



**IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY:
STORIES FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE JEWISH MUSEUM
EXHIBITION BACKGROUNDER**

Drawn from the Museum's collection of nearly 30,000 works, the Jewish Museum's new collection installation on its third floor highlights how art and objects convey the richness of Jewish experience across centuries and continents. *Identity, Culture, and Community: Stories from the Collection of the Jewish Museum* unfolds in a loose chronology across the galleries, including the following thematic sections:

- ***Ritual and Community*** highlights the role of ritual in Jewish life, demonstrating how Judaica and ceremonial scenes can connect Jewish people in both home and synagogue, even during times of upheaval. Objects on view represent traditions from Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Mizrahi communities, illustrating both shared rituals and distinct cultural aesthetics. Despite centuries of persecution, migration, and prohibitions, these ceremonial works testify to the endurance of Jewish art and ritual across the global Diaspora.
- ***Persecution and Remembrance*** presents works that both subtly and explicitly address the histories of marginalization and persecution that have shaped important chapters of Jewish experience. This includes art, ritual objects, and materials culture, from drawings made by an artist who perished in the Holocaust but whose legacy has been preserved, to works by emigre artists grappling with the aftermath of war. These works memorialize those lost and explicitly and implicitly communicate the consequences of persecution for new generations.
- ***Post–World War II*** showcases how, in the postwar era, Jewish artists, including Lee Krasner and Mark Rothko, employed the language of abstraction and helped shape Abstract Expressionism among other pivotal postwar movements. At the same time, the section explores how postwar refugees brought modernist ideas into their everyday lives in the United States, reimagining ceremonial objects and decorative arts through abstraction, mass production, and experimental materials to create a distinctly modern American Jewish aesthetic.
- ***Feminisms: Unveiling Voices*** presents work of a new generation of artists who emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, challenging the male-dominated art world by expanding into performance, photography, installation, and craft-based media. Jewish artists such as Martha Rosler and Miriam Schapiro were central to this shift, blending feminist principles with Jewish values of social justice, to reimagining art as social critique. This legacy continues today as artists explore contemporary issues through diverse, queer, and nonbinary perspectives, enriching the discourse around identity and heritage.
- ***Contemporary Connections*** spotlights the Museum's history of collaborating with living artists and presenting innovative contemporary artwork across media. The artists and makers in the gallery differ in conceptual approaches, use of materials and relationships to Jewishness, articulating unique realms of lived and inherited experiences.

The collection installation is animated with special gallery exhibitions that complement the central collection display and will rotate over time. The initial series of focused gallery exhibitions include:

- ***Circa 1776***, presented in conjunction with the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, examines early Jewish congregations in the American Colonies during the Revolutionary War. By the late 1700s, about two thousand Jews—Sephardic immigrants from the Caribbean and Ashkenazic arrivals via England—lived in colonial America, where they could worship openly but faced restrictions such as exclusion from public office. The works on view will explore themes of Jewish life throughout colonial and post-colonial America, highlighting Judaica from early congregations in New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, as well as examining questions of selfhood, migration, assimilation, and equality.
- ***Art in Focus: Dor Guez*** features an installation-based work that mines the personal histories and artifacts of the art and his family, which blends Christian Palestinian and Jewish Tunisian heritage. Excavating his private archive of objects—from humble buttons to a red vest sewn by his grandmother—placed in glass-enclosed vitrines, Guez transforms the relics of the past to channel untold—and often forgotten—histories. In *Belly of the Boat*, Guez displays the belongings of his Tunisian Jewish grandparents—Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Israel in 1951—treating them as symbols of both personal and communal memory; and the photographic series *Letters from the Greater Maghreb*, based on a water-damaged Judeo-Tunisian Arabic play by his grandfather, which metaphorically unites languages, homelands, and identities.
- ***Togetherness*** draws photographs from the Museum’s collection of over two thousand images to explore intimacy and togetherness in human relationships across time. From early analogue film to contemporary digital technology, these works capture shared human experiences of joy, loss, and resilience, offering both a record of the past and a bridge to contemporary artistic expression.
- ***Pearl Bowser and the 1970 Black Film Series*** provides an opportunity to rediscover *The Black Film* series presented at the Jewish Museum in 1970, before traveling over the course of the next six years. Curated by Harlem-born Pearl Bowser in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, the program drew attention to “race films”—independent movies created largely by and for Black audiences between 1925 and 1965—while expanding the museum’s contemporary offerings and affirming the shared activist traditions of Black and Jewish communities.

Identity, Culture, and Community: Stories from the Collection of the Jewish Museum is curated by Darsie Alexander, Senior Deputy Director and Susan and Elihu Rose Chief Curator; Claudia Nahson, Morris and Eva Feld Senior Curator; Kristina Parsons, Leon Levy Assistant Curator; and Rebecca Frank, Curatorial Assistant.

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