of Robert and Jane Van Summern

**Philosophers** (study), 1962;  
India ink, titanium white gouache/self-toned paper, 26” x 29”

**On the sixth day God made animals...**,  
from *The Seven Days of Creation*, 1981;  
published by Holiday House;  
acrylic/paper drawings, 11” x 17”
Creation (study), 1963;
India ink, white gouache/self-toned paper,
20” x 24”

Moses from Moses, 1995; published by Holiday House;
acrylic/paper drawings, 10” x 19”
Leonard Everett Fisher was born in the Bronx, New York, in 1924. As an eight-year-old, he began his more formal art training at New York’s Heckscher Foundation in 1932. He went on to study with Moses Soyer at the New Art School, Reginald Marsh at the Art Students League, and Olindo Ricci and Serge Chermayeff at Brooklyn College (1939-1942). He served as a topographer for the 30th Topographic Engineers during and after the Second World War (1942-46).

He received his BFA (1949) and MFA (1950) degrees from Yale University and taught design theory as a Graduate Fellow. Fisher was awarded Yale’s William Wirt Winchester Traveling Fellowship and the John Ferguson Weir Prize. His art was first seen in Manhattan at the Jacques Seligmann Galleries (1946-1948) and later at the Edwin C. Hewitt Gallery (1950-1952). Between 1954 and 2007, he illustrated some 260 books for young readers, published in more than a dozen languages world-wide. He has designed ten United States postage stamps; executed paintings for the Norwalk (CT) Transit District Building lobby, and created numerous easel works.

Fisher is a recipient of the Joseph Pulitzer Painting Fellowship (1950), the Premio Grafico Fiera Internazionale di Bologna (1968), the University of Southern Mississippi Medallion (1979), the National Jewish Book Award (1980), the Christopher Medal for Illustration (1981), the Catholic Library Association’s Regina Medal (1991), the University of Minnesota’s Kerlan Award (1991), the American Library Association’s Arbuthnot Citation (1994), and the New England Booksellers Association Children’s Literature Award (2002), among other honors. Fisher was a delegate to the 1979 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services during the Carter Administration. He is Dean Emeritus of the Paier College of Art (CT); formerly dean of the Whitney School of Art (CT); a member of the Low Illustration Committee of the New Britain Museum of American Art; and, formerly, a member of the advisory board of the Master of Fine Arts program of Western Connecticut State University. He is currently represented by Cavalier Galleries, Inc. (Greenwich, CT); and John Hawkins & Associates (NY).

Group Exhibition Highlights
1939: Brooklyn Museum. Brooklyn, NY
1942: Rockefeller Center. New York, NY
1948: Jacques Seligmann Galleries. New York, NY
1949: American Federation of Arts National Tour
1949: Yale Art Gallery, Yale University. New Haven, CT
1951: Whitney Museum. New York, NY
1979: Grand Central Art Galleries. New York, NY
1984: Yeshiva University. New York, NY
1990: Society of Illustrators. New York, NY
2005: Rye Art Center. Rye, NY
2005: Smithsonian National Postal Museum. Washington, DC
2007: Chicago Art Institute. Chicago, IL

Solo Exhibition Highlights
1968: Silvermine Guild of Artists. New Canaan, CT
1975: Westport Public Library. Westport, CT
1976: General Electric Corporation. Trumbull, CT
1979: Westport-Weston Arts Council Gallery. Westport, CT
1985: Everson Museum. Syracuse, NY
1990: Kimberly Gallery. New York, NY
1991: Henry Green Collection. Southport, CT
1994: Northeast University Museum of Art. Kearney, NE
1995: Westport Art Center. Westport, CT
2000: Stamford Museum and Nature Center. Stamford, CT
2001: Westport Public Library. Westport, CT
2002: Silvermine Guild. New Canaan, CT
2002: Buell Children’s Museum. Pueblo, CO
2008: Cavalier Galleries. Greenwich, CT
2008: Westport Public Library. Westport, CT

