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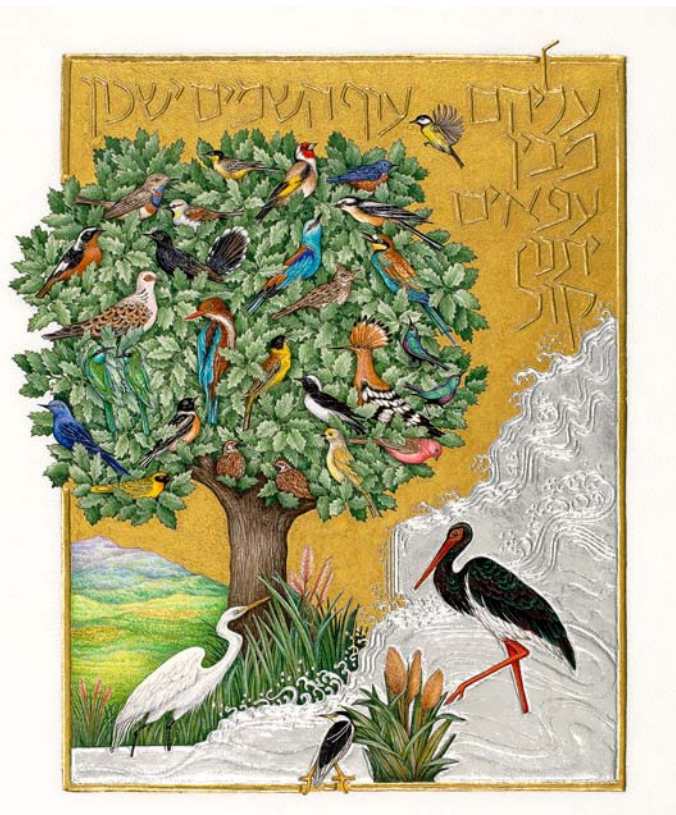
THE MORGAN CELEBRATES THE BEAUTY AND ARTISTRY OF CONTEMPORARY ILLUMINATION IN AN EXHIBITION OF WORK BY BARBARA WOLFF

Hebrew Illumination for Our Time: The Art of Barbara Wolff
February 6 through May 3, 2015

New York, NY, January 5, 2015 —

For many museum-goers the use of rich gold and silver leaf to illuminate religious texts is an artistic practice that began—and ended—centuries ago.

However, the process in all of its precision and beauty continues to this day, and a new exhibition at the Morgan Library & Museum highlights the work of celebrated contemporary artist Barbara Wolff. Titled *Hebrew Illumination for Our Time: The Art of Barbara Wolff*, the show includes *You Renew the Face of the Earth: Psalm 104* and the *Rose Haggadah*. The manuscripts feature gold, silver, and platinum foils on vellum with imagery drawn from nature, archaeology, and religious custom in a 21st century ode to the long history of Jewish illumination.



Barbara Wolff, *Among the Branches They Sing* from *You Renew the Face of the Earth: Psalm 104*. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1190, fol. 3. Gift of Joanna S. Rose, 2014. Artwork © 2015 Barbara Wolff. Photography by Rudi Wolff.

Both works were generously donated to the Morgan—an institution renowned for its collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts—by Joanna S. Rose. The exhibition will be on view through May 3.

“These manuscripts allow visitors to draw rich comparisons between contemporary Jewish illumination and some of the European precedents drawn from the Morgan’s Christian Psalters and other Morgan manuscripts that served as inspiration for Barbara Wolff,” said Peggy Fogelman, acting director of the Morgan Library & Museum. “The artist’s imagery and compositions are remarkable and demonstrate that the practice of illumination can be as meaningful today as it was centuries ago. The Morgan is deeply grateful to Joanna Rose for the donation of these works and is delighted to present them on public exhibition so soon after their arrival at the Morgan.”

