

# Proverbs, Adages, and Maxims

---



---

DR. BERNARD HELLER MUSEUM  
HEBREW UNION COLLEGE, NEW YORK

# Proverbs, Adages, and Maxims

August 18, 2025 - June 25, 2026

Every culture offers traditional sayings that articulate a perceived truth based on common sense or human experience. From the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible, Abraham Joshua Heschel's philosophical writings, Sephardic and Judaeo-Arabic popular dictums, and Yiddish adages; to old English and Chinese aphorisms and African folk axioms, there are countless profound or wittily succinct statements that provide insights into human nature and guidance for a moral and righteous existence.

Fifty-seven artists of diverse backgrounds offer visual interpretations of familiar sayings and worthy shorthand advice. Ranging from representational to abstract approaches and a broad range of mediums, their art applies age-old maxims to explore interpersonal relationships, environmental concerns, gender stereotypes, Holocaust remembrance, and the impact of trauma on the human psyche.

Their works encourage us to deepen our understanding of the world and others, and to reflect on our own self-perceptions of our identities and values. From admonitions to consoling commentaries on the vagaries of life, they impart wisdom, empathy, hope, and healing.

Phyllis Freedman, *Curator*

Front cover:

---

## HARRIET R. GOREN

*A Barking Dog Doesn't Bite*, 2015

Giclee print; 14" x 11"

Goren applies her own creative typography in English and Hebrew to depict this old English proverb, published by the Tudor courtier John Heywood in *Thersytes* (c. 1550) and adapted from an earlier work by the French writer Joannes Ravisius Textor.

---

## HEDDY BREUER ABRAMOWITZ

*Can Leopards Change Their Spots?*, 2025

Mixed media; 20" x 24"

Inspired by Jeremiah 13:23's admonition about those practiced in doing evil, the leopard's green Hamas headgear references the impact of the Gaza War in Abramowitz's artistic declaration against terrorism and aspirations for peace.



---

## FRANN ADDISON

*Charity Begins At Home*, 2024

Pewter, brass, copper, ceramic; 3.5" x 4" x 5.5" (below)

This *tzedakah* box shaped like a house holds contributions advancing righteousness and reminds that family care and participation is a vital part of the obligation to help those in need.



*Count Your Blessings*,



2024

Pewter, brass;

6.5" x 4" x 3"



Back cover:

---

## JENNIE BOOTH

*Easier Said Than Done*, 2025

Gouache and graphite; 8" x 5"



Inspired by a record-breaking surfing competition, Booth depicts her surfer hesitating on the shore while mustering up the courage to join the huge wave.



---

## GAYLE ASCH

*All Israel Is Responsible For One Another, 2024*

Digital painting on canvas with colored pencil; 12" x 12"

The pro-Israel rally in Times Square on the first anniversary of the October 7 Hamas terror attack illustrates the Talmud's teaching in Shevuot 39a of communal responsibility in Jewish law, ensuring mutual support in mourning, hope for the hostages, and healing.

---

## EFRAT BALER-MOSES

*When Life Gives You Lemons,  
Make Lemonade, 2022*

Acrylic on canvas; 11" x 9" x 5"

Shifting perspectives and sculptural forms transform the conventional still-life painting into a statement about adaptability and creative possibilities in finding opportunities in challenges.



---

## YARON BOB



*Let Us Beat Our Swords Into Ploughshares, 2023*

Qassam rocket shrapnel, Swarovski red crystals;

9" x 6" x 6"

Collection of Thomas Gelb

Thomas Gelb commissioned this piece upon learning of Yaron Bob's transformation of objects of terror into art of beauty and hope. Metal sculptor Yaron Bob collected shrapnel from a partially exploded Qassam rocket that landed in an Israeli pomegranate orchard behind his home, and formed it into a pomegranate-shaped spice box with crystal seeds. The transformation of an evil object of destruction into a beautiful work of ritual art, used during Havdallah at the end of Shabbat to praise God for our salvation, illuminates Isaiah 2:4's prophecy of turning from war to peace.

