

Accessible Exhibition Wall Text and Labels

California Jewish Open

The Contemporary Jewish Museum

June 6, 2024–April 20, 2025

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Exhibition Text

Introduction

For the *California Jewish Open*, The Museum's first major open call-based exhibition, Jewish-identifying artists residing in California were invited to submit artworks responding to the question: How are artists looking to the many aspects of Jewish culture, identity, and community to foster, reimagine, hold, or discover connection? The forty-seven artists selected offer a wide array of answers, and an invitation to think more deeply about what connection means today.

Connection—whether sought out of joy or out of pain, discovered through longing or hope—is one of humanity's most essential and defining shared characteristics. In Genesis, God's first critique of creation is made upon realizing that the first human has no companion: "It is not good for man to be alone." That statement still holds true, even if the circumstances under which individuals come together have changed. For many, the search for connection today is simultaneously hindered by rising loneliness due to

isolation and political divisions and bolstered by increased freedom of speech and greater societal openness to long-taboo needs and desires.

The artists included in this exhibition process connection with a mix of intimacy, humor, urgency, and humility, and through a variety of perspectives, artistic media, and genres. While the need to connect is universal, these artists explore this urge through the lens of the times and places in which they live. The result is a collection of works that communicate the myriad, contrasting ways in which artists are reckoning with themselves and the world in this moment; personally and collectively, vulnerably and protectively, joyfully and mournfully, and literally and abstractly, sometimes all at once.

The exhibition is organized into four sections reflecting the types of connection most frequently explored amongst the selected artworks. The first section, focused on connection to the earth, cycles through the potential for transcendence in nature and collective grief over the looming climate catastrophe. The second section examines the essential and inevitably fraught nature of connection with other humans, and how relationships can both heal and break. A section centered on the past and future delves into the complex, often paradoxical relationship Jewish people have historically had with time, traversing topics including past traumas, current politics, and visions for the future. The final section explores connection with the divine greater forces governing existence, as well as the Jewish belief that to connect with another being is to connect with the whole universe.

Connection is a complex and often messy process, one bound to produce both pleasure and tension; and at times, connection is also insufficient or impossible. The diverse perspectives that emerge when these artworks come into conversation with one another reflect a core piece of Jewish culture: a belief in dialogue, debate, and questioning as fertile grounds for discussion and understanding. Such dialectical engagement has long been upheld as holy work and is essential to fostering civil discourse. These artists carry forward this tradition of dialogue. They invite visitors to open themselves to the multiplicity of viewpoints, histories, and visions represented in the gallery, and hope to

inspire meaningful connection at a time when it is both deeply needed and challenging to find.

Artwork Label: Outside of the Gallery

Bonny Nahmias

The Orchestra Of Space Holders

2020

Steel, concrete, wood, tin, nylon, print

Courtesy the artist

Can one listen without simultaneously speaking? In this interactive piece, Nahmias uses the old technology of the tin can telephone to put visitors to the test and explore the concept of “holding space.” Visitors are invited to look through her book *The Orchestra Of Space Holders*, which serves as a conversation guide and features creatures with a protective “evil eye” on their chests, intended to help participants feel safe and encourage empathy in connection.

“This interactive installation is meant to inspire a playful engagement and connection between two people in the gallery space . . . It is accompanied by a book with images of figures, who are finding connection, along with questions that are meant to stimulate a conversation.” —Bonny Nahmias

This artwork is interactive. Please **read and follow the instructions** in the book.

This artwork **requires two people** to operate. If you feel comfortable, you may wish to partner with someone you don't know.

Please be considerate of other visitors waiting to participate.

Earth

California's rich and dramatic natural world calls to these artists, whose work does not merely document wilderness, but investigates what it is like to be in dialogue with the earth and its natural phenomena. They consider humanity's connection to nature in ways both celebratory and grief-stricken; some artworks revel in the transcendent splendor of the natural world, and others grapple with collective loss over the climate catastrophe. Artists explore their connection with nature as a magnetic force with almost intoxicating properties, while some delve into the interconnectivity and primal connection humans have to the land—a connection with particular relevance for a diasporic people. Others explore human fantasies of nature, always potent and rarely benign, including the dangerous notion of nature as an ever-replenishing, eternal source that can never be destroyed.

Artwork Labels: Earth

Rebecca Fox

Moon Dance

2022

Patinaed steel

Courtesy the artist

Rebecca Fox

Sun Dance

2022

Patinaed steel

Courtesy the artist

Fox's sculptures explore the dances of two elemental forces engaged in an ongoing cycle of coming together and coming apart—dependence and independence—that defines humans' relationships with both the planet and one another.

“This minimalist yet expressive artwork encapsulates the essence of connection by showcasing the power and beauty of the bond formed between two distinct elements, inviting viewers to contemplate the depth and significance of relationships in their simplest yet most profound form.” —Rebecca Fox

J. Ruth Gendler

Renewal

2020

Monotype

Courtesy the artist

Gendler’s monotype explores a spirituality that is rooted in humanity’s connection to the planet and to their ancestors. By integrating human forms into the branches of a growing tree, she offers a vision of creation that is rooted in relationships both between people and between people and the land.

“*Renewal* refers to my personal renewal as I began to emerge from the grief lands and my appreciation of [Jewish renewal communities]. I am inspired by the ways in which Jewish traditions endure and change.” —J. Ruth Gendler

Terri Loewenthal

Cinnamon Peak (Ute land)

2023

Archival pigment print

Courtesy the artist

Loewenthal’s photograph relies on single exposure—an image captured through one single opening and closing of the camera shutter—to explore the potential for discovery

and responsiveness between artist and subject, as well as between nature-lovers and nature. While the artist's process and medium rely on seeing through her own eyes, she embraces natural conditions as they are by using a unique optical in-camera technique, thereby listening to what the natural world is trying to tell her and gaining empathy and respect for her subject in the process.

