

Audio Descriptions: *How do artists work with materials?*

The Jewish Museum

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1. Please Touch!

Use your hands to discover objects of different shapes, sizes, forms, and textures that mirror artworks in the Jewish Museum collection. A diverse group of artists across time produced the objects on display, which range from ceremonial to everyday, and are made of clay, synthetic materials, stone, and metal. Please touch gently.

On the left, a large question reads: *How do artists work with materials?*

Let's now describe the space and resources you can find here. This area is comprised of a 28-foot-long light blue wall, with sections set back at either end. The objects are placed on top of a matching shelf that runs along the angles of the wall. Text about individual objects is at the front, slanted edge of the shelf. The display is divided into three sections by two thick columns that jut out from the blue wall, each 2 ½ feet wide. You can find more resources to explore the objects on the front of the columns; on the right one is a box with large print labels and Braille labels, and on the left, a booklet of select raised line drawings.

This audio guide will include the text on the walls and individual object labels combined with additional audio descriptions of each piece. There are 22 audio guide stops total, one for each object and section text. They are numbered to move from right to left, so stop #2 gives an overview of clay objects, the first section text on the wall, and #3 describes the first touchable object on the shelf.

Enjoy the experience!

2. Clay

A plentiful natural resource found all over the world, clay has long been used to make beautiful and useful objects. Some of the most ancient works in the Jewish Museum collection are made of clay, a malleable material that can be shaped by hand or on a potter's wheel. When dried or fired in a kiln, the material becomes hard ceramic. Some ceramic objects feature intricate designs. Artists use different tools to imprint, carve into, or build up decorations, textures, and finishes before the clay dries. Glazes bring color to and seal and strengthen surfaces, making them waterproof and smooth.

3. Female Figurine

Clay

Modern interpretation of an Israelite figurine, ancient Israel, Iron Age, 800 – c. 550 BCE

5 ½ inches high, 2 ¼ inches wide, 2 ½ inches deep

Replica by Leah Wolff

This female figurine has short-tufted hair, deep-set eyes, a small nose, and an etched, slightly smiling mouth that you can feel if you brush your fingers over her face.

Moving downward, her arms curve tightly, just beneath her breasts, pressed close to her body. The arms are roughly formed, shaped by simple pinching and smoothing of the clay. Her hands are triangular shapes with small, indented lines defining fingers. The lower half of the figurine flares out like a bell with a flat, circular bottom, allowing her to stand upright. There are no signs of feet or separate legs beneath the smooth, flowing shape, and she is positioned on a 2-inch-high square base.

This type of figurine has been found throughout ancient Israel in grave sites and Iron Age homes (1200–586 BCE). Female pillar figurines may have had ritual significance and may represent a goddess belonging to a popular religion from before the Israelites came to believe in one God.

4. Three animal figurines

Horse vessel

Clay

Replica of a vessel, ancient Israel, Iron Age, 1000–700 BCE

4 ½ inches high, 3 inches wide, 6 inches deep

Bird figurine

Clay

Replica of an Israelite figurine, Ancient Israel, Iron Age, 800–700 BCE

2 ⅝ inches high, 4 inches wide, 3 inches deep

Bull figurine

Clay

Replica of a figurine, Syria, Middle Bronze Age, 2000–1700 BCE

3 ⅞ inches high, 2 1/16 inches wide, 3 inches deep

Replicas by Leah Wolff

These are copies of ancient sculptures from the Jewish Museum's collection. Handmade animal figurines like these were common throughout the ancient Eastern Mediterranean, found in tombs, homes, and sanctuaries. Although their original meaning and use is no longer known, they likely had ritual and spiritual significance.

The three objects are arranged on small white risers at varying heights. In the middle, and the highest is the bird, the horse on the left, and the bull on the right.

Let's start with the bull figurine, made of a light beige clay. Run your hand from the back of the figure to the front and feel its slim body and deeply arched neck. It has four tapered legs, and a small bump for a tail. Its facial features are simple yet expressive, marked by large triangular ears. The bull's upturned snout is a small cylinder with two dots for nostrils and a horizontal line for the mouth. The eyes, positioned above, are wide raised circles with dots in the center, giving the bull an incredibly attentive expression.

