

## Testimony and Memory: Contemporary Miniature Torah Mantles

February 26, 2009 – July 26, 2009



**“O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who guides the steps of Human beings.”**

Woven linen, appliquéed with black felt, stitched and painted

New York, New York: The beauty of the fabrics and the high degree of skill lavished on Torah mantles are a measure of the regard in which the Torah is held. The mantles “dress” and protect the sacred, handwritten scroll comprising the first five books of Moses. In “Testimony and Memory: Contemporary Miniature Torah Mantles,” at the Yeshiva University Museum, London artist Carole Smollan reinterprets these ceremonial covers using remnants from huppot (wedding canopies) that she designed for couples from around the world. This collection of 56 exquisitely detailed miniature mantles will be on display from February 26 through July 26, 2009.

Smollan’s Torah mantles exhibit an extraordinary range of decorative variation. She employs a variety of stitching techniques and other embellishments, such as applied lace, linking this body of work to her early career in lace and lingerie design. In addition to specializing in traditional processes, such as Japanese *shibori*, Smollan has developed her own technique of “bleeding” silk. These pattern-dyeing techniques, she believes, epitomize the way in which cloth retains the memory of any action that is performed on it. Additional resonance is generated by the fact that all of the textile fragments and trimmings used to construct the mantles come from the artist’s treasured store of off-cuts and rejected portions of other textile projects.

A small, moving series of Torah mantles tells the story of Smollan’s own family exodus from Lithuania to South Africa; these objects are artificially aged and stained and incorporate fragments of family travel documents and *ketubot* (Jewish marriage contracts), photographs, and other memorabilia. The series also bears silent witness to those family members who did not make the exodus and later perished in the Holocaust. Other imagery on the Torah mantles is more traditional – the Tree of Life, the *menorah* (seven-branched lamp), the Ark of the Covenant, and Hebrew prayers and words spoken at life-cycle ceremonies. They communicate a sense of Jewish identity and Jewish experience in the diaspora, evoking ideas of connectedness.

Born and raised in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Smollan does not remember a time when textiles were not a part of her life. In the 1990s she emigrated from South Africa to London. She describes her large collection of miniature Torah mantles as a “collective memory,” a weaving together (to use a textile metaphor) of her life’s artistic work and personal history.

Smollan works out of studios in London and Portugal. Her work has been exhibited internationally for almost forty years.

### **About Yeshiva University Museum**

For 35 years, the Yeshiva University Museum has provided culturally diverse exhibitions and programming for the greater metropolitan area and beyond, as well as to Yeshiva University students, faculty, and alumni. Its permanent collection includes more than 9,000 objects spanning over 3,000 years of Jewish history. The Museum also emphasizes teaching schoolchildren and adults of diverse backgrounds about Jewish culture through many varieties of interdisciplinary programs. Located at the Center for Jewish History, the Museum occupies four spacious galleries, a children’s workshop center, and an outdoor sculpture garden.

**Listing Information:**

**What:** Testimony and Memory: Contemporary Miniature Torah Mantles

**When:** February 26, 2009 – July 26, 2009

**Where:** 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street (between 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Aves), NYC

**Hours:** Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday: 11 am – 5 pm  
FREE Mondays @ YUM, 3:30-7:30 pm

**Admission:** \$8 for Adults; \$6 for seniors and students and children (ages 5 – 16)  
FREE Members and children under 5; FREE with valid Yeshiva University ID card

**Public Information:** 212-294-8330 [www.yumuseum.org](http://www.yumuseum.org)

**Press Inquiries:** Yeshiva University Museum 212-294-8330 [press@yum.cjh.org](mailto:press@yum.cjh.org)  
Lauren Sanne/Ilyse Fink 212-575-4545 [lsanne@lakpr.com](mailto:lsanne@lakpr.com); [ifink@lakpr.com](mailto:ifink@lakpr.com)  
Linden Alschuler & Kaplan, Public Relations

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