"My work is created not from an idea or preconceived notion of what nature 'looks like'; it is born from deep within the experience of what it feels like to sit and be with nature. For me, representational imagery often fails to convey the full-bodied experience of a place—heightening it through color comes closer to the truth." —Terri Loewenthal

Adam Thorman

The Weight and the Light

2021

Screen print with spot gloss of a digitally altered photograph

Courtesy the artist

In *The Weight and the Light*, a simple field of grass becomes textual; the layered, annotated document might call to mind the Talmud. Through the layering of black, white, and grey tones and shapes to form a singular composition, it evokes a multitude of ideas, a debate between different people, or a debate within a single mind. Nature becomes a place of rumination where one can endlessly experience both epiphanies and questions.

"In my teenage Hebrew school classes at Berkeley Midrasha . . . one thing that stuck with me were the pages of Rabbinic arguments . . . in which years of argument were laid out in insets and marginalia around the narrow columns of the law. I was raised to believe that to thoughtfully challenge ideas is the right way to live. As an artist, this has bled into my approach to the landscapes I make work in." —Adam Thorman

Vanessa Niederstrasser

Tsurb Talb

2023

Resin, spray paint

Courtesy the artist

Vanessa Niederstrasser

C Niwts

2023

Wood, steel, resin, spray paint

Courtesy the artist

In Niederstrasser's sculptures, nature is depicted in a state of distress. The colors appear to be draining out of natural forms, and the shapes depicted in the works hover between organic and mechanical.

"My sculptures combine reality and artificiality. Non-existent natural forms represent the contrast with real nature. In this way, I want to question the connection of how nature reacts to climate change." —Vanessa Niederstrasser

Liz Lauter

Bride

2023

Terracotta clay, majolica glaze and stains, found beads, frameworked and fused glass

Courtesy the artist

Lauter's artwork depicts Eve as a bride, wearing the splendor of the Garden of Eden on her head. Eve is characterized here as unsure, preparing to enter a relationship she is

unprepared for or conflicted about. The sculpture celebrates natural beauty while also calling attention to how easy it is to objectify it.

“[Eden] is in the form of a headdress ornately embellished with dangling handmade, glass, flowerlike dangling decorations, and semi-precious beads. It’s a heavy load on her head which she did not place. She is like the child brides who are elaborately dressed for the wedding day. Eve is apprehensive and it is too late to turn back.” —Liz Lauter

Natalya Burd

Chandelier

2021

Acrylic, plexiglass

Courtesy L. Bahr

Natalya Burd

Town of silence

2021

Acrylic, plexiglass

Courtesy the artist and Jack Fischer Gallery, San Francisco

For Burd, a Kyrgyzstan-born immigrant, nature is a place of belonging with a magical ability to inspire calm and reflection. These artworks render a walk through the forest as a visceral, impressionistic experience, which offers a sense of belonging to any visitor willing to observe and listen to the natural world.

“My Jewish heritage and my experiences as an immigrant have instilled in me a deep sense of empathy and a desire to connect with people from diverse backgrounds. Through my art, I strive to create a space for shared experiences, where viewers can connect with the universal themes of nature, belonging, and humanity.” —Natalya Burd

Human

Relationship to other human beings is perhaps the most fundamental form of connection. Humans enter the earth as deeply dependent beings and often leave the earth as deeply dependent beings, and the need for relationships with others tends to remain in varying capacities during the time in-between. But as many of the artworks in this section explore, what is necessary is not necessarily easy. There are interactive artworks that offer moments of synchronicity between two participants, even if fleeting, alongside works that invite internal reflection. These artists consider what humans owe one another, how relationships can both heal and hurt, and the varied forms in which human-to-human bonding takes place. People enmesh themselves with one another through their bodies, appetites, laughter, transgression, food, grief, and more—everything they do, everything they are, is illuminated by the fact that they exist alongside others.

Artwork Labels: Human

Steven Wolkoff

Jewish Rock Stars

2023–2024

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist

In this artwork, Wolkoff explores and celebrates a desire to name and honor Jewish people who have experienced mainstream success in the United States—historically, one of the societies that has been most welcoming to Jewish people. His work is inspired by the traditional Jewish art form of micrography, which involves making art out of words that only appear upon close inspection.

Among the names included in the artwork are Bob Dylan, Lenny Kravitz, Slash, and all three Beastie Boys. Visitors are invited to see who else they can find.

“As Adam Sandler has repeatedly demonstrated in his four versions of *The Chanukah Song*, one of the ways Jews in the American diaspora connect is by listing the names of other Jews—especially those who have had success in the entertainment industry. American Jews also sometimes use these lists to try to connect with the majority American culture—to assert their belonging by naming other Jews who have established their place in the larger culture.” —Steven Wolkoff

Amadi Greenstein

Forever Young

2021

Transparency film, cotton, silk, wool, alpaca, nylon, wood

Courtesy the artist

Greenstein combines photography and textiles to commemorate her mother and grandfather. This photograph of her mother at age sixteen was taken by her grandfather. The image, and the familial connection it represents, appear both ghostly and intimate, broken and whole, behind the woven elements.

“I invite the concepts of remembrance and healing, along with my ideas of pixelated memory in this woven image . . . The notions within this work emphasize physical diversities within all Jewish communities. It symbolizes that no stereotypical feature separates or defines one Jewish individual from another.” —Amadi Greenstein

Georgina Reskala

Original Copy #59

2020

Photograph on linen, unthreaded
Courtesy PDX CONTEMPORARY ART

Georgina Reskala

Original Copy #23

2020

Photograph on canvas, paint, embroidery

Courtesy Upstart Modern

Georgina Reskala

Horas Transparentes

2022

Photograph on linen, embroidered, unthreaded

Courtesy UPSTART Modern

Reskala's artworks explore her recently-discovered Jewish ancestry. Here, landscapes represent stories that she attempts to stitch together, thereby exposing, reclaiming, and repairing the parts of her family history and her identity which long went unspoken.