The bird figurine has outstretched wings and a pert tail, as if caught mid-flight. The head is narrow with subtle indents that suggest eyes and a triangular shape for a beak. It has a compact, round base that allows it to stand upright. Its surface is slightly rough. Run your hands outward from the center to feel how the artisan pinched and smoothed the clay in

four directions to form the wings, tail, and head. This figure and the next are the dusty orange color of natural clay, without glaze or adornment.

The horse vessel has a rotund body, a short, sturdy neck, and elongated head. The snout protrudes forward, forming a cylindrical muzzle with a hole in the center. The eyes are not distinctly carved but are suggested by the gently sloping form of the face, giving it a soft, understated expression. Its legs are small, slightly pointed, and blend seamlessly into the body, making the vessel appear stable yet compact. Feel the long lines texturing the surface, showing how the artisan joined and worked the clay.

Notice how expressively the maker molded the body of each animal, from the energetic outstretched wings of the bird to the alert, arched neck and wide eyes of the bull.

The original versions of these objects are on display nearby in the gallery with archaeological artifacts, located to the right at the end of the hallway.

5. Three Oil Lamps

Lamp with abstract designs

Clay

Replica of a lamp, possibly Jerusalem, Islamic period, 600–1100 CE

1 ¾ inches high, 2 ¾ inches wide, 2 ⅝ inches deep

Lamp with branch or seven-branch menorah

Clay

Replica of a lamp, ancient Israel, Byzantine period, 350–550 CE

1 ⅝ inches high, 2 ⅝ inches wide, 3 ¼ inches deep

Lamp

Clay

Replica of a Canaanite or Israelite lamp, ancient Israel, 1200–1000 BCE

1 ½ inches high, 4 ½ inches wide, 4 ¾ inches deep

These vessels are reproductions of lamps that were used to burn oil, providing light for homes in ancient times. Handmade oval-shaped lamps are small enough to fit into the palm of your hand. They are arranged on bases at varying heights, with the earliest lamp on the right. This lamp has an open, flat bowl for oil, with one end pinched together to create a spout for a wick. Its surface is unadorned, allowing you to feel the natural texture of the warm, earthy, light orange colored clay.

Next, is another terracotta oil lamp, smooth and decorated with an abstracted branch or stylized menorah. The lamp has an elongated egg-like shape with a central circular opening where oil would have been poured, and a smaller opening at the thinner end for a wick. Run your fingers over the top surface and feel the symmetrical designs raised on the clay, six curved lines coming off a central branch on the narrower end and smaller curved lines radiating from the larger opening on top.

The third lamp, to the left, has an organic, slightly rough texture. The top is decorated with four half-circles along each edge. There are two or three small lines in each circle. A raised detail runs along the edge of the lamp and connects to the open circle in the middle. Unlike the other two it is adorned with a weathered dark paint, once perhaps smooth and now aged with time. The central opening is prominent, with a second hole at the narrower pointed end.

The original versions of these objects are on display nearby in the gallery with archaeological artifacts, located to the right at the end of the hallway.

6. **Asher Weintraub**
Born in 2003, United States
Connie Smith (fabricator)
Born in 1964, United States
Menurkey Hanukkah lamp, designed 2013
Slip-cast and glazed ceramic
6 ½" high, 8 ½" wide, 5 ½" deep

With a small, rounded body and a broad, fanned-out tail, this turkey stands as both a playful sculpture and a functional menorah. Its surface is smooth, glossy, and ivory-white, coated in a shiny glaze that catches the light. It is positioned on a 4-inch-high square white base.

Let's start at the back of the piece, with nine full tail feathers that fan out symmetrically, forming a semicircle. Run your fingers along the tips of the turkey's tail feathers and notice divots where candles could fit. The feathers are detailed, with delicate raised swirls along the back, adding texture and ornamentation to the smooth ceramic. The turkey's head is small and rounded, and it looks slightly upward. Find the small, pointed beak; above it are cartoonishly circular eyes, and below a curved dangling wattle. Its body is rotund, subtly decorated with more lines which add texture to this whimsical turkey.

