

THE 2026 MARK PODWAL PRIZE IN VISUAL ART



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The Elie Wiesel Foundation is proud to present the winners of the **2026 Mark Podwal Prize in Visual Art**, celebrating artists from across the United States whose work powerfully explores Jewish identity, memory, heritage, resilience, and human connection. The winners were selected by a distinguished jury from a wide and diverse pool of submissions and are honored in this exhibition together with selected works by Mark Podwal. Together, they underscore the role of art in expressing both individual and collective narratives.

“The Mark Podwal Prize affirms that art carries both joy and responsibility. By honoring these artists, we celebrate Jewish creativity as a living force — one that invites us to remember, to embrace complexity, and to move forward with purpose and hope.”

LizAnn Eisen,
Executive Director,
The Elie Wiesel
Foundation

The Mark Podwal Prize was established in collaboration with the Podwal family and inspired by the decades-long and deep creative partnership between Mark Podwal, one of America’s most distinguished Jewish artists, and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel. Their collaborative work gave powerful voice to Jewish history, faith, and hope.

“This award honors my father and his work with Elie and Marion Wiesel to celebrate Jewish life and confront antisemitism through word and image. Continuing that work with Elisha Wiesel and The Foundation carries our parents’ shared legacy into the next generation.”

Ariel Podwal,
Son of Mark Podwal

“Through this work, I sought to give form to the enduring strength of Jewish communities — how we remember, rebuild, and find hope. Art allows us to speak to resilience in ways that words alone cannot.”

Allison Zuckerman,
1st Place Winner

MARK PODWAL AND ELIE WIESEL

Renowned artist, author, filmmaker, and physician who taught at NYU's Grossman School of Medicine, Mark Podwal uniquely excelled at the practice of art and medicine. From his 1960s anti-Vietnam War posters and his drawings appearing regularly on *The New York Times* Op-Ed page from the 1970s on, to the over 40 books he authored or illustrated and numerous exhibitions at major museums and memorials worldwide, Podwal offered powerful commentary on Jewish mysticism, history, the Holocaust, antisemitism, Israel, and contemporary events.

Writer Cynthia Ozick noted that one could discover “juxtapositions of meaning” and “the fusion of ink and inkling” in Podwal’s works. His creativity encompassed the full scope of human emotion and Jewish experience – from witty celebration to tragic remembrance and mystical redemption.

For forty years, Mark Podwal illustrated Elie Wiesel’s books and designed the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to the Nobel Laureate (1996). Their close friendship, creative partnership, and shared vision are an enduring legacy. Their lives and works are a source of inspiration for visual artists today who seek to transmit our heritage, enrich Jewish culture, and perpetuate memory for future generations.

Jean Bloch Rosensaft
Director, Dr. Bernard Heller Museum

“If you like to dream, then enter the dreams of Mark Podwal. He will lead you through the centuries as through a gallery where you are awaited by a world both strange and familiar. A world forever united with a pen that, with rare finesse, recounts the stories of yesterday and today, and of all days....

Through them you will discover and rediscover recollections, which – without your being aware – are part of your collective memory. Such is the power of this artist: he captures what death has forgotten to take.”

— Elie Wiesel

“Preoccupied with Jewish history and fascinated by its traditions, legends, and mysticism, I have tried to imaginatively interpret and faithfully transmit my heritage through pictorial narratives. Much of my art entails composing visual metaphors adapted from Jewish symbols and iconography. Franz Kafka once described writing as a form of prayer, and that definition has resonated with me. For me drawing is a form of prayer.”

— Mark Podwal



1st Place Winner:

ALLISON ZUCKERMAN

Even a Flood Could Not Wash the Flame Away, 2025, oil on canvas, 58" x 84"

The word “flood” in this title nods to the October 7th massacre and the painting answers with light. Stitched across the sky, a banner reads “Am Yisrael Chai”: the people of Israel live. Orange balloons keep vigil for the Bibas family and, by extension, all hostages. A yellow ribbon rests over the central figure’s chest, an emblem of solidarity and hope.