"I use landscape as a metaphor for narrative. When my grandmother died, we found a box full of her secrets; secrets she kept to herself as she thought that hiding who she really was would keep her safe. She never told anybody she was Jewish and I wish I could have asked her so many questions." —Georgina Reskala

Beth Fein

Conjunctio II (The Marriage of Opposites)

2017

Ink on paper on wood panel, woodblock relief prints, letterpress prints

Courtesy the artist

In *Conjunctio II (The Marriage of Opposites)*, Fein portrays the act of communication as a game, encouraging visitors to imagine ways to find common ground amidst the political divisions and polarized, black-and-white thinking of our age.

"This is a response to political discourse which is tribal, polarized, and lacks compromise and nuance. These images can be turned 45, 90 or 180 degrees and also moved within the grid or displayed in a linear fashion horizontally or vertically, or [another] configuration—allowing for change, compromise and flexibility . . . These works reflect and locate my work in the world we live and work in, where common ground seems to disappear too easily as issues become black and white." —Beth Fein

Richard H. Alpert

Primary Traces

2021–2023

Steel wire, synthetic rubber, lead, wood, glass

Courtesy the artist; display made by the artist

In *Primary Traces*, Alpert uses colorful, abstract forms to explore creativity and wisdom-seeking in Jewish thought. His playful work speaks to the ways in which human curiosities and imagination feed into the process of creation—a childlike state of mind that does not have to disappear with youth if one does not let it.

"Primary colors, fanciful shapes and forms, and a never-ending curiosity to 'take apart the clock to see what makes it tick' have led me to attempt to trace back a path to a psychological beginning/source of some sort." —Richard H. Alpert

Deborah Stein

Les Oubliés

2018–2023

Porcelain

Courtesy the artist

Les Oubliés (meaning “the forgotten ones”) is a series of ceramic plates featuring memorial portraits of victims of antisemitism-motivated murders in France after World War II. The design of the plates references the style of mass-produced ceramics in France, pushing one to consider: who and what is seen and memorialized in a society? And who and what isn’t?

“Like the splatter of a gunshot wound, these and the memory of the forgotten French Jews on them connect all the living Jews to the ones who are dead. They connect the Jews of the California Bay Area to the Jews of France. They connect the Jews of the Diaspora to each other. This connects the Jews of past, present, and future to each other in and out of Diaspora . . . we have the tenacity to survive as artists, and in the permanent medium of ceramics—they can break us to shards, but they can’t make us disappear.” —Deborah Stein

Christine Huhn

West Garrison (Camp Reynolds) Shoreline Ruins at Dusk, Angel Island

2021

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy the artist

Christine Huhn

Native Oak Limbs near Sunrise Campsites, Angel Island

2021

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy the artist

Christine Huhn

Eucalyptus Tree at Immigration Station, Angel Island

2021

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy the artist

Huhn's photographs depict Angel Island, an early twentieth-century immigration station in the San Francisco Bay. By documenting California immigrant history, she asks visitors to consider through what process one comes to belong to a place, or to become one of its people.

"Angel Island has become a deep inspiration to me and my work, connecting back to my Jewish heritage. When I spoke with friends about the project, some had never been to the island, including many San Francisco natives. I have always been most interested in visiting lesser-known landscapes and photographing their histories. Highlighting underrepresented communities, histories, and places is what my work [strives] to accomplish." —Christine Huhn

Deborah Benioff Friedman

End-to-End and Side-to-Side

2020

Mulberry paper, thread

Courtesy the artist

Using a Korean process known as *joomchi*, Friedman has cut, saturated, kneaded, and dried mulberry paper into forms that abstractly resemble body parts; one might see the forms of skeletons, lungs, or the double-helix structure of DNA. They evoke the durability and fragility of the human body and species—a durability that exists not in spite of this fragility, but because of it.

“The biomorphic forms illustrate connections within each body to its own inner processes and outside of each individual to its neighbors and external relationships. The pieces also suggest to me the chromosomes that not only determine individual characteristics but also connect each individual to the living and dead, ancestors and descendants... connections that reach almost infinitely into the past, into the future and to each side, to cousins and cousins of cousins.” — Deborah Benioff Friedman

Ash Hay

Golem and Her Guard Dog

2023

Acrylic paint and pastel on wood panel

Courtesy the artist

In *Golem and Her Guard Dog*, a creature made from mud seeks protection of her own. The golem has carved an *alef* on the dog's forehead, representing *ahava* (אהבה)—the Hebrew word for “love.”

“Love cannot protect you, and it cannot be protected. It just stays with you. Lingers even when it's gone. Her little dog guards everything nobody wants from her. Fights for her wholeness, especially the stuff outside her 'purpose.' In her own head is a depiction of my deceased father's sapphire ring. The memories of my dad are like folktales to me, built so much more on stories than truth.” —Ash Hay

Ash Hay

Garlic Protection Amulet

2022

Gouache, watercolor, sculpture medium, polystyrene on papier-mâché

Courtesy the artist

In *Garlic Protection Amulet*, the artist places a bulb of garlic, a protective substance in Ashkenazi folklore, at the center of a body.

“As a Jewish artist who rejects their Zionist upbringing and stands in solidarity with Palestine, the integration of mystic Jewish symbols and plant magic has been crucial to my spirituality and art practice. These symbols belong to me as much as they do any other Jew and I turn to them to guide and protect me in chaotic and uncomfortable environments, keeping me connected to ancestors and to myself.” —Ash Hay

Ash Hay

Tools for Growth and Healing

2019

Tulle, yarn, poly fill, paper clay, gouache, acrylic paint

Courtesy the artist

Hay blends Jewish folklore with personal history, highlighting the ways in which myth can offer more clarity and understanding than fact-based explanations of why things are the way they are.

Through this sculpture, Hay explores the necessity and discomfort of growth. The process of becoming oneself is one of distortion, represented here by unexpected growths and appendages reaching in unpredictable directions. The figure's hair serves as a scroll or record, holding objects that represent a personal history.

