

**Yeshiva University Museum Presents
In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis
November 22, 2009 – February 28, 2010**

– *Internationally Acclaimed Contemporary Artists Re-Imagine the Relevance of Genesis* –

New York, NY— New interpretations of the relevance of Genesis are presented by a group of internationally acclaimed contemporary artists through multimedia installations exhibited at the Yeshiva University Museum in New York City. New York-based artists Alan Berliner, Matthew Ritchie, Ben Rubin, Shirley Shor and Mierle Laderman Ukeles explore the continuing relevance of the story of creation through five highly engaging, experiential works in an exhibition fittingly titled: *In The Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis*. The exhibition, which originated at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco last year, will run from November 22, 2009 through February 28, 2010 at Yeshiva University Museum, located at the Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street in New York City.

The five installations will be presented in New York with site-specific elements created expressly for the Yeshiva University Museum galleries. Common to all the works is the juxtaposition of ancient and modern, of text and image, and techniques that actively engage viewers in the themes of Genesis and the questions it poses about our origins.

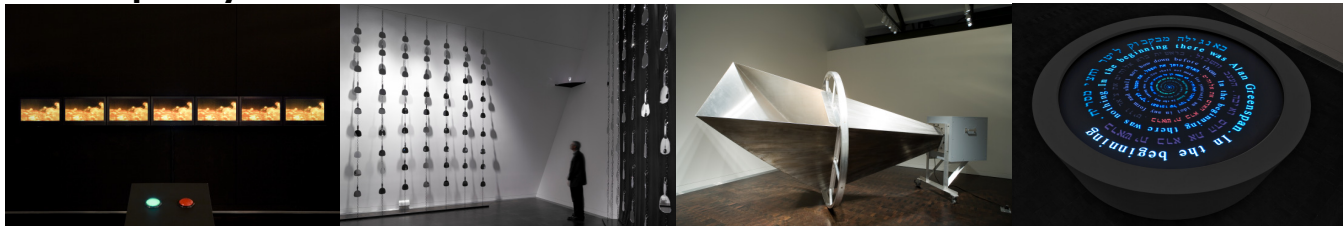
"The genesis of the show was quite remarkable in and of itself," noted Yeshiva University Museum consulting curator Fred Wasserman. "Before they began to work on their pieces, the artists and curators met with Jewish scholars to study the text of *Genesis*, and to learn about the Jewish tradition of text and commentary. In effect, the artists were invited to create new commentaries for the 21st century. The finished works reflect dramatically

different interpretations of the themes and language in the biblical text. The show is an amazing opportunity to see a group of highly original, participatory new works of art and enter into dialogue with them about the meaning of Genesis for us today.”

While the exhibition brings into play a range of current digital media, the works’ engagement with core themes of the creation story is vividly and consistently in evidence. To contextualize the new works, *In the Beginning* opens with an impressive group of historic manuscripts, spanning from the 15th to the 18th centuries, which serve to link the installations both conceptually and physically to the biblical text. Also featured is the video *Genesis Now*, produced and directed by award-winning filmmaker Pam Rorke Levy for the original presentation of the exhibition, in which scientists, theologians, writers and artists from a range of backgrounds offer their perspective on Genesis, Chapter 1.

“The text of Genesis—the story of our origins—touches on universal themes of deep contemporary relevance,” said Yeshiva University Museum director, Jacob Wisse. “*In the Beginning* is a show of exceptional quality and complexity, and one that powerfully manifests Yeshiva University Museum’s goal to explore the dynamic relationship between Jewish text and the visual arts.”

Contemporary and Historical Works



Generating commentary and interpretations of biblical texts is at the root of Jewish tradition. *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis* inserts itself in this tradition in imaginative, varied and unpredictable ways.

