

The Visual Arts Program at KlezKanada – Program Origins and Trajectory

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As a visual artist, folklorist and frequent attendee of Jewish arts programs like KlezKamp and KlezKanada, I became concerned with the lack of innovative programming in the area of the visual arts. While there is great exploration and innovation in the areas of music and dance (to a lesser degree), the offerings in Jewish visual arts were much reduced. Course offerings were generally limited to techniques like papercutting and calligraphy. While I appreciate the “traditionality” of these genres, they also demand a great deal of precision and eye-hand coordination that is not always available to the casual student. Thirteen summers ago, I offered the leaders of KlezKanada an innovative program on Jewish/Yiddish material culture in collaboration with other summer faculty, especially Tine Kindermann, and KlezKanada fellows.

The visual arts program has been popular with KlezKanada attendees. The art room is a place where the non-musical (who may be accompanying a musical participant) find refuge and a place where the musical may find diversion. As it has gained in recognition, there are some individuals even come to camp specifically for the visual arts. The program prides itself on collaborating with other faculty, especially theater and the kids program; working on decorations and costuming for the large dance party and camp-wide memorials; and contributing to fundraising for the scholarship program.

What follows is a brief description of each year’s visual arts program taken from past KlezKanada program booklets since the program’s inception in 2003.

2003 *Amulets: Protection in the Material World.* Crafting special objects to ward off difficulties has been a constant across cultures throughout time. This class will examine the Jewish amulet making traditions and survey how other communities have crafted protective objects. From the written formula, to the natural amulet, the significance of colors, symbols, gems, plant materials and metals have combined powerfully to keep our world safe. This class will review historical forms and create personally meaningful interpretations.

Faculty: Emily Socolov

2004 *Growing Up Jewish in Eastern Europe.* This multi-part class will bring the richly inventive life of Jewish children and adolescents in Eastern Europe during the first half of the century (including the Holocaust) vividly to life. Learn how to sing your children and grandchildren to sleep with Yiddish lullabies, distract them with a little mouse made from a handkerchief or recite a rhyme to decide who gets the first turn.

Faculty: Emily Socolov, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Meyer Kirshenblatt & Itzik Gottesman

2004 *Childhood Memory Quilt Workshop.* As part of this summer's theme, Emily Socolov will teach a multi-session course, culminating in an exhibit. In this class, students will craft a panel for a collective project (which will be taken home individually by each student). Through the photo transfer process, attendees can incorporate historical images into their compositions. Working with found art materials, intricate stores of contemporary and historical childhoods can be made tangible. Students will provide interpretations for their work for a final exhibit at the conclusion of KlezKanada.

Faculty: Emily Socolov

2005 *Words Like Ribbons.* With KlezKanada 10, we embark on an enhanced art curriculum, led by returning faculty member, Emily Socolov with Ari Davidow, Vera Sokolow and Jamie Shear. This year's course Words Like Ribbons celebrates the love of letters and their translation into cloth and thread. In keeping with the theme of letters and numbers, we turn to *yud*, a small and powerful letter, and the 10th in the alphabet. It begins with the word *yiddishkayt* and the Hebrew word for hand, *yad*. We celebrate the work of our joined creative hands this year and for many years to come at KlezKanada. P.S. Did you know that the compound KlezKanada has ten letters as well?

Faculty: Emily Socolov with Ari Davidow, Vera Sokolow & Jamie Shear

2006 *Yiddish Visual Theatre Workshop: The Meanings of Kleyn.* This image-rich artists' dialogue examines the implications of going small, touching on the meanings of miniaturization, interiorization, childhood, and fairytale (eg. *Bebele*, the Yiddish Tom Thumb) and commoditization. Toy Theatre (or Paper Theatre), popular for home performances in the 19th century, is making a comeback! Using traditional techniques and whatever styles serve our content, attendees will create original Yiddish toy theatres, to be performed for KlezKanada and taken home. Your invented world can be based on history, experience or the curiosity to explore or recreate an imagined place. You may bring and incorporate family pictures, letters, etc. We will bring art materials and tools, and provide an inspiring mix of presentations by artists and scholars on Yiddish visual style, guided by Jenny Romaine of Great Small Works. Sessions include: The narrative paintings of Mayer Kirshenblatt, the mystical constructions of Tine Kindermann, musings on Jewish material culture with Jeffrey Shandler and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, experimental approaches to traditional materials with Emily Socolov and Vera Sokolow. Open to all teenagers and adults. It is a *velt mit veltelekh*. Make your little world within the big Yiddish world. Get your Yiddish visual style on!

Faculty: Emily Socolov & Tine Kindermann

2007 *Kveln far Kreln: Jews and Beads.* From early times to the current day, Jews have enjoyed beads, pearls and precious stones; using them to adorn ritual objects, bring beauty to daily life and special occasions and as a source of livelihood. This class will look at the ways Jews have used beads - and the ways in which beads can be employed to enhance Judaic objects. Amulets incorporate the special properties of stones, metals and other natural elements to synthesize belief and provide protection. Millinery traditions inspire our work with wire, from vintage beaded flowers to beaded yarmulkes. Embellished wedding gowns and beaded purses, fringed lampshades and crystal chandeliers create a glittering world. Along with embroidered gold threads, beads and sequins have adorned torah covers and *aron* curtains. Beads and charms

can bedeck *yads*, *mezuzahs*, candlesticks and spice boxes. We will explore techniques including peyote stitch, using looms, bead crochet, working with found objects and creating polymer beads. Most materials provided, there will be an additional charge for crystals and semiprecious stones.