The figures on horseback reference Max Liebermann’s painting *Two Riders on the Beach* (1901). This painting was stolen after Kristallnacht from the collection of David Friedmann, a Jewish collector, and later held by Hildebrand Gurlitt, Hitler’s art dealer. In 2015 it was formally restituted to Friedmann’s great nephew, his closest heir (as his wife and daughter perished in the Holocaust). This rare victory speaks to the ongoing struggle to recover the 100,000 Nazi looted artworks and affirms that justice, though delayed, can prevail.

Jewish artists Liebermann, Guston, Altman, Pearlstein, Kisling, Soutine, Rivers, Modigliani, Katz, Freud, and Lichtenstein are all honored throughout the painting. At lower left, Lichtenstein’s Shabbos candlesticks steadily burn, an eternal flame no flood can quench.

2nd Place Winner:

JOAN LINDER

Titled, 2022-2024, pen and ink drawing, 110" x 110"; Courtesy of the artist and Cristin Tierney gallery

This life-size pen and ink drawing of bookshelves is based on my parents' idiosyncratic library and captures a particular time and place, now history itself. The bookshelf on the left has titles on Judaism, Jewish identity, Jewish history, the Holocaust, Israel, liturgy, literature, poetry, theology, spirituality, and antisemitism. The bookshelf on the right focuses on post-war American do-it-yourself domestic themes: self-help, self-reliance, self-improvement, home improvement, homemaking, health, nutrition, and language. A fern sits atop the shelf of Jewish books. Through text, this piece reflects on identity and the American Jewish experience in a post-Holocaust era. This drawing brings together my interest in domestic space, gender roles, and experience as an American child and grandchild of Holocaust survivors.

In a culture hyper-saturated by electronic imagery, I use traditional materials – quill pens and bottles of ink – to create large-scale images, exploring the processes of observation and mark making. Through continual acts of observation translated through the hand, I describe a response to my subject matter that is as contemporary as my means are old-fashioned. This personal scrutiny, through drawing of my immediate surroundings, becomes an examination of a larger contemporary experience.



3rd Place Winner:

MAXWELL BAUMAN

Emergency Golem, 2024, Lego bricks, 8" x 8" x 3"

In the 16th century, Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel created a golem (a clay figure brought to life by magic) to defend the Prague Jewish ghetto from the pogroms. Once, the Rabbi forgot to deactivate the golem before the Sabbath and it went on a violent rampage. The golem was destroyed, and the remains stored in the attic of the Old New Synagogue, where it could be restored if needed. Golems can be made from any raw material. My piece was built with LEGO bricks. It expands on that tradition of having a protector ready when the Jewish people need to defend themselves. This tiny figure is certainly easy enough to destroy and rebuild if / when it goes berserk.



Honorable Mention:

JOSHUA MEYER

Eight Approaches, 2022, oil on board, 40" x 100"

Eight Approaches is a sequence of eight paintings, hung in a row, but it is really about the spaces in-between the paintings. Consequently, it is about the spaces in-between people and ideas. Taken together, the eight paintings nearly coalesce into a narrative, reminding us of side-by-side triptych paintings, comic-book panels or film stills, and of course the eight-armed hanukkah.

Judaism loves complexity. We love to answer a question with a parable – from Hassidic Tales to Kafka and Midrash – so we can enter and engage. I hope viewers add their own stories, weaving, sorting and encountering a dialogue about the diversity and complexity of identity, community, and tradition.

My paintings have been grappling with two themes: light and time. Light is how we see and try to understand. Time is about how we change. Art allows us to hold multiple, competing truths. I paint people over long stretches of time by layering thick paint. Each daub holds a memory, and as they overlap, you can see time elapse. These two themes converge in Hanukkah, marking the passing of time with light. This giant, almost-but-not-quite hanukkah begins by using the teachings, rituals, and traditions of the holiday as a lens to think about art and ourselves.