Background

It is impossible to say with absolute certainty when the art of illuminating Hebrew texts began, but it dates at least to the tenth century. Geographically, the earliest known manuscripts are traced to the Middle East but soon the practice spread throughout Europe. Indeed, there are stylistic characteristics than can be seen in Jewish illumination unique to Spain, Italy, France, and other countries. Jewish and Christian artists of the medieval and Renaissance periods freely borrowed materials, imagery, and technique from one another. Christian illuminators were noted for their Books of Hours and Old and New Testament renderings while Jewish artists often focused their work on Jewish Bibles and Haggadot.

Today, the practice continues among a select group of artists. Barbara Wolff’s work is an outstanding example of the ongoing vitality of the Jewish tradition, while recently, the Morgan acquired one of the “Apostolic” copies of the *St. John’s Bible*, a fully illuminated manuscript by contemporary calligrapher Donald Jackson.

The Exhibition

Since neither manuscript by Wolff has yet to be bound, all ten leaves from *Psalm 104* and all seventeen bifolios from the *Rose Haggadah* will be exhibited. Wolff’s decision to illustrate *Psalm 104* is artistically important as this text is not traditionally illuminated. She also takes the unusual approach of incorporating the verses of the Psalm into her paintings, using squared Ashkenasic and Hebrew monoline scripts.



Left: Barbara Wolff, *The Mountains Rose* from *You Renew the Face of the Earth: Psalm 104*. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1190, fol. 2. Gift of Joanna S. Rose, 2014. Artwork © 2015 Barbara Wolff. Photography by Rudi Wolff. Right: Barbara Wolff, *Leviathan Whom Thou Hast Formed* from *You Renew the Face of the Earth: Psalm 104*. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1190, fol. 8. Gift of Joanna S. Rose, 2014. Artwork © 2015 Barbara Wolff. Photography by Rudi Wolff.

You Renew the Face of the Earth: Psalm 104

Psalm 104 praises all creation and the divinity of nature. Wolff created ten minutely rendered illuminations that celebrate the diversity of the flora and fauna of the natural world. Painted on goatskin, using contemporary pigments and precious metals, the work was executed between 2006 and 2010.

The Mountains Rose

In “The Mountains Rose,” illustrating Psalm verses six to eight, the artist uses different shades of gold leaf to depict the geological layers that make up the earth’s surface. Prehistoric plants and animals are pressed like fossils in the rock, on top of which rise green hills and purple mountains. Cresting above these, like a huge tsunami, are gold and silver waves.

Among the Branches They Sing

Wolff’s skills as both a botanical and natural science illustrator are evident in the illumination for verse twelve, “Among the Branches They Sing.” The folio features a spectacular grouping of twenty-eight species of birds crowding the branches of a tabor oak. These include, in the foreground, a great white egret, a black stork, and, perched on the gilded frame, a black-crowned night heron.

Wine That Maketh Glad the Heart of Man

“Wine That Maketh Glad the Heart of Man,” verse fifteen, is an example of the artist working entirely in gilt. To illustrate the vine leaves, grape clusters, and tendrils, Wolff worked with several varieties of gold, including 24-karat yellow gold, 23.5-karat red gold, and 16-karat white gold, all set against a matte shell-gold background. In addition to multiple colors, the gold surfaces also vary in texture and in degrees of burnishing to differentiate one form from another.

Leviathan Whom Thou Hast Formed

A vast platinum fin whale occupies the bottom left quadrant of the page, which also includes a multitude of Mediterranean creatures. Verses twenty-five and twenty-six, “Leviathan Whom Thou Hast Formed,” describe the variety of “Living creatures, both small and great” in the sea. In addition to the whale, a sea horse and octopus are identifiable in the depths of the deep blue waters, and striped dolphins can be seen cavorting among the waves.

