

For Immediate Release

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**Small Wonders: Rarely Seen
Collection of Historic Synagogue Models
Goes on View at Yeshiva University Museum**

yumuseum.org // yumuseum.tumblr.com

WHAT: <i>Modeling the Synagogue – from Dura to Touro</i>
WHEN: <i>January 25 – July 5, 2015</i>
WHERE: <i>Yeshiva University Museum, 15 W. 16th St. near Union Sq., Manhattan</i>

New York City, January 19 – Yeshiva University Museum’s newest major exhibition features a collection of small wonders: remarkably detailed, architecturally accurate models of some of history’s most significant synagogues.

The ten synagogue models featured in the exhibition reflect the geographic and cultural breadth of the Jewish world across the centuries, from the ancient Mediterranean – Dura-Europos in 3rd-century Syria and Beit Alpha in 6th-century Galilee – to modern America and Europe – Touro in 18th-century Newport and Tempio Israelitico in 19th-century Florence.

Each model is actually not so small, measuring approximately five feet by five feet in surface area and as much as four feet in height. The models, commissioned in conjunction with the founding of the YU Museum in 1973, were conceived, designed and constructed under the direction of leading scholars and historians, using the most up-to-date research and architectural information.

Modeling the Synagogue – from Dura to Touro marks the first time in three decades that these extraordinary models will be displayed as a group. Accompanying the models are rare artifacts, original manuscripts, photographs, and maps of and from the communities and synagogues represented by the models.

The show brings to life the nature of the modeling process, as well as the culture of each synagogue community and the thematic connections between different structures and between synagogues and their physical settings.

Each model was designed and built between 1970 and 1973 with intricate architectural detail and with materials that richly evoke the original structures and their interiors. Featured in a distinct section of the exhibition are materials that document the conception and process of the modeling commission itself, including: approximately 40 rubber molds used to fashion architectural elements of the models; original drawings; and correspondence among members of the project team about the criteria for choosing the synagogues to be modeled and other issues related to the commission.

“This exhibition will let people experience not only the physical beauty and wide-ranging architecture of some of history’s most important synagogues,” says museum director Dr. Jacob Wisse, who curated the exhibition, “but also their religious, communal and cultural character. We think it will also be interesting and eye-opening for visitors to get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the fascinating process through which the commission came to life and of the remarkable work that went into producing the models.”

Breathtaking original objects related to each synagogue also round out the exhibition, including a beautifully illuminated and decorated 15th-century Hebrew Bible from Prague that reflects on the culture of the Altneuschul; a Torah Scroll used in Amsterdam’s Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue, which may date from before the time of the expulsion of Jews from Spain; and a large-scale brass Hanukkah Lamp and a silver, chased and punched Torah Shield that echo the furnishings of the 17th-century Zabłudow Synagogue in Poland.

Bringing the exhibition up-to-date and expanding on the modeling theme is a special interactive display of Sephardi synagogues presented by the American Sephardi Federation in cooperation with Diarna: the Geo-Museum of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Life. Featuring photographs by Joshua Shamsi and Diarna’s team of field researchers, as well as digital reconstructions by Erin Okabe-Jawdat, this digital tour allows visitors to experience the grand Algerian synagogues that are today mosques, an aged synagogue on the edge of the Sahara, the dilapidated Art Deco synagogue in downtown Tripoli, and the subterranean synagogue on the site of the traditional shrine to Esther and Mordechai in Hamadan, Iran.

A rich array of public programming will expand on themes within the exhibition, with several of the programs taking place within the exhibition space itself – in the company of the models. Among them will be: a *Musical Journey through Jewish Space*, hosted by cellist Elad Kabilio of MusicTalks, which will feature diverse musical selections inspired by the synagogues and their communities; a series of gallery talks by scholars on some of the individual synagogue communities; and tours by contemporary professional model makers, who will explore and expose the processes and techniques through which the models came to life.

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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