---

## MICHAEL BOGDANOW

*For Everything There Is A Season*, 2001  
Acrylic on canvas; 24" x 40" x 1"

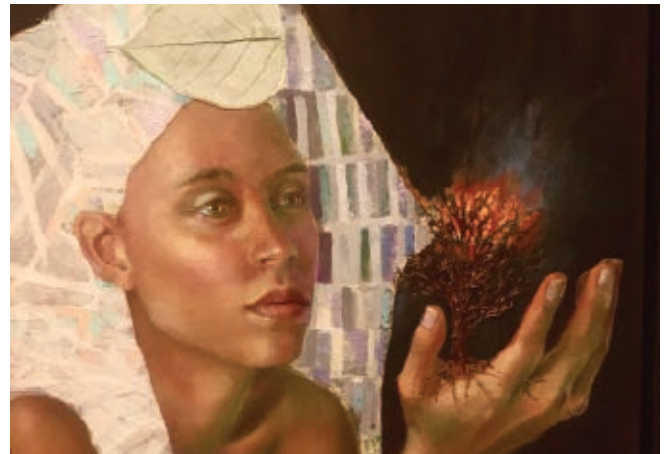
Ecclesiastes 3:1 inspired this depiction of the seasonal progression of the year from winter through fall passing across the lake and beneath the heavens above.



## ELIZABETH MYERS CASTONGUAY

*If You Educate A Man, You Educate An Individual.*  
*If You Educate A Woman, You Educate A Family*, 2022  
Acrylic on canvas; 16" x 18" x 2"

Moved by the plight and loss of education of women in Afghanistan after the US and Allies' withdrawal, Castonguay quotes the Ghanian scholar, Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey (1875-1927) in her depiction of a woman holding the endangered "Tree of Knowledge."

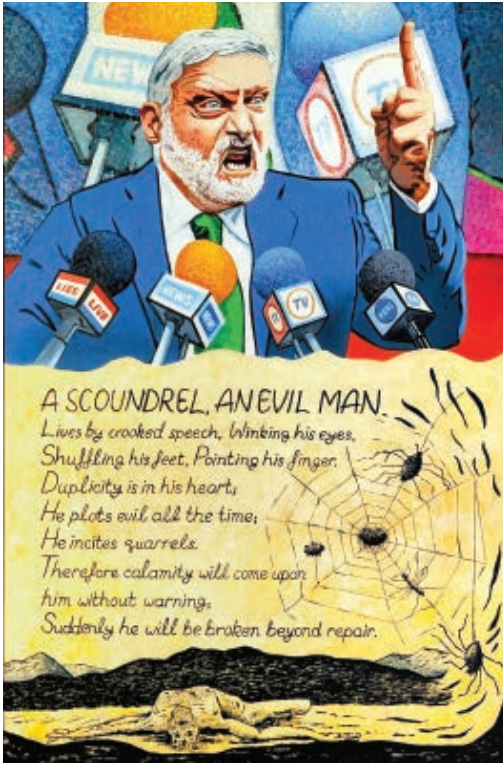


---

## JUDY CHICAGO and DONALD WOODMAN

*We're All In The Same Boat*, 2000  
Photograph of sprayed acrylic, oil paint, applique, embroidery on fabric; needlework by Mary Ewanowski and Jacquelyn Alexander; 22" x 28"

This collaborative artwork exemplifies Chicago's mission of advocating empathy in the face of shared adversity.