I Will Sing Unto the Lord

Verse thirty-three, “I Will Sing Unto the Lord,” affirms the miracle of creation. Blooming on this page are twenty-three different flowers that grew in ancient Israel, at the time the Psalms were composed. Clustered near the top are a large red tulip, blue iris, and red poppy; the bottom right is dominated by a large white lily. Wolff’s border, bursting with flowers, was inspired in part by the floral specimens painted by the French Renaissance artist Jean Bourdichon; an example of his work is on view in the center of the exhibition. The diapered background against which the



Left: Barbara Wolff, *I Will Sing Unto the Lord* from *You Renew the Face of the Earth: Psalm 104*. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1190, fol. 10. Gift of Joanna S. Rose, 2014. Artwork © 2015 Barbara Wolff. Photography by Rudi Wolff. Right: Barbara Wolff, *Wine That Maketh Glad the Heart of Man* from *You Renew the Face of the Earth: Psalm 104*. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1190, fol. 5. Gift of Joanna S. Rose, 2014. Artwork © 2015 Barbara Wolff. Photography by Rudi Wolff.

Hebrew quotation is set was inspired by such backgrounds in the Morgan's famous fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Livre de la chasse*, also on view.

The Rose Haggadah

Haggadot are among the most beloved of Hebrew liturgical books. The text, of biblical passages, prayers, and hymns, is read aloud at the Passover Seder, the domestic ceremony held annually in many Jewish homes to commemorate the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. The *Rose Haggadah* sits within a rich tradition of Hebrew manuscripts, of which select examples are included in the exhibition. Illuminated Haggadot first became popular around the thirteenth century. The relatively short text encouraged pictorial elaboration, and the domestic context allowed patrons and artists a certain freedom in their choice of decoration.

The Story of The Exodus

The story of Exodus begins, "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt," and recounts how, after the peaceful time of Joseph and Jacob, a new Pharaoh put hard taskmasters over the Jews and set them to building the cities of Pithom and Raamses. In Wolff's illustration, the Israelites are depicted laboring on the construction of the pyramids, under a watchful Egyptian eye.



Barbara Wolff, *We Were Slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt* from *The Rose Haggadah*. The Morgan Library & Museum, MS M.1191, p. 10 (detail). Gift of Joanna S. Rose, 2014. Artwork © 2015 Barbara Wolff. Photography by Rudi Wolff.

Public Programs

Talk **Hebrew Manuscripts, the Creation of the Rose Haggadah, and Psalm 104**
A Conversation with Barbara Wolff and Sharon Liberman Mintz

Today computer-driven machines can print thousands of books in minutes, so what is the value of a single manuscript? What is special about parchment, and why work with it rather than paper? Why do manuscripts have gilded pages and why are Haggadot the most illuminated of all Hebrew books? Artist Barbara Wolff and Sharon Liberman Mintz, curator of Jewish Art, The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary, will address these questions and explore a contemporary approach to ancient techniques and aesthetics.

A reception and viewing of the exhibition *Hebrew Illumination for Our Time: The Art of Barbara Wolff* will begin at 6 p.m. for program attendees.

Tuesday, February 17, 2015, 7 p.m.
Tickets: \$15; \$10 for Members; Free for students with valid ID

Gallery Talk **Hebrew Illumination for Our Time: The Art of Barbara Wolff**
Barbara Wolff, artist, and Roger Wieck, Curator and Acting Head, Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts

All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary. They are one hour in length and meet at the Benefactors Wall across from the coat check area.

Sunday, March 1, 2015, 1 p.m.

Family Program **My Very Own Illuminated Manuscript - Part 1: Colors and Gold**
In this miniseries children first become illuminators, then book binders, as they discover ancient book making techniques based on the Morgan's superb collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts and the dazzling modern illuminated works of Barbara Wolff on view in the exhibition *Hebrew Illumination for Our Time: The Art of Barbara Wolff*.

Part 1: Colors and Gold

What do stones, bugs, and flowers have in common? Join Morgan Manager of Gallery Programs Marie Trope-Podell to learn how to make your own paint with natural ingredients using medieval techniques. You will complete your art work with genuine gold leaf.