The ceramic base is round and sturdy. At the front half of the base are raised capital letters spelling "Happy Hanukkah", and below it the numbers 2013 and 5774.

This *Menurkey*—a Hanukkah lamp (or menorah) shaped like a turkey—celebrates November 28, 2013, the first time Hanukkah and Thanksgiving had fallen on the same day since 1888. Asher Weintraub, who was nine years old at the time, used 3-D modeling and printing technology to design the lamp.

The *Menurkey* is also on display in the vitrine filled with Hanukkah lamps nearby. It is in the case on the far right.

7. Synthetic Materials

Synthetics are human-made materials created through industrial processes. Often more flexible and affordable than other materials, synthetic media allow artists to create with a wider variety of colors and textures than those commonly found in nature. Manufactured materials—such as plastic, resin, and silicone—can be cast and sculpted into a range of forms. Many painters prefer to use synthetic polymer paint, known as acrylic, because it dries more quickly and resists fading from light exposure more effectively than natural pigments.

- 8. Ilana Savdie**
Born in 1986, Miami
Material Sample
Pigmented Beeswax on canvas
24 inches wide by 14 inches high
Courtesy of the artist

Ilana Savdie is known for an interest in exploring materials, color, and the body in her work. This canvas is completely covered in small, bright pink layered drips of pigmented beeswax. Feel the dimpled, oily surface of this sample that the artist made in preparation for a large-scale painting. The abstract canvas feels skin-like, distorting the boundaries between the human body and the objects around it. The wax, once liquid but now hardened, flows downward in many small drips, like rain on a window. There is something also visceral about this work's almost neon color, like the pink of your tongue or of already chewed bubble gum.

In the Contemporary Connections gallery on the third floor, you can explore Ilana Savdie's painting *Cow*, which uses a similar application of beeswax.

9. Marit Meisler

Born in 1974, Tel Aviv

ceMMent Mezuzah case, designed 2006

5 1/4 inches high, 1 1/2 inches wide, 7/8 of an inch deep

Cast concrete multiple

This modern and sculptural mezuzah case is made entirely of deep grey concrete, smoothed to a matte finish. It is shaped similarly to a slim triangular wedge; with the two longer sides angling in towards one another, creating a raised midline. The Hebrew letter *shin* is etched across this midline, at the upper center of the piece. The letter appears like a geometric W, with its bottom as one long straight line with three evenly spaced lines emerging upwards. This mezuzah is attached to the front of a 9-inch-tall light blue plinth, and positioned tilted to the right, like it would traditionally be hung in a doorway.

- 10. Talia Levitt**
Born in 1989, Brooklyn
Material Sample
Printed vinyl and acrylic embellishments
9 inches wide by 12 inches high
Courtesy of the artist

A raised line drawing of this image is located in the booklet on the front of the column just to the left of this piece.

Feel the knobby surfaces of the tiny buttons, flowers, stars, and sequins—small, everyday objects Talia Levitt cast by pouring acrylic paint into molds. She creates these small items to adorn and embellish her layered artworks; this piece is a preparatory sample for the mural in the Salon on this floor. Textiles and quilts are a frequent theme in her work, inspired by four generations of her family working in New York’s garment industry.

This material sample is reminiscent of a woven tapestry. The vinyl’s texture creates a tiny grid across the whole piece, making it further resemble embroidery.

Let’s start with exploring the background. The lower three-quarters of the piece is covered in what resembles an orange-red rug with an abstracted floral border at its top. Across it are a combination of repeated geometric patterns and more sporadic symbols in dark red and black: asterisk-like stars, a sunburst, arrows, and more. The top quarter of this piece has green and earthen-colored designs. On the left, a bird and vines, and on the right, what appears as a sideways tree trunk. A bright orange molded acrylic chain separates this top from bottom. Run your hands across this raised element; do you feel the breaks in the chains? In the break on the left side there are layered blue cylinders, like a pot, and in the middle two cartoonish legs that run from the top of the canvas to the middle. These legs are dressed in slightly flared pants in patterned soft teal, orange, and olive green. Bright blue shoes face away from the viewer, indicating that the full figure would have their back to us. The patterns on the pants appear as a long column of zig-zag lines, like several sideways letter “M’s” stacked on top of one another. The leg on the left also has two olive green vertical stripes on either side of a thick orange line with black floral motifs. This pattern can also be seen on the lower corner of the right pant leg.