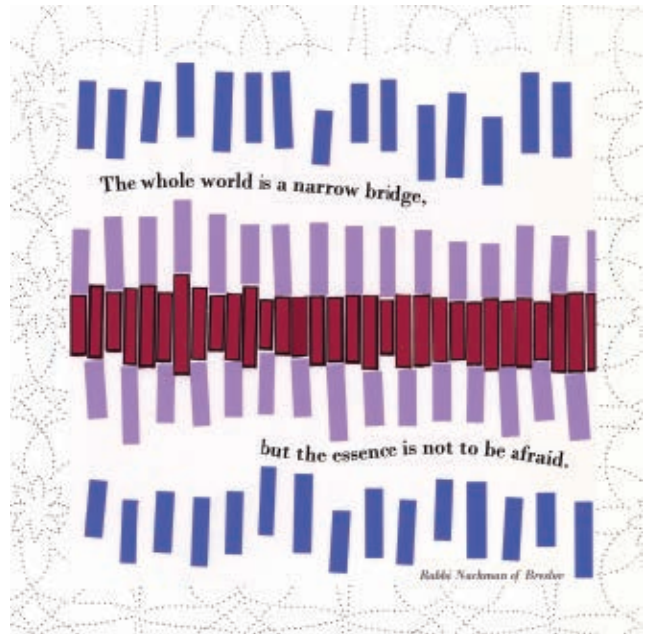
## ALAN FALK

*An Evil Man (Scoundrel) Lives By Crooked Speech*, 2025

Oil, pastels on canvas; 36" x 24"



Inspired by Proverbs 6:12-16, Falk depicts the duplicitous scoundrel who foments evil and conflict and predicts his eventual calamitous fate.



## DIANE FINE

*The World Is A Narrow Bridge, But The Essence Is Not To Be Afraid*, 2023

Limited edition archival inkjet print; 11" x 8.5"

Fine illuminates Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's teaching about the precariousness of our existence and the need for confidence in traversing life's uncertain path.

*Truth Is The Safest Lie*, 2023

Intaglio and archival inkjet print; 2" x 12"



## VICKI REIKES FOX

*If Everyone Hung Their Troubles On A Line, We'd All Take Back Our Own*, 2022

Mixed media, assemblage artist's book; 9.25" x 9" x 4"



Through well-loved personal materials deployed in an artist's book format, Fox commemorates her late mother's legacy and reflects her philosophy on life in an intimate expression of personal loss.



---

## YOLANDA RAMIREZ GOLDSACK

*Music Is The Language Of The Soul*, 2021

Acrylic on canvas; 29" x 24"

Plato's statement that "music is the movement of sound to reach the soul for the education of its virtue," is captured in Goldsack's depiction of the cellist conveying emotions and experiences through a universal language that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers.

---

## DEBBIE TEICHOLZ GUEDALIA

*For The Dead And The Living,  
We Must Bear Witness*, 1994

Photo assemblage; 30" x 20" X 4"



Elie Wiesel's plea for Holocaust remembrance infuses Guedalia's assemblage. The smoldering, furrowed Israeli fields near Gaza, where Shoah survivors overcame trauma to plant new roots, echo the embedded train tracks that carried their families to the death camps and take on new tragic symbolism after the October 7 Hamas attacks.



---

## KEITH HARING

*Ignorance=Fear, Silence=Death*, 1989

Poster; 16" x 23"

Haring designed this poster in 1989 for ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), the political advocacy organization founded in 1987 to combat the AIDS crisis. Urging action and awareness in the face of misinformation and passivity, three figures marked by X on their chests convey urgency and distress, with the call to action to "Fight AIDS" highlighted with the pink triangle, the Nazi designation that continues to be historically significant in the context of LGBT rights and AIDS activism.



---

## MAXINE HESS

*Honesty Is The Best Policy*, 2012

Fabric assemblage; 19" x 17"



Hess recalls learning a lifelong lesson at the age of 7½, when her mother learned about her misdeed from another child's mother and sat her down on the kitchen stepladder chair that night to reprimand her. Rescued fabric and enhanced stitching describe this memorable moment of reckoning. First coined by Edwin Sandys in 1599, this saying was popularized by Benjamin Franklin's writings.

---

## JENNY HOLZER

*Abuse Of Power Comes As No Surprise*,  
from *Truisms*, 1980-

*Protect Me From What I Want*,  
from *Survival Series*, 1983-84

Screen print on cherry wood; 4" x 6" each

Conceptual artist Holzer's text-based works are constructed from "truisms" in bold fonts that are visually displayed in public spaces and on merchandise to provoke discussions about violence, sexuality, oppression, human rights, feminism, power, war, and death.