Appropriate for children age 8 and up only.*

* Please note that, due to the art materials being used, museum staff may not allow participation in the program if you arrive with children age seven or younger.

Saturday, March 21, 2015, 2–4 p.m.

Tickets: \$6 adults; \$4 for Members; \$2 for Children

Talk **Skies of Parchment, Seas of Ink: Barbara Wolff and her Place in the History of Jewish Manuscript Illumination**
Marc Michael Epstein

Jews have been creating and commissioning illuminated manuscripts since the High Middle Ages. The tradition includes books that run the spectrum between

the consummately elegant and the charmingly folksy. Marc Michael Epstein, Professor of Religion and Visual Culture on the Mattie M. Paschall & Norman H. Davis Chair, Vassar College, discusses how the art of contemporary New York illuminator Barbara Wolff continues the medieval tradition. Her work represents a space where nature crystallizes in aesthetic precision born of artistic passion for the small and beautiful.

Wednesday, April 1, 2015 6:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$15; \$10 for Members; Free for students with valid ID

Workshop

The Midas Touch

How did they do it? What magic did medieval artisans use to illuminate their manuscripts with precious gold and silver leaf? Here is a chance to find out more about this ancient craft, its history, materials, and techniques. With artist and illuminator Barbara Wolff, participants will have the opportunity to try their hands at gilding using historical materials.

Sunday, April 12, 2015, 2–5 p.m.

Tickets: \$35 adults; \$25 for Members; Limited availability

Concert

The Sarajevo Haggadah: Music of the Book

Merima Ključo, composer and accordion

Bart Woodstrup, artist

Seth Knopp, pianist

A multimedia work composed by Merima Ključo, *Sarajevo Haggadah: Music of the Book* traces the incredible journey of this most treasured 14th-century Hebrew illuminated manuscript. Inspired by the musical traditions of Spain, Italy, Austria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ključo collaborates with artist Bart Woodstrup and pianist Seth Knopp to present a multimedia performance exploring the *Sarajevo Haggadah* as a symbol of diaspora and return. A discussion with Merima Ključo and Geraldine Brooks, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and author of *People of the Book*, the historical novel that inspired this production, will follow the performance. This New York premiere concert coincides with the exhibition *Hebrew Illumination for Our Time: The Art of Barbara Wolff*, and is cosponsored by the Centro Primo Levi New York (www.primolevicenter.org).

Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 7 p.m.

Tickets: \$25; \$15 for Morgan and Centro Primo Levi Members.

Family Program

My Very Own Illuminated Manuscript - Part 2: Putting It Together

In this miniseries children first become illuminators, then book binders, as they discover ancient book making techniques based on the Morgan's superb collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts and the dazzling modern illuminated works of Barbara Wolff on view in the exhibition *Hebrew Illumination for Our Time: The Art of Barbara Wolff*.

Part 2: Putting It Together

If you have attended Part 1 of this miniseries, "Colors and Gold," you may bring your illuminated pages back to the Morgan and bind them into a book with book artist and educator Stephanie Krauss. If you have not, you can still make a

beautiful blank book. All children will use high quality professional materials to decorate.

Appropriate for children age 8 and up only.*

* Please note that, due to the art materials being used, museum staff may not allow participation in the program if you arrive with children age seven or younger.

Saturday, April 18, 2015, 2–4 p.m.

Tickets: \$6 adults; \$4 for Members; \$2 for Children

Organization and Sponsorship

Hebrew Illumination for Our Time: The Art of Barbara Wolff is made possible through the generosity of Daniel and Joanna S. Rose and the David Berg Foundation, with additional support from the Sherman Fairchild Fund for Exhibitions.



The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

The Morgan Library & Museum

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, photography, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405
212.685.0008
www.themorgan.org

Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

Admission

\$18 for adults; \$12 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop, Café, or Dining Room.