MARK PODWAL

The Books of Elie Wiesel, 2010, archival pigment print, 20" x 16"

Chapman University commissioned Mark Podwal to create a painting honoring Elie Wiesel, at the suggestion of Matthew Lazar, the Founding Director of the Zamir Choral Foundation and the founder of HaZamir. The composition is arranged as a sequence of open book spreads, each referring to a major work and theme from Wiesel's writing, including *Night*, *The Jews of Silence*, *A Beggar in Jerusalem*, *One Generation After*, and *The Golem*. Each "page" shows a clear image connected to Wiesel's life and books: the skyline of Jerusalem, Jewish ritual objects, a clock, a throne-like chair, and a yellow star encircled by barbed wire. These images refer directly to the Holocaust, Jewish identity, memory, and the responsibility to bear witness. This painting was later used as the cover for *Elie Wiesel: Jewish, Literary and Moral Perspectives*.



IN THIS EXHIBITION:

Books Written by Elie Wiesel and Illustrated by Mark Podwal:

The Golem, Summit Books, 1983 | *A Passover Haggadah*, Simon & Schuster, 1993

King Solomon and His Magic Ring, Greenwillow Books, 1999 | *The Tale of a Niggun*, Schocken, 2020

Books by Mark Podwal with Introductions by Elie Wiesel:

Moses and the Angels, Delacorte Press, 1999 | *Reimagined: 45 Years of Jewish Art*, Glitterati, Inc., 2016

MARK PODWAL

Rabbi Loew and the Golem in the Old-New Synagogue, 1982, inkjet print, 10.25" x 8"



This illustration is from *The Golem: The Story of a Legend, as Told by Elie Wiesel and Illustrated by Mark Podwal* (1983), the first book created together by Elie Wiesel and Mark Podwal. Wiesel initially suggested that they collaborate on the legends of Isaac, but Podwal proposed the Golem, believing the story's themes of Jewish mysticism and Prague legend would lend themselves more powerfully to visual interpretation.

Wiesel made only one request regarding the artwork: that the face of Judah Loew ben Bezalel, the 16th-century rabbi known as the Maharal of Prague, never be shown, since we do not know what he looked like. Podwal often depicted the Golem as a looming shadow, emphasizing mystery rather than portraying it as a heroic figure. The drawings in the book were conceived to resemble seventeenth-century etchings, reinforcing the historical atmosphere of the legend.

MARK PODWAL

Prague Ghetto Cemetery, c. 1990s, acrylic and colored pencil on paper, 16" x 20"

The Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague is shown with the Altneuschul (Old–New Synagogue) rising at the left above the tightly packed gravestones. This burial ground, in use from the 15th to the 18th century, is known for its dense layers of stones, set closely together over centuries. The tombstones bear Hebrew inscriptions and carved symbols, including a lion, a fish, and a bird.

Among those buried here is Judah Loew ben Bezalel, the 16th-century rabbi known as the Maharal of Prague, whose grave remains a site of ongoing visitation. Rabbi Loew is the subject of a legend that he created the Golem of Prague, an animate fashioned from clay, to defend the Jews of the ghetto from antisemitic attacks, particularly the blood libel. He is said to have used mystical powers based on esoteric knowledge of how God created Adam.

The subject connects to *House of Life: The Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague*, a documentary created by Mark Podwal and Academy Award–winning filmmaker Allan Miller, broadcast on PBS in 2009 and 2010.



MARK PODWAL

Rabbi Loew with the Golem, 1994, inkjet print, 7" x 6.25"



In the children's book Podwal wrote and illustrated, titled *Golem: A Giant Made of Mud* (1995), he retells the Prague legend of the mystical creature created out of mud by Rabbi Loew. Podwal paired concise, poetic text with stark, atmospheric images, presenting the story for young readers while preserving its mystery and gravity, as evoked in this passage:

“Then one midnight, through a hidden passage beneath the city streets, the rabbi made his way to the river. With the help of a spoon that glittered in the moonlight, he molded a large figure from the mud of the shore. How he brought the figure to life remains a mystery. Some say he simply placed a piece of parchment bearing God’s name into its mouth. Others claim it was the Hebrew letter that he inscribed on the golem’s brow that gave it life.”