---

## SUSAN KAPLOW

*There Is Nothing So Whole  
As A Broken Heart*, 2022

Hand felted fiber, beads; 9" x 14" x 4"



During the worst of the Covid pandemic, artist Susan Kaplow was consoled by the teachings of the Kotzker Rebbe (1787–1859), who lived in seclusion for the last 20 years of his life. The Hasidic master's words take shape through Kaplow's fashioning the fiber into a whole heart with beads outlining the veins and arteries that express hope that vitality would return.





---

## ROMAN KHIDEKEL

*The Sky Is The Limit*, 2020 (above)

Color print; 13" x 19"



## MARK KHIDEKEL

*Life Is A Journey, Not A Destination*, 2020 (below)

Pencil on paper; 22" x 28"

This diptych by two artists reflects the influence of early 20th-century avant-garde art in the Suprematist abstraction of the astronaut and space vehicle in the digital 3D animation (above) and the Cubist-Futurist movement through space of the rockets and robot in the pencil drawing (below).

---

## SIDNEY KLEIN

*The Evil That Men Do Lives After Them.*

*The Good Is Oft Interred With Their Bones*, 2024

Acrylic on paper; 24" x 18"

Comparisons of the October 7 Hamas attack with the Holocaust prompted Klein to look at Shoah images for the first time. His portrayal of an elderly Jew selected for the Nazi gas chamber expresses the enduring consequences of evil as described by Shakespeare's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar*.



---

## MELANIE KLINE

*A Bird May Love A Fish, But Where Will They Build Their Home?*, 2024

Oil on canvas embellished with shells, pearls, and gold leaf; 20" x 24"

Kline's birds and fish adhere to their own habitats, recalling her grandmother's admonishment to date only Jewish boys with this quote credited to playwright Joseph Stein's *Fiddler on the Roof*.



---

## KSENIJA KOSTIC-PECARIC

*The Early Bird Gets The Worm, 2024*

Ceramic, wood assemblage; 10.5" x 6" x 2.25"



Recalling the roosters of her Serbian childhood who set the tone for rising early and greeting the day with intention, Kostic-Pecaric's whimsical bird is poised to succeed at getting what he wants.

---

## TANIA KRAVATH

*L'Dor Vador, From Generation To Generation, 2024*

Ceramic; 10" x 10" x 6"

The hovering mother with child expresses the challenges of female identity, relationship, and belonging, coupled with memory. Evocative of an ancient artifact, the ceramic finish enhances the sense of ancestral stories and the embedded patterns reflect imbued traditions, values, and ideals.



---

## BARBARA KRUGER

*We Don't Need Another Hero, 1987*

Postcard; 4.5" x 6.25" each

During the 1980s, Kruger developed works based on found black-and-white images, to which she affixed words that turn out to be ironic maxims. "We don't need another hero" from the 1985 hit song by Tina Turner bisects a photo of a young girl admiring a young boy's flexed bicep, engaging our consideration of stereotypes that are imposed in childhood and how gender roles are defined in society.

*To Buy Or Not To Buy, 1987*

*Your Assignment Is To Divide and Conquer, 1981*

*You Can't Drag Your Money Into The Grave with You, 1988*

*Money Can Buy You Love, 1985*

*We Don't Need Another Hero, 1987*

Postcards; 4.5" x 6.25" each

---

## RONA LESSER

*A Good Woman Is Hard To Find; Her Worth Is More Than Rubies*, 2023

Acrylic on canvas; 15" x 30"



Having read these lines from *Ayshet Chayil* (Proverbs 31:10-12) for her Orthodox bat mitzvah, traditionally recited before *kiddush* (blessing of the wine) on Friday night, Lesser reflects on her life's journey and the evolving empowerment of women in synagogue worship.

---

## IRIS LEVINSON

*The Writing Is On The Wall*, 2025

Acrylic, collage, mixed media on canvas; 36" x 36"



Levinson's work is a meditation on the devastation of the Los Angeles fires and the rebellion of nature, no longer able to sustain the damage of fires, floods, plastic pollution, and oil slicks. Saying "the walls are falling with the writing on them," her painting is a call to action to reduce and reverse the causes of climate change.