- British painter and installation artist Matthew Ritchie explores the experience and impact of the formation of the universe in a multimedia work, called *Day One*, incorporating digital animation, a wall drawing, and a soundtrack. Ritchie has described his piece as a work that explores “the possibility of visualizing the unknown.”
- In *Playing God*, filmmaker and media artist, Alan Berliner, has created a large-scale seven-screen “slot machine” that uses the words of the first chapter of the Hebrew Bible and a range of archival film clips. Visitors perceive the story of creation against the backdrop of history, contemporary events, and the concept of human agency.
- Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s mixed media installation, *Tsimtsum/Shevirat Ha-Kelim—Birthing Tikkun Olam*, invokes and updates the biblical idea of covenant, inviting viewers to make an agreement to perform an act of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). Composed of hundreds of double-sided mirrors, variant chantings of the Genesis text, and a desk where visitors can pause to write their agreements, Ukeles’s work is inspired by Kabbalistic interpretations of the Genesis story.
- Media artist Ben Rubin’s sound sculpture, *God’s Breath Hovering Over the Waters (His Master’s Voice)*, re-examines early scientific efforts to detect the Big Bang in light of the story of creation.
- In *The Well*, Israeli-born new-media artist Shirley Shor projects texts (in English and Hebrew), mined from the Internet using search engines, which explore how Biblical language manifests itself in our everyday language on the Web.

Among the historical works presented at the opening of *In the Beginning* are several important late Medieval-era manuscripts that serve to embody the rich tradition of biblical

illumination and textual commentary in which the contemporary artists follow. All of the works are drawn from New York collections. From the collection of the Yeshiva University Library is a richly decorated Prague Bible, dating from 1488. Also on view will be Bomberg's third Rabbinic Bible (Venice, 1547), an early printed Hebrew example of the Book of Genesis with multiple commentaries, which is being lent by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research; and the beautifully illuminated *Koberger Bible*, an extraordinary Christian manuscript (Germany, 1483), owned by the American Bible Society. Representing the tradition of Hasidic Judaism is the Yeshiva University Museum's own Torah scroll, written in part by the Baal Shem Tov, considered the founder of this mystical tradition. Together, these early manuscripts and printed editions of Genesis and the Bible neatly trace the shifting interpretations of the events in Genesis and the ideal of divine creation.

The exhibition *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis* was organized by the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, and has been adapted by the Yeshiva University Museum for this presentation.

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.

Museum Hours for *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis*:

Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday: 11 am – 5 pm

Monday: 3:30-8:00 pm (FREE)

Wednesday: 11 am – 8 pm (FREE 5 pm – 8 pm)

Friday: 11 am – 2:30 pm (FREE)

Museum Admission:

Adults: \$8 Seniors and Students: \$6

YU Museum Members and Children under 5: Free

Yeshiva University Faculty, Administration and Students: Free (with valid ID)

Location:

Yeshiva University Museum

at the Center for Jewish History

15 West 16th Street, NYC 10011

212-294-8330

www.yumuseum.org

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Images available upon request

Captions:

Page 1: Matthew Ritchie, *Day One*, 2008 (detail); Interactive digital animation, acrylic and marker on wall with audio; Variable dimensions. *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis*; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (June 8, 2008–January 6, 2009). Photo credit: Bruce Damonte. Courtesy of the artist and Andrea Rosen Gallery.

Page 2 (l to r): Alan Berliner, *Playing God*, 2009; Multimedia installation; variable dimensions. *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis*; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (June 8, 2008–January 6, 2009). Photo credit: Sibila Savage. Courtesy of the artist.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, *Tsimtsum/Shevirat Ha-Kelim: Contraction/The Shattering of the Perfect Vessels—Birthing Tikkun Olam: As Above So Below/As Below So Above*, 2008; Mixed media installation; Variable dimensions. *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis*; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (June 8, 2008–January 6, 2009). Photo credit: Bruce Damonte. Courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.

Ben Rubin, *God's Breath Hovering Over the Waters (His Master's Voice)*, 2008; Aluminum, wood, steel, audio electronics, and two framed photographs; Variable dimensions. *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis*; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (June 8, 2008–January 6, 2009). Photo credit: Bruce Damonte. Courtesy of the artist.

Shirley Shor, *The Well*, 2008; Multimedia installation; Variable dimensions. *In the Beginning: Artists Respond to Genesis*; Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (June 8, 2008–January 6, 2009). Photo credit: Bruce Damonte. Courtesy of the artist and Mike Weiss Gallery.