Dotting the reddish background are playful clusters of small acrylic embellishments, varying greatly in color, shape, and design. Some are roses and other flowers, leaves, or small domes. Most of these embellishments are gold while others are primary red, sky blue, forest

green or lavender. Gold sequins with bright blue dots in the center, also cast in acrylic, run in two rows along the middle and bottom.

11. Statue of Liberty figurines

Plastic

Each 8 ½ inches high by 2 inches wide by 2 inches deep

The artist Mae Rockland Tupa (born in 1937, New York) incorporated plastic Statue of Liberty souvenirs in her work *Miss Liberty*, which was made in 1974, a Hanukkah lamp that is on view in the glass case in this gallery. In the spirit of assemblage art—an approach to composing sculptural works from everyday, discarded, or mass-produced materials—Tupa created *Miss Liberty* by sourcing these found commercial objects, transforming and recontextualizing the symbol of the American immigrant experience as a Jewish ritual object.

In *Miss Liberty*, Tupa presents these figurines alternating facing forwards and backwards, like the two shown here. On the left, the familiar statue faces forward. She stands on a 2 ½ inch square tan base, showing intricate tiered brickwork and four small columns on each side. Atop, her green figure stands tall, leaning ever so slightly forward. Her right arm is raised straight up, holding a round torch with a golden flame. Her left arm is bent close to her chest, holding a book with the words “July 4, 1776” in Roman numerals on the cover. She is dressed in layers of flowing robes that join over her left shoulder and drape down to her bare feet, and in her iconic crown with seven radiating pointed spikes.

On the right, she faces backwards. Run your fingers from the top of her crown to her hair tied in a bun, down her robes which form to the curve in her back, to her right foot, heel slightly raised like she is about to step forward.

Mae Rockland Tupa’s *Miss Liberty* is on display in the vitrine filled with Hanukkah lamps nearby. It is in the case on the far right.

12. Stone

Cool and solid to the touch, stone requires considerable skill and artistry to carve, grind, shape, and polish. This durable, natural material, found or quarried from the earth, has made up the walls of cities, homes, and religious spaces around the world since ancient times. Artists also use stone to create sculpture and practical or decorative objects, which can be chiseled down from whole blocks or assembled from smaller pieces of the material. Different stones are prized for their color, tone, hardness, and rarity, as well as their workability.

13. Mosaic
Cut stone and mortar
Replica of part of a floor mosaic, Bet Alpha synagogue,
Northern Israel, Byzantine period, c. 527-78 CE
22 ¾ inches high, 18 inches wide

A raised line drawing of this mosaic is located in the booklet on the front of the column just to the right of this piece.

A colorful floor mosaic from the Bet Alpha synagogue depicts a figure personifying winter. In the original composition, images representing the four seasons frame the twelve signs of the zodiac arranged in a circle. Floor mosaics are both utilitarian and aesthetically pleasing, meant to be walked on and admired from many different angles. Feel the uneven surface and changing shape and direction of the stones in this replica.

This fragment has straight sides and a top that comes to a point, since it was taken from the corner of the floor mosaic. The piece depicts a woman's head in a flat linear design. She has a tan oval face outlined in black, and wears a semi-circular headdress of golden yellow with black and emerald green diamond designs radiating upwards. From her temples, two black lines arch towards the center of her face and extend downwards to form eyebrows and a slim, rectangular nose. Her eyes are shown as white ovals with pointed ends and black outlines, and a smaller black oval in the center for pupils. Her lips are a small brown rectangle. She has round ears that peak below her headdress, and wears dangling earrings with light green stems and brown balls on the end. Her neck is a simple column outlined in green. Rounded flourishes, cut off at the bottom, indicate shoulders.