---

## LUCINDA LUYAAS

*We're All In This Together*, 1982

Reverse glass painting; 24" x 30"



The unity and diversity of these hatted figures arose from a newspaper photo the artist saw of a protest by a group of rabbis. The color and technique of reverse glass painting adds dimension and uniqueness to each individual of the collective.



---

## VIRGINIA MALLON

*Look Before You Leap, For Snakes Among Sweet Flowers Do Creep, 2024*  
Oil on burlap; 42" x 25"



Mallon explores myths, bible stories, and fairy tales about women's roles in the world that evoke the loss of feminine power and the birth of patriarchy. Harking to the Garden of Eden, she depicts Eve's trouble in paradise and the universal adage to be found in German, Bengali, and Indonesian cultures.

---

## RICHARD MCBEE

*A Capable Woman, Who Can Find?  
Far Beyond Pearls Is Her Value, 2016*  
Oil on canvas; 24" x 24"

Evoking *Aishes Chayil* (Woman of Valor) sung on Friday night, McBee depicts the midrash about Mrs. Ohn ben Peles, based on Numbers 16:1 and the Talmud (Sanhedrin 109b-110a). She rescues her husband, who is among the four primary rebels with Korach rising up against Moses' leadership, by getting him drunk and simultaneously blocking the door with her immodest appearance so he is unable to join their rebellion.



---

## MICHAEL MENDEL

*A Chain Is As Strong As Its Weakest Link, 2009*  
Watercolor; 14.5" x 23.5"

Mendel magnifies the links of a tugboat chain that can pull massive oil rigs along the West Coast and to Alaska. The maxim dates to Thomas Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1786).





---

## LENORE MIZRACHI-COHEN



*What's Past Is Dead*, 2021

Papercut, Arabic calligraphy; 12.25" x 12.25"



*Alamthal*, timeless Judaeo-Arabic popular sayings, offer a *Mattal* (phrase) for every occasion. Celebrating their wisdom with the discipline of Arabic calligraphy, Mizrachi-Cohen simplifies their eternal truths to their visual essence to perpetuate and renew her family's heritage 100 years after they were uprooted from Syria to New York.

---

## DEBORAH MORAG



*There Is Hope For A Tree: If It Is Cut It Will Sprout Again*, 2023

Photographic print; 25.3" x 38"



Morag photographed the thriving avocado grove of Kibbutz Nirim on the Gaza border six months before the October 7 Hamas attacks. Citing Job 14:7, she notes that, "Even when damaged, trees retain potential. These trees' silver wrappings evoke both injury and care... a gesture of protection and belief in renewal."



---

## YEHUDIS MOSKOVITS

*Light At The End of Every Tunnel*, 2025

Oil on canvas; 24" x 18"

Reflections on the confinement of her upbringing in a religious extremist community, Moskovits expresses how it feels to be separate and yet connected, to inhabit spaces between past and present, isolation and integration, and the pursuit of education and self-expression.

---

## DENNIE OLIVA

*Peace Comes From Within*, 2025

Digital drawing; 8" x 8"



Echoing Buddhist wisdom, Oliva says, “A dark vision drew me in with its magnificent wings. Within the vision a void of endless space filled me with tranquility. I surrendered for that moment and then it was gone, never to be seen again.”



---

## JOSE A. LOPEZ ORTEGA

*Don't Walk With The Wicked*, 2024

Collage; 24" x 20"

Inspired by Psalm 1:1, Ortega's intricate “painting with collage” expresses a dense interior landscape of vivid color punctuated by patterns of darkness.



---

## JENNIFER DEPPE PARKER

*Beauty Is In The Eye Of The Beholder*

(*Kate Moss, Natalia Vodianova* (at right),

*Linda Evangelista, Tyra Banks*), 2023

Acrylic on board, hand-cut magazine papers,  
molding paste, convex mirror gel mediums;

12" x 12" x 1.5" each



Parker invents a new portraiture, beyond superficial representations and cultural, racial, socioeconomic status or species differences. With each unique iris indicating a map of individual identity, the pupil is either a mysterious black hole or a convex mirror reflecting both perception and self-perception, showing us “how our experiences and vision impact the lens with which we view all new things.”