“This piece addresses the connection [between] physical objects used to heal emotional pain and the connection our hair has to memory. The charms in her long braid are based on my own personal rituals around healing from painful thoughts or memories.”

—Ash Hay

Elina Frumerman

Stateless

2023

Digitally printed peel-and-stick wallpaper, die-diffusion prints, giclée prints, blind embossed print.

Courtesy the artist and Brenda Austin

Frumerman combines photographs of family and objects that her family brought with them when they immigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States with new images in an attempt to forge a connection between her past and present. They are set against wallpaper she designed to replicate the wallpaper from her childhood home that also incorporates hand gestures evoking love, fear, care, insecurity, and resignation.

“In reconstructing my family’s cultural narratives, I explore ideas about hope, belonging, and what we choose to value. I explore how these stories are passed down through generations.” —Elina Frumerman

Meirav Ong

Grieving Stones

2022–present

Porcelain

Courtesy the artist; made in community with the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco on Yom Hashoah 5784 and with the Zekelman Holocaust Center in Detroit, MI in 2022

Inspired by the Jewish tradition of placing stones on a gravesite, Ong’s *Grieving Stones* offer a personal and embodied way to hold, share, and release grief. Each stone was made by hand through collective workshops where participants were invited to perform the act of tightly gripping pieces of clay—a process that allowed them to share an impression of their hands with future participants in the artwork. This act also offered

Ong a way to symbolically hold hands with her departed mother when visiting her mother's gravesite.

"The handprint in these stones contains the simultaneity of grief: a fist, an expression of anger; a held hand, an expression of love . . . To hold this stone in your hand is to hold hands with another . . . These stones were made with communities in connection to the Holocaust. As survivors of genocide, we say 'Never Again,' and yet we are witnessing an entire people being decimated, expelled, and starved, in our name. This work is an invitation to sit with the agony and horror of this grief. May this gesture of care for one another serve as an intimate reminder of the value and impact one person's imprint can have over a lifetime." —Meirav Ong

This artwork is interactive. Please **read and follow the below instructions from the artist.**

Instructions

You are invited to pick up a stone. Find one that feels good in your hand.

1. Squeeze the stone
2. Sit with your feelings that arise from the collective indifference that has led to the mass killing of Palestinians
3. Squeeze the stone again
4. Imagine holding hands with a child in Gaza
5. Release love to this child

Place the stone on the growing pile of *Grieving Stones* or carry its weight home with you.

Holly Wong

Lost Language II

2018

Cotton, linen, netting, paper, costume jewelry, metal pins

Courtesy the artist

In *Lost Language II*, Wong explores what it might take to make a fragmented identity whole, after discovering she was Jewish later in life through genetic testing. The materials and process used in the work reference family heirlooms, homemade quilts, or possibly a *ketubah*—an often ornate and prominently-displayed Jewish marriage contract—but fills them with holes or openings in an attempt to understand an uncertain past and future.

“I wanted to connect to this previously-unknown part of myself through aspects of language. I also wanted to use language as a way to re-process trauma, and so I embroidered Hebrew letters on linen along with English and Chinese characters and integrated my love of quilt blocks and other forms of patterning. This work is about a gathering of all the things I love in my personal history, but there is also an aspect of finding things in the ashes, the destruction, and the resurrection from that.” —Holly Wong

Ronit Shalem

Are You Listening?

2021

Soft clay, cardboard, synthetic fibers

Courtesy the artist

Shalem uses exaggerated forms of a mouth, an ear, and tangled threads connecting them to illustrate both the simplicity and impossibility of connection. Do the knots in these threads mark a barrier between those speaking and listening? Or is their presence a necessary part of true, successful communication?

“This artwork delves into the dynamics of conversation. Marked by knots in diverse positions, these threads symbolize the nuanced gaps between speakers and listeners, embodying the conviction that the interpretation of spoken words diverges from their original intent. These knots act as poignant markers, representing shifts in meaning

during the exchange. In contemplating these threads, I question the feasibility of knot-free connections.” —Ronit Shalem

Anna Landa

A Seat at the Table

2021

Single-channel video, audio, wood, transducers, painted tableware

Courtesy the artist; originally funded by Art Kiosk, RCIA, and Fung Collaboratives

The artist created *A Seat at the Table* during the COVID-19 pandemic as part memory of gatherings of the past, and part call for more gatherings in the future. Landa combines the setup for a celebratory dinner party, where the inherent messiness of connection is on full display, with two sound elements. In one, visitors hear the noise of guests eating around a table. In the other, they hear and feel the artist’s heartbeat, synced to a countdown on a television in the corner.

“A shared meal is a universal way to show care for one another . . . Sounds of laughter, conversation, and music are audible in the background, the narrative meant to evoke memories of dinners with friends and family . . . while the heartbeat resonates inside the table as a stand-in for the diners, creating both a sense of intimacy and urgency.”

—Anna Landa

This artwork is interactive. Please read and follow the instructions.

Please be considerate of other visitors waiting for their turn.

Instructions

1. Sit down in one of the chairs at the table. Wheelchair users may use the empty space at the head of the table.

2. Place your elbows on the surface of the table.
3. Cover your ears with your hands, keeping your elbows in direct contact with the surface of the table.
4. Look at the screen displaying the synchronized countdown.

Forest Reid

DREYDL: ZOL ZAYN MIT MAZEL

2023

Slot machine

Courtesy the artist

DREYDL: ZOL ZAYN MIT MAZEL is a mystical slot machine, which connects twelfth-century Kabbalah—a system of Jewish mysticism—with video poker, the game of dreydl, and stories from American Jewish immigrants. Through it, Reid explores the role of play in our instinct to create meaning and forge connections.