At the edge on the left side is the head of a white bird with a black outline. The piece is set in a cream metal frame, which covers about an inch of the mosaic face on all sides.

14. Bird mosaic

Cut stone with mortar

Replica of part of mosaic floor from a synagogue or church, ancient Israel, probably late 400s-600 CE

16 inches high, 16 inches wide

A raised line drawing of this mosaic is located in the booklet on the front of the column to the right of this piece.

Mosaics consist of stone, glass, or ceramic pieces, or tesserae, placed to create patterns and images that are held in place by mortar. A circle encloses a bird, identifiable by the stripes on its neck, wings, and tail. Geometric, plant, animal, and human imagery typically decorated floor mosaics in ancient synagogues and churches.

At the center of this circular mosaic replica is a bird in profile, facing to the right. Its body is primarily made of cloudy black tiles. Five white stripes run vertically on the wing, while the protruding angular tail features four slightly tilted bands. A white and tan line outlines the lower edge of the wing, defining the separation between the two. Two white bands with reddish-tan at their center encircle the bird's neck, resembling a collar. Run your hands over the tiles and feel the consistent thickness throughout- each stripe is the width of a tile, about 1 cm squared.

The bird's legs are visible beneath its body, with each leg extending downward in a natural walking position. The feet are splayed, with two clearly defined toes pointing forward. The head is held high, with a sharp, pointed beak, and a small light eye with a dark dot at its center.

Above the bird, slightly to the left, is a small diamond-shaped design, composed of a mix of tan, black, and white tesserae. The piece is set in a cream metal frame, which covers about an inch of the mosaic face on all sides.

The original mosaic can be found in the fourth-floor gallery with archaeological artifacts, located to the right, all the way to the end of the hall.

15. Mezuzah case

Hand-carved and polished Jerusalem stone (limestone)

4 inches high, 9/16 inches wide, 5/8 inches deep

The engraved Hebrew letter *shin* invokes the name of God. A case like this one typically contains a mezuzah, a small parchment scroll inscribed with Hebrew Bible passages to bless a home. Meant to be touched, a mezuzah in a decorated case is traditionally hung on a doorjamb, showing visitors, they are entering a Jewish household. Jerusalem limestone is frequently used in Jewish ceremonial art.

Run your fingers along the mezuzah case and feel the polished surface, smooth with the faintest grain of the natural stone. The material is tan with orange-red veining. It is hung to the front of a 9-inch-tall plinth, and positioned tilted to the right, like it would be on a doorway. On the front side, ½ inch down from the top, an engraved Hebrew letter *shin* interrupts the otherwise sleek surface. Trace your fingers over its shallow grooves, where the stone has been carefully cut away. The letter has three prongs that point upward, tapered at the end, and connected at the base. The engraving is slightly rougher than the surrounding polished area, offering a tactile contrast.

16. Metal

Artists use metal ranging from precious gold and silver to more common copper, bronze, and brass to create inventive forms. Mined from the land, metal is refined by heating and made durable by mixing different types of material. Metal can be shaped by hand through hammering, etching, perforating, and stamping to create fine details or by casting. To make a cast, molten metal is poured into a clay, wax, or plaster mold; when the material cools and hardens, the mold is removed, leaving behind a 3D object.

- 17. Lynda Benglis**
Born in 1941, Lake Charles, Louisiana
Walla Walla Foundry (fabricator)
Founded in 1981, Walla Walla, Washington
Material Sample
Cast aluminum
5 ½ inches high, 6 inches wide, 1 ½ inches deep
Courtesy of the artist

Touch the bubbled, tangled surface of this sample. Lynda Benglis created the object using the same process and materials as her *FIGURE 6*, part of the Jewish Museum collection. The artist created its bulging, wavelike forms by spraying foam on a chicken-wire structure, which was then cast in aluminum. Benglis was inspired by the natural forms of brain coral and the muddy piles left by burrowing crawfish in her native Louisiana.