---

## MICHAL PERRY

*Just When The Caterpillar Thought The World Was Over, It Became A Butterfly, 2024*

Oil on canvas; 80" x 90"

“Created as an emotional response to the terror and war of the past year in Israel, the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly symbolizes the soul departing the body after death, any spiritual or physical change, and the hope we all so desperately need,” says Perry. She cites the 4th-century BCE Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi’s aphorism, whose writings during decades of struggle and warfare are one of the two foundational texts of Taoism.

---

## JENNIFER RADIN

*Don’t Count Your Chickens Before They’re Hatched, 2025*

Acrylic on canvas; 16" x 12"

Paralysis when things go wrong is expressed by the eggs tumbling and cracking beneath the woman’s feet (a reference to her lack of control over reproduction), while the kettle whistling and bread rising allude to the urgency of taking action. Radin says, “A perfect appearance and home cannot guarantee becoming a mother.”



---

## DEBORAH ROLNIK RAICHMAN

*The Reddest Of Apples May Have A Worm, 2024*

Water media and collage on canvas; 28" x 34" x 1.5"

This vivid still-life of ripe apples is inspired by a Yiddish aphorism. It recalls the temptation of an apple in the Garden of Eden that led to Adam and Eve’s expulsion.

---

## DIANE REICH

*You Reap What You Sow*, 2020  
Acrylic on canvas; 20" x 20"

Depicting Simcha Blass in the 1930s developing the revolutionary drip irrigation system at Kibbutz Hatzerim in Israel, Reich celebrates the Israeli groundbreaking innovations that have enabled arid regions to flourish, alleviating food insecurity around the globe. Reich shines light on Israel's "life-changing contributions to humanity."



---

## FLORA ROSEFSKY

*The Search For Wisdom Is Never Ending*, 2007  
Mixed media collage and papercut; 14" x 11"

Rosefsky employs "drawing with scissors" to express King Solomon's affirmation that a person who sincerely seeks truth – the "wise" man – will become even wiser.

live life  
in  
radical amazement...



---

## JUDY SIROTA ROSENTHAL

*Live Life In Radical Amazement, To Be Spiritual Is To Be Amazed*, 2022  
Sumi ink, pastels; 17" x 11"

Inspired by philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel's teaching, Rosenthal created "a visual reminder of our responsibility to the world, the environment, and each other."

to be spiritual  
is  
to be amazed.



---

## DEIDRE SCHERER

*The Young Can Walk Faster, But The Elder Knows  
The Road, 2024*

Thread on layered fabric; 10" x 9" x .25"

Gold silk thread illuminates the visage of an elder who embodies an old African proverb that speaks of the complementary strengths of youth and age in gathering wisdom in life.

---

## LINDA FRIEDMAN SCHMIDT

*You Can't Teach An Old Dog New Tricks, 2025*

Discarded clothing, magazine cutouts, hand stitching, embroidery, applique, collage; 32" x 22"

Dating to 1546, this adage reveals elders' perceived resistance to change. The discarded, once well-loved clothing reminds us that we are "all cut from the same cloth." The tactility of the materials communicates the gentle touch binding the human and pet.



---

## DEBBIE SCHORE

*The Mirror Tells The Truth, 2024*

Assemblage of vintage hand mirrors, mirror tiles, and convex, concave, and holographic mirrors, gatorboard; 65" x 35" x 2"

Inspired by the Yiddish proverb, Schore offers an exploration of self-reflection, fragmented identity, and ever-shifting truth through vintage mirrors conveying how self-truth is shaped by time, memory, and context. No single reflection is absolute as the viewer is confronted with multiple versions of themselves – stretched, shrunken, multiplied – challenging the notion of a singular fixed identity.



---

## BEN SHAHN

*Thou Shall Not Stand Idly By*, 1965

Photolithograph; 26.25" x 21"

Heller Museum Collection

Social justice activist and artist Ben Shahn advocated for civil rights in this work, inspired by the words of Leviticus 19:16.