“The interactive installation begins with a slot machine adaptation of dreydl and brings the player into the world of paylines and card counting combined with the Jewish mystical practice of alpha-numeric text interpretation. It recreates the multi-generational experience of stories being shared across the table during a game of dreydl and seeks to foster curiosity into the wide-ranging history of Jewish games, storytelling, and text interpretation.” —Forest Reid

Collaborators: Patrick Stefaniak (Game Developer), Sebastian Strunks (3D Artist), Jeff Raz (Voice Actor), Mitch Reid (Fabricator), Hannah Pozen (Illustrator). Text: *The Card Player* (1947)

This artwork is interactive. Please follow the instructions on the screen of the slot machine to participate.

Please be considerate of other visitors waiting for their turn.

Instructions

Press “Deal/Draw” to start.

Use the buttons to select the number of hands you will be playing and how much to bet per hand.

Cash out and collect your voucher when you are finished.

Bernie Lubell

Aspirations

2019

Pine, maple, inflatable loungers, 2 HP blower, gate valves, hoses, music wire, video surveillance system

Courtesy the artist; *Aspirations* was made possible by a grant from the San Francisco Arts Commission

Aspirations is an interactive installation through which visitors can explore how they connect by playing with different possibilities for giving and receiving. Is a 50/50 balance the preferred ratio, or might another be more fun?

“*Aspirations* began as a zero-sum game. But no relationship is that simple. Find someone to play the machine with you and see how much more you can get to experience.” —Bernie Lubell

This artwork is interactive. Please **read and follow the instructions** and ask for assistance if needed.

This artwork requires **two people** to operate. If you feel comfortable, you may wish to partner with someone you don't know.

Please be considerate of other visitors waiting for their turn.

Instructions

Step 1

- Please fill out the survey before interacting with *Aspirations*.
- Place your completed survey on the middle shelf of the questionnaire stand.

Step 2

- Sit on the bench and **remove your shoes**.
- **Remove keys or any other objects from your pockets**. Place them in the small wood trays on the bench.

Step 3

- A timer and a switch are located between the two air bag platforms. Check that the timer is set to zero and the switch is off (in the down position).
- On the outside of each platform, you will find handles on the upright wood beams. Hold onto one of the handles and step onto the wooden platform first, and then into the center of your inflatable lounger.
- Sit down facing the video monitor and align your hips with the handle located on the upright wood beam.

Step 4

- Set the timer for up to five minutes.
- Flip the switch to the on (up) position. The blower will start.
- Lie back onto the air bag.
- Use the pull cord above you to get more air. The more air you get, the less your partner will receive.

Step 5

- When the timer goes off, please wait to get up until the air bag has deflated.
- Turn off the switch next to the timer.

Amy Trachtenberg

When I see you, the sky is blue. When I don't see you, the sky is blue

2021

Disassembled bras, steel and brass wire, dye, paint, glass

Courtesy Catharine Clark Gallery

Trachtenberg takes a collection of donated and disassembled bras and, by knotting and tying, weaves them into a testimony to the bodies and breasts who once wore them.

The artwork is a meditation on fragility and transfiguration.

"I have dissected every bra to reveal the skeletal bone-like qualities originally designed to conform to the body. Transformed into calligraphic gestures, they release the corporeal history of each of the women who've offered their past to this project. The second layer of stained and tumbled glass are markers hanging in a grid in contrast to the unruly first layer of bras. Their glow [evokes] astral constellations and MRI findings, in part, a response to my adventure into Cancerland." —Amy Trachtenberg

Rebecca Ora (rora)

Habibibuah

2013

Video, sound

Infinite loop

Courtesy the artist

This video features a split-second from Eytan Fox's 2006 film *Habuah* ("The Bubble") in which two lovers—one Israeli and one Palestinian—nearly kiss; in this loop, they are doomed to never complete their embrace. Ora critiques the film's prosaic portrayal of queer love, as well as the seemingly endless political conflict that defines the characters' relationship.

“They spiral indefinitely, locked in an intimate but mutually isolated state on the verge of destruction. Will they kiss? Engage in combat? Will they ever touch? Will it end?”

—Rebecca Ora (rora)

Past/Future

The Jewish relationship to time has always been ambiguous. On one hand, Jewish people have traditionally been meticulous keepers of time—Theologian and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that Shabbat is “a cathedral in time”—and yet, in Judaism’s ancient texts, past and future are also fluid concepts, and sacred texts feature conversations that take place over millennia. In the artworks included in this section, artists contemplate time from a variety of angles, including through histories of Jewish immigration, centuries of antisemitism, protest and polemics, and contemporary expressions of Jewish pride. They invite one to encounter a past that is never truly past, a future that is never truly future, and the complexity of living in this temporal gray area. Some artists call to reject old narratives, politically and otherwise; while others seek to incorporate memories, collective and individual, dark and light, into modern stories. Seven artists whose works were selected for this section decided to withdraw their work after The Museum was unable to meet a list of their demands. The spaces where their artworks would have been displayed have intentionally been left empty, both to honor these artists’ missing perspectives and to authentically reflect the struggle for dialogue that is illustrated by their decision to withdraw. Together, the artworks—both present and absent—challenge visitors to determine their own relationship to history and time, and to move through the doors of past, present, and future again and again.

Artwork Labels: Past/Future

Ken Kalman

Portal

2022

Aluminum, cast aluminum, rivets, screws

Courtesy the artist

In *Portal*, Kalman invites visitors to imagine stepping through a revolving doorway to their pasts and/or futures, again and again, and to consider what they carry with them each time, what they can pick up, and what they can leave behind.

“*Portal* is an actual portal, a threshold, and a way to move through feelings of sadness, isolation, connection to ancestors, life and death, and more. The sculpture includes the Sabbath candlesticks and a Magen David (referring to the identification of Jews throughout history).” —Ken Kalman

The following label is present in six empty spaces on the gallery walls:

Some artworks selected for the *California Jewish Open* included language or images advocating for human rights for Palestinians and condemning Israel’s ongoing military campaign in Gaza. After being notified of their inclusion in the exhibition, a group of artists whose artworks offered, among other ideas, a direct position of support for Palestinians, sent a list of demands to The CJM that they required be met in order for their work to be included in the exhibition. The CJM was unable to meet the demands, and in response, the artists withdrew their work.