MARK PODWAL

Israeli Tank, 1989, etching, 7.75" x 9.75"

The tank setting off to battle emits from its turret a monumental menorah, the symbol of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. The contradictory juxtaposition of a military vehicle with a ritual object denoting spiritual and national identity illuminates the teaching of the prophet Zechariah: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit’ said the Eternal God.” (Zechariah 4:6). Military strength and resources may be necessary, but ultimately true strength is to be found in moral and ethical values inspired by the Divine spirit. Zechariah’s vision of an eight-branched, golden menorah that remains miraculously lit symbolizes the restoration of the Temple and the Jewish state under Divine grace.



The medieval commentator Rashi connected this vision of the candelabra as a reminder that permanent restoration, with its spiritual and political ramifications, would be accomplished only by the spirit of God. Initially published in 1989 on *The New York Times* Op-Ed page, this work received The Society of Newspaper Design Award of Excellence.

MARK PODWAL

Flowers of Jerusalem, 2017, archival pigment print, 21" x 29.5"

A recurring theme in Podwal's work is the pairing of flowers and Jerusalem. In this image, large blossoms fill the foreground, drawn with clean outlines and bold, controlled color. Behind them, at the horizon are the ramparts of the Old City of Jerusalem and the distinctive silhouette of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount, the site of Solomon's Temple and the Second Jewish Temple. It is built over a stone sacred to the Abrahamic faiths as the site where God created the world and the first human (Adam), the attempted sacrifice of Isaac took place, and the holiest site toward which Jews pray. Muslims believe that the prophet Muhammed journeyed in a single night from the Great Mosque in Mecca to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, from which he ascended to heaven. This holy site is also the destination of Christian pilgrims.



The space is intentionally compressed. The flowers are scaled almost as large as the city, bringing the natural forms and the architecture into the same visual plane. The result is a direct, tightly structured image in which foreground and skyline hold equal presence, joined within a single, unified composition that conveys the vitality of this ancient city, revered by Jews, Muslims, and Christians, and the spiritual joy and beauty to be found in this sacred place where God's spirit resides.

MARK PODWAL

In Every Generation, 1998, etching, 10" x 8"

The Haggadah we read at the Passover seder (festive meal) instructs us that in each generation we must see ourselves as having been liberated from Egypt. The redemption from slavery in our own recent history is evoked in this haunting etching. The Torah scroll, embodying our Jewish values and teachings, is the base for an eruption of flames and letters emitted by the burning of synagogues in Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland by the Nazis on Kristallnacht on November 9-10, 1938. The yellow stars worn by Jews during the Holocaust frame the toppled menorah on the right, whose branches morph into railroad tracks leading to Auschwitz and the annihilation of European Jewry. The upright menorah on the left holds Jerusalem aloft, symbolizing the rebirth of the survivors and the creation of the State of Israel. This etching is based on a drawing initially published on *The New York Times* Op-Ed page, illustrating an article by Elie Wiesel. It also appears in Elie Wiesel's *A Passover Haggadah*.



MARK PODWAL

King Solomon, 1998, inkjet print, 10" x 8"

King Solomon and His Magic Ring (New York: Greenwillow Books, 1999) was written by Elie Wiesel and illustrated by Mark Podwal. This book presents a retelling of the life of King Solomon, drawn from traditional legend. They follow him from age twelve, when he became king, through the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, and to the final years of his reign.

Wiesel wrote, "His name was Solomon, or Shlomo in Hebrew, which could mean that he was a man of peace (shalom), or a man who sought perfection (shleimut). Or both. A son of King David, the warrior, he assumed his father's throne when he was just a boy of twelve. But Solomon's own reign was peaceful, and it remained so for forty years."