Her work appears frozen in time, as if the molten metal was caught mid-flow, solidifying into intricate, chaotic formations, like knobby tubes or tunnels intersecting, looping, and merging into each other. Some parts are bulbous, while others are rope-like. The reflective silver surface enhances this sense of movement, emphasizing the texture's peaks and valleys. Benglis is known for her ability to convey fluidity in solid materials, giving her sculptures a feeling of arrested motion, as though they are still shifting and evolving.

This sample invites you to experience the tactile nature of Benglis' process firsthand. By running your hands across its uneven ridges and smooth dips, you engage with the same textures and forms that define her monumental works, such as *FIGURE 6*.

18. Ludwig Yehuda Wolpert

Born in 1900, Hildesheim, Kingdom of Prussia (now Germany), died in 1981, New York

Hanukkah lamp, designed 1958

Brass multiple

10 inches high, 10 ¾ inches wide, 4 ½ inches deep

The sinuous lines of this Hanukkah lamp are a modern take on an ancient form. Ludwig Yehuda Wolpert trained as a metalsmith in Germany but, during the rise of Nazism in the 1930s, he immigrated to Israel. After moving to the United States in the 1950s, Wolpert established the Tobe Pascher Workshop at the Jewish Museum, which was dedicated to the creation of modern Jewish ceremonial art and where he designed this lamp

For this Hanukkah lamp, Wolpert's design focuses on clean lines and smooth, flowing shapes. The piece is entirely made of polished, golden brass.

The eight curved arms of this lamp are made from individual, squared-off tubes of metal. At the base, these individual pieces are grouped into two sets of four, each foursome lined up horizontally next to each other, separated by a few inches. Travelling upwards, the two sets arch towards each other and cross in the middle, forming a diamond-like pattern as they pass. The arms continue and curve the opposite way into a traditional branch menorah shape. At the top of each is a small cup and saucer-like candle holder. The four arms on each side fan out as they expand upwards, making the top of the menorah much wider than the base.

The ninth central branch follows the same angled S-curve, but is positioned to cross perpendicularly through the lamp, from the back to the front. This unique positioning creates a stabilizing point, giving the menorah its distinctive structure.

This is a multiple of a lamp on display in the vitrine filled with Hanukkah lamps nearby. It is in the case on the far right.

- 19. Rachel Feinstein**
Born in 1971, Fort Defiance, Arizona
IPPOLITA (fabricator)
Founded in 1999, New York
Fan Castle Ring, designed 2023
Sterling silver
2 ¼ inches high, 1 1/16 inches wide, 3/16 inches deep

A raised line drawing depicting this object is located in the booklet on the front of the column to the right of this piece.

The sharp silhouette of a fantastical castle perches atop this ring created by artist Rachel Feinstein. Although its clean lines are modern, this piece of jewelry refers to a traditional form. Architectural mazal tov, or good luck rings were part of medieval Jewish wedding ceremonies, symbolizing the home the couple would build. The ring also evokes the artist's many childhood trips to Disney World and a fascination with fairytales. It is positioned on a 4-inch-tall rectangular light blue base.

Feel the side of the ring and the dimensionality becomes clear; the ring is made of three thin layers of sterling silver, joined at the base and fanned slightly to be spaced out at the top. This formation gives the image of the castle depth, creating a foreground, middle, and background.

The front-most layer has a straight-across row of small squared ridges, and four arched windows underneath. They are connected by small squared off ridges like a stone edge of a castle.

In the middle, the silhouette of six pointed turrets rise from the bridge of this ring, their spires reaching upward in striking, architectural form. The sharp, pointed turrets vary in height, with the tallest in the center. This one features a circular cutout near its peak. Below the turrets, tiny rectangular cutouts form windows, reinforcing the illusion of a miniature fortress perched atop the wearer's hand.

The last layer is not visible from the front of the ring; it has a large arch in the middle, with arrow-like turrets, or the pointed tops of towers, on either end. The crisp, laser-cut edges contribute to its sharp quality, while the stacked layering enhances the illusion of a real fortress emerging from the ring itself.

20. Hanukkah lamp

Antiqued silver plate

Inspired by a Hanukkah lamp, Stolin, Russian Empire (now in Belarus), c. 1885

Each piece measures 2 1/4 inches high, 1 inch wide, 1 inch deep

Three raised line drawings depicting the front, side, and back of the individual pieces displayed here are located in the booklet on the front of the column to the right of this piece.