To honor the perspectives that would have been shared through these artworks, and to authentically reflect the struggle for dialogue that is illustrated by the artists’ decisions to withdraw, the spaces where each of these works were planned to be displayed have been intentionally left empty. At a time when many need connection more than ever, the blank walls speak to a moment when connection may also feel insufficient or impossible.

Kim Kyne Cohen

Jug

2023

Underglaze and glaze on ceramic

Courtesy the artist

Cohen's sculpture carries on in the longstanding Jewish tradition of finding humor in pain. The cartoonish Kedem grape juice bottle labeled with a Yiddish expression for dismay and grief uses comedic relief to process pain, while asserting that pain is best processed around a table, sharing a drink with others.

"I am able to explore unwelcome feelings and make peace with trauma through naive imagery. I sculpt playful forms to mine joy from the uncomfortable. The phrase 'oy vey' is the Yiddish expression for dismay. My personal way of coping is with humor, and I wanted to 'bottle up' the grief I was feeling as a result of the October 7 massacre."

—Kim Kyne Cohen

Stela Mandel

Bring them Home

2023

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist

Stela Mandel

Save Israeli Democracy

2023

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist; the artist thanks Offir Gutelzon, UnXeptable, for reference photos

In *Bring Them Home*, Mandel depicts a gathering of Californians calling for the return of the hostages kidnapped by Hamas on October 7. In *Save Israeli Democracy*, she depicts Bay Area Jews protesting judicial reforms in Israel the month prior to October 7. Both paintings reflect the deep connection that many Jews across the world feel to Israel, and their feeling that Israel's fate is their fate, too.

“As a Jew, working toward social justice is an obligation and a value that connects us to each other . . . As a daughter of Holocaust survivors, Israel has been central to my life as a Jew; after the war, half of my family settled in Israel. It is encouraging to now have an opportunity to connect with my Israeli family through support of our mutual shared values.” —Stela Mandel

Alex Stern

Star (Colored David)

2023

Acrylic and oil on linen

Courtesy the artist

In *Star (Colored David)*, Stern constructs the Star of David—a central symbol of Judaism—through lines, color, texture, layers, and shapes, offering an expression of complex, hesitant pride. The artwork is a representation of reverence for Jewish culture and an expression of grief about the world's current political moment.

“My paintings are shields and badges of honor. I am interested in the intersection where this reverence collides with shame and confusion as it relates to Israel and military atrocities in the Middle East, but also personal histories. These are the most vital contradictions in the work—layered contradictions simultaneously carrying hope, guilt, pride, repulsion, serenity, and discomfort.” —Alex Stern

Robin L. Bernstein

Hope Dies Last

2023

String, wax, gold leaf, wood

Courtesy the artist

Where does hope come from? How is it sustained? How is it destroyed? And why do humans feel it? Through bright colors and delicate thread, Bernstein examines what she calls “hopeium,” or the human impulse for hope no matter the evidence against it. A baby, innocent and vulnerable, looks directly out from the center of the work in a reminder to viewers not to look away from reality, no matter how dire it may become.

“An exiled and reviled people will either assimilate and disappear—or will figure out a way to channel their suffering, history, and sadness into survival—becoming resilient and dedicated. The Jewish people, a varied and rich conglomeration of every kind of person, are unified in history and share a common story.” —Robin L. Bernstein

Irene Nelson

Being Human

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper

Courtesy the artist

In a time when words may fail to express one’s grief and horror, Nelson has turned to color, lines, and shapes to express the enormity of this moment in history. The intensity on the canvas mirrors the intense feelings she is having about her Jewish identity during a fraught and complicated political moment.

“ . . . the work expresses the raw emotion and grief I experience over the killing of thousands of innocent Israelis and Palestinians . . . Without explicitness, the abstract compositions manifest a sorrow over the horrors of extreme physical violence, psychological wounds, and profound loss of those suffering from this war. At the same time, it is my intention that the work communicates a sense of hope and healing for our world.” —Irene Nelson

Rebekah Goldstein

Bridge to Burn

2022

Oil on shaped canvas

Courtesy the artist

For Goldstein, abstraction accommodates both the mystery of the past and the potential to create a new future. Her process involves meticulous layering, reworking, and redefining of the composition, an act through which she makes sense of her family history while embracing the present moment.

"In painting you must create your own language, your own story, your own history . . . When painting, I am always building on what has come before. While the painting has deep ties to its own history, it must exist fully as itself in the present." —Rebekah Goldstein

Marianna Baker

Bloodstained Echoes

2023

Fiber art

Courtesy the artist

Created as a means to process the grief felt after the October 7 attack on Israel, Baker's sculpture pulls visitors into the experience of pain and how it burns, tangles, and retreats, only to return in another color or form.

"My sculptures serve as a bridge between the rich traditions of art and the contemporary art scene, all while celebrating feminine artistic traditions often marginalized in history . . . *Bloodstained Echoes* is an emotionally-charged fiber sculpture that explored the profound impact of the October 7 massacre on collective consciousness." —Marianna Baker

Tiffany Shlain

My Center will Hold

2023

Reclaimed pine

Courtesy the artist

This piece uses the simultaneously circular and linear markings of time offered by trees to explore different layers of the artist's identity. The title references William Butler Yeats's phrase "the center cannot hold," but takes the opposite approach; Shlain's sense of self is rooted firmly in a multi-layered, concentric experience.