Shlomo was the name of Wiesel's beloved father, with whom he was deported to Auschwitz, together with his mother and younger sister who were immediately sent to the gas chamber. Together, Wiesel and his father endured a death march to Buchenwald, where Shlomo died shortly after their arrival on January 29, 1945 and Wiesel was liberated on April 11, 1945 by Allied soldiers. Their story is recounted in Wiesel's *Night*.



MARK PODWAL

Omer Calendar Hamsa, 2011, acrylic and colored pencil on paper, 16" x 12"



This image combines a hamsa, a protective hand inscribed "Omer" at its fingertips, with the counting of the Omer – the forty-nine days between Passover and Shavuot. The hand is divided into a numbered grid, marking each day of the counting.

A Torah scroll with an ornate Torah shield mantle rests on the hamsa's thumb, pointing to Shavuot and the giving of the Torah. Inside the palm is a form based on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, reflecting the tradition of personal growth during these days. Stalks of wheat at the side refer to the original Omer offering, which was brought to the ancient Temple from the new grain harvest.

The image, presenting the Omer as both a daily calendar and a time of preparation, leading from freedom to receiving the Torah, is from Podwal's third Haggadah: *Sharing the Journey: The Haggadah for the Contemporary Family* (2012).

MARK PODWAL

Five Torah Pointers, c. 2010s, gold and silver thread, velvet textile, 26" x 26"



Podwal was commissioned to create ark curtains, Torah mantles, and other ritual textiles for prominent synagogues, including Temple Emanu-El in New York and the Altneuschul (Old-New Synagogue) in Prague. This design features Torah pointers (yads), the ritual objects used by Torah readers to keep their place as they read from the Torah, as it is not permissible to touch the parchment scroll with one's hand. His drawings for this ceremonial textile were translated into silk and metallic thread using traditional embroidery methods by the renowned New York firm Penn & Fletcher.

MARK PODWAL

Matzoh Moon, 2004, archival pigment print, 20" x 16"

A shtetl sits beneath a large full moon shaped like a round piece of matzoh. The houses cluster tightly together under a dark blue sky, while the oversized matzoh-moon dominates the composition, immediately identifying the scene with Passover.

This image was later used as the updated cover for *A Passover Haggadah: As Commented Upon by Elie Wiesel and Illustrated by Mark Podwal*, first published in 1993. Passover was Podwal's favorite Jewish holiday, and over the course of his career he created three different Passover haggadot, returning repeatedly to the themes and imagery of the festival.



MARK PODWAL

Dąbrowa Mural, 2021, archival pigment print, 36" x 26"



Dąbrowa Białostocka, a predominantly Jewish town before World War II, was the birthplace of Podwal's mother. In memory of the Jews who lived there for centuries, Podwal painted an impression of an oak tree (Dąbrowa means "oak forest") with the twenty-two letters of the Yiddish alphabet scattered among the leaves. On the horizon are the Dąbrowa synagogue and homes painted red and orange to symbolize the burning of the town by the Germans in 1941, which left no traces of its Jewish past other than a few tombstones in its Jewish cemetery. To honor Podwal's mother, this work was painted as a mural in the town of Dąbrowa Białostocka.

MARK PODWAL

Talmud Typewriter, 2015, silkscreen, 18" x 13.5"

The Talmud is the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend comprising the Mishnah and the Gemara. There are two versions of the Talmud: the Babylonian Talmud (which dates from the 5th century AD but includes earlier material) and the earlier Jerusalem Talmud. Written in a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic, it records the teachings and discussions of the great academies of the Holy Land and Babylonia. With 2,711 densely packed pages and countless commentaries, learning Talmud is a lifelong occupation.

Podwal juxtaposes the ancient, scribed text with the modern mechanical instrument of the typewriter, demonstrating how antiquity and modernity are linked in an ongoing chain of tradition, learning, and commentary in our own time.