Nine individual chairs form a Hanukkah lamp that is inspired by a lamp in the Jewish Museum's collection. The seat of each chair here has been adapted to hold a candle, rather than oil, for modern use. The chairs are lined up in a straight horizontal line all facing forward along a rectangular white base. They are spaced slightly apart, except the left-most one, the *Shamash*, placed at an angle.

Each brightly colored silver chair is identical, except again for the *Shamash*, which is slightly taller than the others. They all have four straight legs, and a thick box-like seat with a cylindrical indent on the top to hold a candle. Trace the stylized patterns that decorate the body of these chairs, including flowers with six petals on either side and a fleur-de-lis on the back. On the front side, a raised Hebrew inscription translates to "the miracle of Hanukkah." The back of the chair has tall straight sides, with a top that curves to a small point in the middle. The inside of the back is open except for three lines which cross through the center. The arms of the chair are solid and slope from the middle of the chair back to curve in the front. Along each edge of the chairs there are decorative straight or curved lines.

The lamp is based off of one on display in the center of the vitrine filled with Hanukkah lamps nearby.

- 21. Oded Halahmy**
Born 1938, in Baghdad, Iraq
Pomegranate in Bud, 1989
Cast aluminum
4 inches high, 3 inches wide, 3 inches deep

The richly textured surface of this cast aluminum pomegranate invites touch. The piece has a round body that is slightly flattened on eight sides. The surface is lightly and unevenly dimpled all over, like an exaggeration of the natural texture of the fruit. A contrasting smooth metal piece is molded to the bottom of the fruit; it has six rounded protrusions, like petals of a flower. On top is a chunky, smooth circle with raised spikes, like a crown atop the pomegranate. Within this is a cylinder carved out to hold a candle. The piece is placed on a 2-inch-tall square base.

Oded Halahmy designed this textured sculpture to celebrate a fruit with diverse spiritual and mythological significance. Pomegranates probably originated in Afghanistan and Iran and were later grown across Asia, Africa, and Europe. Symbolizing abundance in the Hebrew Bible, the fruit is traditionally eaten on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, for a blessed year to come.

22. Erté (Romain de Tiroff)

Born in 1892, Saint Petersburg, Russia, died in 1990, Paris

Tree of Life Hanukkah lamp, 1987

Polished bronze

15 ¼ inches high, 12 ½ inches wide, 7 ½ inches deep

This gleaming bronze lamp designed by Erté sparkles in candlelight. The Tree of Life is an ancient cross-cultural symbol of the interconnectedness of life; in the Jewish tradition, it can represent divine presence, wisdom, and growth.

Bring your hands to the base and feel the six roots of this tree spreading outwards in all directions, curling and reaching like they're rooting into the display surface. Each of these main roots branches and multiplies into many smaller tendrils. The surface is smooth, enhancing the flowing lines of the design.

The stem of this Hanukkah lamp is a thicker central tree trunk, from which four thinner branches extend symmetrically on each side. They reach outward and upward in a curved formation. Across the branches are nine small, pointy gold protrusions, resembling thorns or budding leaves. At the top of each branch emerges a flowering fruit, textured with overlapping spiky leaves, similar to the structure of a pinecone. These sculptural fruits have textured tops, like upside-down acorns, with an opening nestled in each for a candle.

Perched on the third and 7th branches from the right are two long slim birds with gracefully extended tail feathers, their wings folded close to their bodies. These birds rest on the third and seventh branches from the right, their wings folded close to their bodies. They both face the center of the lamp, looking inward and down. They have crested heads, long tails, and their beaks are slightly curved downward, mimicking the thorns. The feathers are finely etched, adding a delicate texture. The fruit, birds, and thorns are polished to a higher shine than the rest of the lamp, offering a sparkling contrast.

The Russian Jewish artist Erté created this exquisite lamp in 1987 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the founding of Israel.

This is an edition of a lamp on display in the vitrine filled with Hanukkah lamps nearby. It is in the case on the far right.