---

## MARC SHANKER

*From Your Footsteps We Shall See Good Fortune*, 2007

Etching with aquatint; 7.5" x 5.5"

Inspired by his grandfather's Ladino adages as windows into his heritage, Shanker composed his book, *Traces of Sepharad, 45 Etchings of Judeo-Spanish Proverbs*. It includes this image of a whimsical foreshortened foot stepping on a path whose blossoming flowers portend a beautiful future.

---

## KAREN SMUL

*If the Shoe Fits, Wear It*, 2024

Photograph; 16" x 20"

Photographer Karen Smul finds joy in documenting Pride Month events, filled with costumes, glitter, and camaraderie. She explains, "When I took this shot, I focused on the casualness of the red boots, mixed in with the t-shirts and everyday apparel of the others, each owning their own identity. As the saying goes, 'If the shoe fits, wear it' – proudly!"



---

## CHELSEA STEINBERG GAY

*That's Only The Tip Of The Iceberg*, 2013

Plaster casting on wooden base; 4" x 5" x 5.5"

The visible tip of an iceberg is perched on its base, but its submerged mass is left to the viewer's imagination, conveying the mystery of what is unseen and therefore unknown.



## MERLE TEMKIN

*There Are Other Fish In The Sea*, 2024  
Oil on canvas; 5 works, each 14" x 18"

First recorded in a 1573 letter from English writer Gabriel Harvey to the poet Edmund Spenser, this consoling adage is conveyed through idiosyncratic and highly diverse fish reminding us that despite disappointment, opportunities still await.

## JOE TURPIN

*You Can't Hold A Candle To It*, 2025  
Oil, charcoal, diptych; 30" x 30", 12" x 12"

Turpin depicts Mike Diamond, Adam Horowitz, and Adam Yauch, known as the Beastie Boys, who identified with their Jewish heritage in their song "Shadrach, You Can't Hold a Candle to It." It was inspired by the biblical Book of Daniel's story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to bow down to an idol, were punished by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon by being thrown into a furnace, and were rescued by an angel. The singers amid flames are juxtaposed with a depiction of a 1950s photograph of the crematorium at Auschwitz, whose victims were not saved by divine intervention.



## LISA TURTZ

*Sometimes It's Hard To See What's Right Before Your Eyes*, 2024  
Watercolor, watercolor pencil, gouache; 30" x 22"



In Numbers 22:20-35, God tries to prevent Balaam from fulfilling the Moabite King Balak's command to curse the Israelites. Balaam does not see the sword-wielding angel blocking his path, but his donkey does and lays down, saving Balaam's life. The comedic irony of a talking donkey having more vision than a prophet reminds us that salvation may be missed, even when it is in front of us.



## YONA VERWER

*Water, Water Everywhere, But Not  
A Drop to Drink*, 2024-2025

Acrylic on canvas; 26" x 40"



This adage comes from Samuel Coleridge's poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), in which a ship is cursed because the Mariner has killed an innocent albatross. It informs Verwer's painting confronting the destructive pollution that endangers the delicate balance of marine life. Amid the surreal underwater beauty, a sea turtle clutches a plastic bag, mistaken for a jellyfish. The artist's staring eyes plead for our attention, while the couple riding the fish, inspired by Hieronymus Bosch, express the corruption of nature.

## DAVID WANDER

*It Is Better To Go To A House  
Of Mourning Than To Go To  
A House of Feasting*, 2024

Oil on canvas; 24" x 36"



Quoting Ecclesiastes 7:2, Wander juxtaposes the austerity of the barren room's mourning benches with the festive table set with wine and an overturned glass, and reminds us of the precedence of acts of consolation over celebration.



## DENIS WOYCHUK

*Every Dog Has Its Day*, 2025

Gouache on paper; 12" x 9"

Attributed to Plutarch in the first century and Richard Taverner's *Adages* (1539), and repeated in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599-1601), Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838), Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), this adage is literally expressed in the colorful, cubistic depiction of a happy dog with its ball.



 **HEBREW  
UNION  
COLLEGE** | HELLER MUSEUM

Brookdale Center, One West Fourth Street, New York, NY 10012