Emerging from this typewriter is the first page of the tractate *Berakhot*, which opens with a discussion of "what is the time" (the large Hebrew graphic word atop the Talmud page) to recite the Shema prayer. The first verse of the Shema, from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, is considered the most essential declaration of the Jewish faith: "Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One! Blessed is God's glorious majesty forever and ever." This prayer is recited during morning and evening prayers, on Shabbat, at the climactic moment of the final prayer of Yom Kippur, at bedtime, and as the last words before death. Traditionally, it is recited with one's eyes closed, or with a hand placed over the eyes.



MARK PODWAL

Nabucco (The Metropolitan Opera), 2011, archival pigment print, 36" x 24"



Composer Giuseppe Verdi's reputation was established with his renowned opera "Nabucco" in 1842. The opera follows the plight of the Jews as they were assaulted, conquered, and subsequently exiled from their homeland by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, whose conquest of Judah led to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

In the Bible, Nebuchadnezzar is punished for his hubris and wanders the wilderness like a beast. His bestial body, resembling the Assyrian lamassu (a winged, human-headed lion), evokes the glazed tile beasts decorating the ancient grand gate and processional way leading into the inner city of Babylon. Beneath his feet are the broken ritual objects of various eras symbolizing the plight of the Jewish people throughout history.

The opera's famous chorus, "Va, pensiero" (Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves), became a powerful, symbolic anthem for the Risorgimento, Italy's 19th-century unification movement against Austrian rule. Its themes of longing for a lost homeland resonated with Italians seeking independence. This was the first of nine limited edition archival print posters made exclusively for The Metropolitan Opera by Podwal.

MARK PODWAL

In Commemoration of the Danish Rescue, 2023, archival pigment print, 36" x 24"



Podwal was commissioned by the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York to create a permanent art installation for its exhibition, "Courage to Act: Rescue in Denmark." These twelve drawings evoke the history of the only occupied country to actively resist the Nazi regime's attempts to deport its Jewish citizens, which succeeded in saving the lives of 7,200 Jews and 680 non-Jewish family members.

Each drawing features an opened book with aspects of the story: yellow stars inscribed with the word "Jew" in French, German, and Dutch; Jewish ceremonial objects; the Danish church that hid Jews as they fled Copenhagen, where most lived; the boats that ferried the Jews to safety in nearby neutral Sweden; the Danish and Swedish flags; and the portrait of Christian X, King of Denmark, who supported this altruistic effort.

Shofar Moon Over the Great Synagogue of Copenhagen depicts the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, when Copenhagen's Jewish community was warned of the Nazi plan to deport every Jew in Denmark. The upended menorah morphed into train tracks represents the journey of the 500 Danish Jews who were deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where all but 51 survived due to the Danes' pressure for their wellbeing. Amid the juxtaposed image of barracks is the bright green silver maple tree that Jewish youths planted as an act of resistance. A cutting of that tree now grows beside the front door of the Museum of Jewish Heritage.

The Elie Wiesel Foundation was established in 1987 by Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel and his wife Marion to promote memory, tolerance, and equality through programs that inspire ethical reflection, youth development, and education. Guided by the Wiesels' belief in moral responsibility and human dignity, The Foundation promotes human rights for all and supports youth-focused initiatives such as the Prize in Ethics Essay Contest and the Beit Tzipora Centers that promote acceptance, equality, and cross-community engagement. Today, The Foundation continues Elie Wiesel's legacy by cultivating moral leadership and empowering changemakers whose work reflects the enduring values of compassion, tolerance, and shared humanity. eliewieselfoundation.org

The Dr. Bernard Heller Museum at Hebrew Union College in New York City is a dynamic university museum dedicated to showcasing contemporary artists of all backgrounds whose work explores Jewish identity, history, culture, and values. The Museum presents thoughtfully curated exhibitions that interpret core Jewish texts and traditions while engaging with pressing cultural, social, and historical themes — from communal justice and ritual innovation to broader human experience — inviting visitors to deepen their understanding of Jewish heritage through the visual arts. In addition to its compelling temporary shows, the Heller Museum serves as a resource for students and scholars, offers traveling exhibitions to venues across North America, and fosters dialogue about art's role in enriching both Jewish life and cross-cultural understanding. huc.edu/hellermuseum



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