Publication Highlights (among more than 260)
The Exploits of Xenophen, 1954
America Grows Up, 1960
The Supreme Court, 1962
A Jungle Jumble, 1966
The Story of Science in America, 1967
The Wicked City, 1972
A Russian Farewell, 1980
Pyramid of the Sun and Moon, 1988
The Wailing Wall, 1989
The Spotted Pony, 1992
David and Goliath, 1993
Gandhi, 1995
The Great Wall of China, 1995
Moses, 1995
Leonard Everett Fisher: A Life of Art, 1998
Sky, Sea, the Jetty, And Me, 2001
Don Quixote and the Windmills, 2004
Dybbuk, 2005
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works are from the collection of the artist unless otherwise noted.

Sea Gate Bathers, 1940; pencil/paper, 8” x 8”
Sea Gate Bathers, 1940; pencil/paper, 6” x 9”
Norton’s Point, Sea Gate, 1940; oil/canvas 19½” x 25”
Man on the BMT, 1942; watercolor, 9” x 7”
BMT Subway Riders, 1942; watercolor, 10½” x 7½”
The USS General A.E. Anderson, 1943; red conte crayon/paper, 8” x 9½”

East to Casablanca Aboard the USS General A.E. Anderson, 1943; conte crayon/paper, 8” x 10”; Collection of New Britain Museum of American Art, CT

The Club Car #3, 40’s and 8’s, 1943; conte crayon/paper, 14” x 17”; Collection of New Britain Museum of American Art, CT

Algerian Fathers and Sons, 1944; sepia pencil/paper, 9” x 6”

Creation (study), 1963; India ink, white gouache/self-toned paper, 20” x 24”

Daydream, 1960; egg tempera, gesso/masonite, 24” x 35½”

Juggler (study), 1961; India ink, titanium white gouache/self-toned paper, 19” x 9”; courtesy of Cavalier Galleries Inc., Greenwich, CT

Archangels (study), 1962; India ink, titanium white gouache/self-toned paper, 28” x 22”; Collection of Robert and Jane Van Summern

Flag, 1962; gelatin tempera, India ink, titanium white gouache/self-toned paper, 19” x 23”

Lucifer in Heaven and Hell, 1962; diptych, gelatin tempera/board, 29” x 22” each; Collection of Robert and Jane Van Summern

Philosophers (study) 1962; India ink, titanium white gouache/self-toned paper, 26” x 29”

Preliminary Moses Sketches, 1962; two sepia pencil/paper drawings, 12½” x 6”, 12½” x 9”

Moses Grid, 1962; pen, ink/tracing paper, 12” x 9”

Isaiah and Ezekiel, 1963; diptych, gelatin tempera/board, 39” x 29½” each

Moses Now, 1963; India ink, titanium white gouache/self-toned paper, 60” x 40”

Job, 1964; gelatin tempera/board, 56” x 30”; Collection of John Tucker

Jonah, 1964; gelatin tempera/board, 40” x 40”; Collection of Peter and Carol Mack

Noah, 1964; acrylic, gesso/masonite, 48” x 48”; Collection of Bellarmine Museum of Art, Fairfield University, CT

Daniel and Jeremiah, 1964; diptych, gelatin tempera/board, 39” x 29½” each

There Came A Nation, 1964; acrylic, gesso/masonite, 60” x 40”

Glassmakers, Silversmiths, Tanners, Cabinetmakers, Peddlers, Limners, Shipbuilders from the Colonial American Craftsmen series, 1964-1966; published by Franklin Watts; ten scratchboard drawings, 8½” x 7½” each

Diurnal Mood, 1967; acrylic emulsion, gesso/masonite, 29” x 17”

The Journey with Jonah, 1967; published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux; four scratchboard drawings (facsimiles), 7½” x 5½” each

The Driven, 1967; acrylic, gesso/masonite, 36” x 64”

The Lancers, 1968; acrylic, gesso/masonite, 40” x 64”; Gift of Rosalyn and Irwin Engelman to the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum.