"Several different parts of my identity have felt magnified by the horrors of October 7 and its ongoing aftermath . . . My tree ring sculptures reimagine unexplored histories that trees could bear witness to, like feminist history or the evolution of human thought. In this sculpture I examine my identity and how my personal history connects to the larger universal one" —Tiffany Shlain

Anne Wolf

ENOUGH Protest Banner

2022–present

Cotton fabric, yarn

Courtesy the artist

“Enough” can be an expression of frustration, despair, or the sage wisdom of someone who has learned to be satisfied with what they have. When is enough enough, whether of suffering or of plenty? Wolf’s work doesn’t answer that question, but it does shed light on one way to determine what is enough: together. To create this evolving piece, the artist invited people to work together on the banner as a demonstration of solidarity and a collective declaration of “enough”.

“Sewing circles embody connection. They are communal in nature, centered on the task . . . open to varying levels of social interaction, conversation, or silence. This protest banner is an ongoing project created by members of the California College of the Arts (CCA) community, initiated in February 2022 at the CCA Union Strike . . . As the banner becomes richer with color, texture, and designs, so too does the conversation about what “enough” means to us individually and as a community.” —Anne Wolf

Kim Schoenstadt

No Laughing Series: Entrez Lentement (Enter Slowly)

2022

Acrylic and embroidery on Belgian linen

Courtesy Marissa Gluck and Bob Dornberger

Schoenstadt’s diptych combines neatly-embroidered letters and pigment stains to issue an invitation—or a warning. “Enter slowly,” the artwork instructs, the words separated by an opening that invites one to come on in.

“[This work] explores the idea of connection through language and material. To me, this is the core of my relationship with Judaism. The impulse to parse, debate, and interpret meaning through language was instilled in me at a young age.” —Kim Schoenstadt

Mirka Knaster

Where Can I Go? Where Might I Belong?

2023

Lining of vintage kimono, cotton, and muslin, dyed with rust and hand-embroidered
Courtesy the artist

Knaster creates abstract interpretations of maps that are temporal rather than geographical, leading viewers through seemingly ancient terrains contained by individual and collective memories of trauma and wandering. Using rust as a dye, she allows shapes and lines to emerge that form new places she may one day seek out.

“Hand-dyeing with rust resulted in ‘maps’ that left me, ever a wanderer whose life began in diaspora, wondering where I could go, where I might belong, should circumstances change and necessitate yet another move. Has this not been the enduring fact of Jewish history that connects all of us: we finally feel safe and even prosper somewhere, only to have to leave once again?” —Mirka Knaster

Leon Borensztein

Europe 1939-1945. Kaddish: 1. For Six million.

2015–2017

Digital print

Courtesy the artist

Leon Borensztein

Crimea 1941. Kaddish for Maternal Grandparents, to Hold Them in Memory.

2015–2017

Digital print

Courtesy the artist

In Borensztein's photographs, mourning the lives lost to the Holocaust is presented as a deeply personal and fragmented experience. The broken windows, suitcase, transparent figure, and empty album imply ruptures, absences, and displacement—a people, time and place that can never be recovered.

“My artistic approach is based on *tikkun olam*. Throughout my career, I felt the need to give voice to the unheard and unseen . . . Rather than photographing a single image and skimming the surface, my approach has always been thematic, which enables me to focus seriously and in-depth on a project that I am currently working on. I believe in a straightforward, honest approach that nevertheless reveals what is beneath the surface.” —Leon Borensztein

Divine

Few agree on what to call it—the majestic, the transcendent, the universe, God, Goddess—but humanity has always desired to find connection to something greater. These artworks illustrate that one does not necessarily need to identify what exactly this force may be in order to yearn for it. Instead, it is the quest for connection with the force of life or divinity that animates this work. Ancient preoccupations, including with letters and light, are explored with playful reverence. Old rituals are given new life in works that illustrate the limitations of Jewish practice as well as the possibility for renewal. Connection with the divine for these artists is not necessarily about achieving spiritual wholeness but making space for brokenness and the process of finding one's way through the cracks.

Artwork Labels: Divine

Marty Katzoff

Ritual objects for communal use: Shabbat candlesticks

2022

Copper etching plates, found wood

Courtesy the artist

Marty Katzoff

Ritual objects for communal use: Havdalah set

2022

Copper etching plates

Courtesy the artist

Marty Katzoff

Ritual objects for communal use: Hanukkah

2022

Recycled copper etching plates, driftwood, stones

Courtesy the artist

Katzoff takes recycled copper etching plates and bends them into familiar symbols of Jewish ritual: Shabbat candlesticks, a Havdalah set, and a *hanukkah*. Their hand-hewn forms evoke the durability and malleability of Jewish practice.

“As a Jewish artist and printmaker, copper is a medium connected to my understanding of Judaism as a religion that celebrates accessible teachings within diverse communities.” —Marty Katzoff

Laurie Shapiro

Introspection

2023

Handpainted and screen-printed textiles, prefabricated geodesic dome, handmade lamp, handmade tufted rug

Courtesy the artist

This one-of-a-kind immersive dome acts as a portable sanctuary and axis mundi—a theoretical meridian originating in Greco-Roman astronomy that links the earth to the heavens and underworld and serves as the axis around which the rest of the universe revolves. Composed of dreamy, bohemian textiles, the artwork is designed to foster communion with others. Visitors are invited to enter the space alone or with a peer.

“The environments I create transport viewers into psychedelic womb-like environments: handcrafted, vibrant, and filled with patterns and colors that invite interaction and meditation . . . Heavily informed by my internal and spiritual experiences, my work urges viewers—in a time of climate devastations—to listen not through noise but through feeling and intuition.” —Laurie Shapiro

You are invited to sit or lie down inside this tent. Please remove your shoes before entering the tent and be considerate of other visitors waiting to enter. Capacity is limited to two people at a time.

Laura Puras

Muted Tefillah: A Body Piece

2018

Video

9:04 min. (looping)

Courtesy the artist

How do humans pray? How are rituals around prayer transmitted over time? Puras explores what it means to engage in *tefillah* (Hebrew for “prayer”) or, more broadly, contemplation, accounting, or a joining together of mind and spirit. Through the artwork, she asks what it means to do these things through embodiment rather than through words, and questions what individuals are sharing with whom when they pray.

