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A POTENT SYMBOL OF JEWISH LIFE IN AMERICA, THE ERUV GETS UNPRECEDENTED EXHIBITION AT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

*From “The Daily Show” to Rabbinic and City Hall Debates,
Eruvs Still Generate Controversy*

WHAT:	<i>It's a Thin Line: The Eruv and Jewish Community in New York and Beyond</i>
WHEN:	October 28, 2012 – June 30, 2013
WHERE:	Yeshiva University Museum, 15 W. 16th Street, NYC, 212-294-8330
COST:	Adults: \$8; seniors and students: \$6. Free for members and children under 5
WEB:	http://yumuseum.tumblr.com/ItsAThinLine or www.yumuseum.org

New York City, October 1 – It divides private and public, sacred and secular, work and Sabbath. And you might live in one without knowing it.

The *eruv* is one of the most fascinating, though little understood and sometimes controversial concepts in Jewish life. Now, for the first time, it's the subject of an exhibition – *It's a Thin Line: The Eruv and Jewish Community in New York and Beyond* – at Yeshiva University Museum, near Union Square in Manhattan.

The *eruv* is not just a concept. It's also a physical creation that powerfully affects the lives of observant Jews. Without an *eruv*, parents couldn't even carry their children on the Sabbath. *It's a Thin Line* traces the history of the *eruv* and its adaptation into New York's urban environment, and raises provocative questions.

How far should and do civic authorities go to accommodate religious practices? How does the creation of an *eruv* impact community, and affect the demographics and character of a neighborhood? And where do you draw the line between public and private? From a [notorious segment](#) on The Daily Show about the proposed Westhampton Beach *eruv* to city hall debates around the world, *eruv*s are still a hot-button issue.

As a means for offering separation while integrating into city life, the *eruv* also provides a potent symbol of Jewish life in America. With 130 artifacts spanning over five centuries, *It's a Thin Line* vividly illustrates how an ancient Biblical precept has been creatively interpreted and applied – especially in and around New York City. Objects range from some of the first Hebrew books ever printed to century-old images of New York life to contemporary tools and recent *eruv* artifacts to *eruv*-themed works by contemporary artists.

Even people who don't know about *eruv*s live within their boundaries. And as high-profile cases have illustrated, *eruv*s can still rankle neighbors. With that in mind, a film produced especially for this exhibition will spotlight different opinions and interpretations of *eruv*s in the broader New York metropolitan area in the last 30 years, and the *eruv*'s impact on the community.

A series of public programs will examine different aspects of the *eruv* and issues it continues to raise. On October 28, acclaimed author and Fordham Law Professor Thane Rosenbaum will be among the speakers of a symposium, “The Mystery and History of the Eruv,” which also includes renowned scholars Prof. Charlotte Fonrobert, Prof. Jeffrey Gurock and Prof. Lawrence Schiffman, and artist Elliott Malkin, among others.

Later in the fall, celebrated writer and thinker Blu Greenberg (*On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*) will take part in a program, co-presented by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, focusing on the impact of the *eruv* on the lives of women and families within the Jewish community.

In early 2013, the YU Museum will partner with Yeshiva University’s Center for Jewish Law and Contemporary Civilization at Cardozo Law School and the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought to present a panel discussion among top legal scholars using the *eruv* as a window into church-state issues and the relationship between law and community building.

A series of in-depth tours will be offered during the run of the exhibition, featuring Zachary Paul Levine, curator of *It’s a Thin Line*, and Rabbi Adam Mintz, one of the foremost historians of the *eruv* in America and the exhibition’s curatorial advisor.

“We’re excited to engage a topic of such practical importance for the Jewish community,” said Dr. Jacob Wisse, director of Yeshiva University Museum, “one that has such an interesting material character and longstanding history. We think the exhibition and its related programming have the potential to spark great interest and to illuminate a key example of the dynamics of religious culture in the public sphere.”

With its main focus on New York City, New Jersey, and the surrounding communities, the exhibition also provides a vivid picture of local urban history through the stories of individual communities, religious figures and debates. An array of unique artifacts in widely different media, dating back to the 15th century, brings the story of the *eruv* to life.

Among them: Light poles and an aluminum gate from the current Manhattan *eruv*; a 1986 guide to the Kew Gardens, Queens *eruv* with foreword by then-borough president Donald Manes; printed objects and photographs of the 3rd Avenue elevated train, one of the *eruv* boundaries for the first half of the 20th century; a film on the history and surprising technical history of *eruv*s in the region; and a museum-produced interactive that invites visitors to investigate a host of issues associated with New York-area Jewish communities and *eruv*s today.

The exhibition will also feature *eruv*-themed, New York-centered works by contemporary artists, reflecting the recent interest in the ritual outside its religious context. The vibrant artistic life of the *eruv* will be the focus of three related shows running simultaneously at Yale University and organized by Professor Margaret Olin, called “Shaping Community: Poetics and Politics of the Eruv.” More about Yale’s exhibition at: <http://mavcor.yale.edu/exhibition/shaping-community-poetics-and-politics-eruv>.

What is an eruv?

An *eruv* is a border, usually made out of string or wire stretched on top of or on telephone or light poles, which symbolically encloses a neighborhood or a city. It allows Jews to accomplish one of the most basic activities on the Sabbath, which Jewish law otherwise prohibits on the Day of Rest: carrying. An *eruv* makes it possible for people to carry keys, push a baby carriage or hold a baby, or bring food to someone’s home.

ABOUT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

Yeshiva University Museum is dedicated to the presentation and interpretation of the artistic and cultural achievements of Jewish life. The Museum, founded in 1973, is distinguished by its wide-ranging and intellectually rigorous exhibitions and, as the cultural arm of Yeshiva University, by its strong educational mission. As a partner in the thriving Center for Jewish History and a participant in New York's lively downtown cultural scene, Yeshiva University Museum makes a distinctive and important contribution to Jewish life and to the world of culture and the arts. The Museum's rich and diverse collections preserve Jewish artifacts, art, texts and material culture for posterity, making objects accessible through exhibitions, educational programs, and research and conservational initiatives.

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