Lot and His Wife, Untitled, and mock up of cover from The Wicked City, 1971; published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux; three scratchboard drawings, 9½” x 15” each

Noonan, 1978; published by Avon Books; five mixed media drawings, 7½” x 6” and 18” x 12”

Brothers, Sisters from A Russian Farewell, 1980; published by Four Winds; two scratchboard drawings, 7½” x 5½”

“On the fifth day God made fish …”, “And birds…”, and “On the sixth day God made animals…” from The Seven Days of Creation, 1981; published by Holiday House; three acrylic/paper drawings, 11” x 17”

Summerescape, 1982; acrylic/masonite, 50” x 48”; Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

Still Life in Motion 4, 1985, acrylic/masonite, 46” x 48”; Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

Wind Rises, Galleons Shouldered from Sea Songs, 1986; published by Holiday House; two acrylic/paper drawings, 10½” x 17” each

At the of Quetzalcoatl from Pyramid of the Sun Pyramid of the Moon, 1988; published by Atheneum; acrylic/paper, 18” x 24”

Roman Soldiers, At the Wall, The Roman Conquest from The Wailing Wall, 1989; published by Atheneum; three acrylic/paper drawings, 12” x 18” each

Did the Rabbi Have a Head?, The Caliph and the Cobbler, Hershel Eats, The Spotted Pony, Menorah from The Spotted Pony, 1992; published by Holiday House; five acrylic/paper drawings, 9” x 7”

Boy with Paper Airplane, 1993; acrylic/canvas, 30” x 36”; Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT
David and King Saul, David and Goliath, 1993; published by Holiday House; two acrylic/paper drawings, 11” x 17”

“This Baby Must Live”, Moses, Moses Strikes the Rock from Moses, 1995; published by Holiday House; three acrylic/paper drawings, 10” x 19” each

The Marriage of Mohandas and Kasturbai from Gandhi, 1994; published by Atheneum; 12” x 18”

Building the Great Wall from The Great Wall of China, 1995; published by Macmillan; acrylic/paper, 12” x 18”

ArizonaScape, 1998; acrylic/canvas, 36” x 48”; Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

Our House – Approaching Storm; Sky, Sea, Jetty and Me from Sky, Sea, the Jetty, and Me, 2001; published by Marshall Cavendish; two acrylic/paper drawings, 10” x 19” each

Celebration, Konin Studies, Three Rabbis, Leah Collapses, Rabbi Azriel in His Study, “Sound the Horns”, Konin Dies, Konin and Leah, Studying at the Synagogue from Dybbuk, 2005; published by Holiday House; acrylic/paper, various sizes

Color Sketch for the Wave, 2009; acrylic/canvas, 6” x 8½”

Cockenoe Island Moonrise, 2008; acrylic/canvas, 36” x 48”; Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

The Wave, 2009; acrylic/canvas, 36” x 48”; Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

The Center Fielder, 2010; acrylic/canvas, 48” x 36”; Courtesy of Cavalier Galleries, Inc., Greenwich, CT

Other

Early sketchbooks, 1943; pen/pencil

Map of Tsuchiura NW, 1945; Joint Army-Navy Intelligence Study of Central Japan

United States Postage Stamps:
Colonial American Craftsman, July 4, 1972, 8 cents, full sheet; The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, October 10, 1974, 10 cents, full sheet; Liberty Tree, First Day of Issue envelope, November 8, 1975, 13 cents; Craftsmen for Independence, July 4, 1977, 13 cents, full sheet

Hardship at Valley Forge, 1975; mockup for poster, published by Franklin Watts; 36” x 24”

Jewish Book Month, 1981; signed poster, JWB Jewish Book Council; 18” x 11½”

Archival photographs

Book jackets

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