“In times of conflict and uncertainty, preserving culture and history takes on heightened significance. All history is part of our present, and *Muted Tefillah* represents a "here and now" prayer that refuses to be relegated to the past. It reminds us that the spirits of those who prayed in such a way are still with us.” —Laura Puras

This artwork is interactive. Please **read and follow the instructions**.

Instructions:

1. Stand facing the screen.
2. As you watch the video, imitate the performer’s gestures.

The adjacent iPad contains artist notes and an illustration where you can learn more about the artwork.

Emily Bogin

Self-Portrait As Beloved

2023

35mm photographs

Courtesy the artist

Bogin explores the potential for holiness in the collision of the sacred and profane. Her photographs pair the nude female body wrapped in black ribbon, symbolically suggesting that she has engaged in the sacred ritual of laying *tefillin*. *Tefillin* refers to the Jewish practice, traditionally limited to men, of taking two small boxes containing Torah passages connected to leather straps and tying them to one's arms and forehead on

days other than the Sabbath and holidays. In these photographs, Bogin asks visitors to consider what it means to revere, what it means to transgress, and the ways in which those two states feed one another.

“By using self-portraiture that interrogates subjectivity, femininity, tradition, and transgression, I connect with historical moments of Jewish transgressive acts while incorporating both the antinomian [rejection of laws] and the nomos [laws governing human conduct] into my own expression.” —Emily Bogin

Vanessa Thill

Cleave-To (His Cheeks Were Beds of Spices)

2019–present

Powder pigment, soap, tobacco, cayenne, tea, concrete pigment, copper powder, house paint, chalk, spray paint, coffee, fake blood, Listerine, graphite, ginger, fabric dye, glue, mixed media and resin on paper, wire chain, silver thread, beads, bag for confiscated belongings (from Fairfield Police Department), LED lights

Courtesy the artist

This installation envisions a primordial and embodied relationship with the divine spirit, in which illumination and revelation can come from unexpected sources. The mixture of textures, colors, and materials offers moments of shimmering renewal alongside moments of darkness and destruction.

“*Cleave-To* refers to the Hasidic concept of *devekut*, a connection with divinity that is both a union and a separation. These sculptures wink and gleam like polished gemstones evoking ancient cosmos, while also having a solemn flesh-like presence. As a Jewish artist in solidarity with Palestine, I intend to face the ways that our best intentions to sanctify can become horrifically debased.”

—Vanessa Thill

Cheselyn Amato

Beacons of Interconnectivity and Connection

2023

Radiant film, silhouettes, wire, LED light

Courtesy the artist

These sculptural light artworks serve as contemporary expressions of the Ner Tamid: the eternal light that sits or hangs near the ark containing the Torah at synagogues. Amato's lights feel primordial and unbounded; their glowing forms remind visitors of the past to which humans are tethered as well as the possibilities that lie ahead.

"I work across the disciplines—2D, 3D, and 4D—[to enact] radiant spectacles as circumstances for the experience of sublimity, awe, wonder, and delight in the midst of and as antidote to uncertainty, adversity, injustice, and suffering in the world . . . The work is made as an incubator and instigator for the experience of presence and all the wondrous possibility that is revealed when we pay close attention and receive the opportunity for connection." —Cheselyn Amato

Alexis Arnold

Bar Graphics

2018

Concrete, spray paint, acrylic, epoxy clay

Courtesy the artist

Bar Graphics are reminiscent of both objects that might come from an ancient ruin, infused with a long history, and something futuristic and otherworldly. The bright symbols on these totems call to mind linguistic symbols that, while not comprehensible, feel recognizable and represent a human longing to connect and communicate.

“The colorful patterns on vertical concrete bars are inspired by the aesthetics of data visualization and suggest various forms of communication across the ages—hieroglyphics, [the] Ten Commandments and other stone tablets, scientific charts and graphs, book spines, social media scrolls, mezuzahs, and more.” —Alexis Arnold

Lisa Kokin

Red Line

2023

Machine embroidery on industrial felt

Courtesy the artist

According to some Jewish mystics, the world was summoned into existence through language, beginning with letters. *Red Line* continues in this tradition, featuring letter-like symbols that appear to bounce around the fabric, resembling cellular or atomic structures or human heads. An embroidered red line separates and groups together these letter-beings, evoking both Jewish mystics' use of red thread to ward off the evil eye and the notion of a red line as something one is not supposed to cross.

“Sewing is about connection. It is both a means of attachment and a way to embellish . . . I am stitching and connecting disparate materials and images to form wholes which are inspired by specific events and ideas, but which are open-ended enough to allow for multiple interpretations and experiences.” —Lisa Kokin

Share With Us

We want to hear from you! We invite you to share your feedback/questions about the exhibition or to select one of the prompts below to respond to. Please write your

response with the paper and pencils provided and drop it in the box, or scan the QR code to submit your response digitally.

1. Did you connect with a particular artwork in the exhibition, and if so, why?
2. What is helping you find connection today or what is making connection difficult?
3. Has the Israel-Hamas war impacted your ability to connect with family, friends, or peers? Share your experiences with us.
4. Are there aspects of Jewish ritual, culture, or community that are helping you find connection with others right now?
5. Did you learn anything new about connection from this exhibition?

Exhibition Credits

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Director of Exhibitions: Rita Souther

Former Chief Preparator: Kyle Herbert

Registrar: Jessica Phillips

Exhibitions Fabrications Supervisor: Crow Cianciola

Exhibitions Technical Supervisor: Ben Leon

Lead Preparators: Henna Vainio and Maggi Wong

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Support for the *California Jewish Open* is generously provided by Judith and Robert Aptekar. The Contemporary Jewish Museum is supported in part by a grant from Grants for the Arts.

Media sponsorship is provided by BART, Marin Magazine, San Francisco Magazine, and Silicon Valley Magazine.