Faculty: Emily Socolov, Vera Sokolow & Robin Young

2008 *The Law of Mosaics: Piecing Together the Fragments.* Workshop attendees will learn a range of techniques for creating assemblages with objects, from mosaics in plaster to copper-foil stained glass. Bring your broken plates, beach glass, small pet rocks, broken watches and desire to mend the world.

Faculty: Emily Socolov

2009 *Make Your Own Holiday Cards.* Are you tired of looking over the same selection of holiday cards every fall and spring? Can't find a *Basmitsve* card that doesn't feature a pompous poem? Would you like to make unique works on paper that make beautiful gifts or can be used in a myriad of other ways? In this workshop you will learn how to make your own cards using a unique mono print technique, collage, and 3D techniques. Beginners and advanced artists alike will achieve beautiful results with these methods, as well as have lots of fun! For all ages.

Faculty: Tine Kindermann

2010 *Mask-Making and Masquerading.* Calling all revelers to this hands-on workshop in creating fantasy personae! No longer just for Purim, fanciful masks are now acceptable summer attire! Plaster life masks are just the beginning. Feathers, cloth, paint, sequins, buttons, beads, and ribbons will give your creation its personal air. This year we'll reprise many of the mixed media themes of years past into an energizing creative brew. Those that wish can strut their creations at the Thursday night Masque! Take home your mask creation as a beautiful and unique wall piece. Materials provided but also feel free to bring your own materials (from seashells to sheet music) to personalize your work.

Faculty: Emily Socolov

2010 *Spinning Straw Into Gold.* In this lecture, accompanied by a visual presentation, visual artist and singer of German folk music Tine Kindermann will talk about where she finds her materials (among other places, in the streets of New York City), what some of the challenges are of translating folk culture into a language for the 21st century and why doing so not only still matters, but can even be controversial.

Faculty: Tine Kindermann

2011 *Jews and Birds.* From the adored *goldene pave* to the scapegoated *kapore*, birds figure widely in Jewish life and lore. Birds can be clean or unclean (and what would Jewish cuisine be without the chicken!). Sited throughout the Bible, in Midrash and proverbs, birds have been featured in *haggadahs*, in Yiddish popular expression, humour, musical ornamentation and lyrics, and visual arts. This year we explore the beauty and the cultural significance of birds. Not only is the community identified by birds when likened to the dove, but nourishing birds at times like *Shabbos-Shiroh* is mandated. The aviary we create from feathers, jewels and found items will form an exhibition at the end of KlezKanada.

Faculty: Emily Socolov

2011 *Jewish Paper Cutting.* For the first time at KlezKanada, multi-media artist Tine Kindermann will be offering a class in the classic Jewish folk art of paper cutting. Bring nothing but your fine motor skills and creativity, and learn how you too can make a *ketubah*, a special card or simply a unique and beautiful piece of art based on this timeless tradition.

Faculty: Tine Kindermann

2012 *Jewish Textile Arts.* Join Tine Kindermann and Emily Socolov this summer in an Open Studio in Textile Arts. From techniques of reverse applique, loom and off-loom weaving, sewing, felting and knotting, students can embellish t-shirts, create a personal *tallis*, craft a challah cover or just enjoy the colors and textures of fiber. *Tejidos* or weavings, form an important part of Latino as well as global handicrafts. An introductory slide lecture will survey different artistic traditions. Participants will then be set free to create and the studio will be staffed throughout the day. Please bring t-shirts and any other fiber materials to repurpose.

Faculty: Emily Socolov & Tine Kindermann

2013 *To kroynt di kep mit blumen-krantsn So Crown Our Heads with Wreathes of Flowers.* Flowers have long provided inspiration for creative expression. This summer we will be inspired by flowers! We will focus on making flowers from recycled materials, corresponding to the transformational and magical properties often attributed to flowers in folk songs and stories. Students can create objects and adornments from beads, paper, clay, fabric and other media. The more adventurous are invited to make works based on complex Jewish flower themes. A discussion of flower names in Yiddish will enhance our program.

Faculty: Emily Socolov & Tine Kindermann

2014 *Shutn un likht - Shadow and Light.* In conjunction with the theme of this year's retreat, the KlezKanada art faculty is excited to explore the visual equivalent of otherworldliness. Working with the evocative elements of transparency, light, and shadow, we will create nightmare-catchers, shadow boxes, and multi-media assemblages that explore the in-between, the unconscious, and the rich Jewish narrative folk traditions of dreams, *dybbuks*, and demons. Participants can organize their collections of symbols and charms in a special workshop on bookbinding. In ***Bookbinding for Beginners***, you can create your very own soft cover book with a simple stitching technique, a great way to collect and share folktales, songs, drawings, and special KlezKanada moments. Various craft materials will be provided to customize your book. Additional studio sessions will also be available for those interested in exploring other bookbinding techniques.

Faculty: Tine Kindermann, Emily Socolov & Oksana Hawrylak

2015 *Tinsel Painting.* Tinsel Painting was a popular art form in the late 19th Century, a reverse glass painting technique where the negative space is blacked out and a glittering background radiates through the clear, tinted spaces. This was an inexpensive means of creating signs, settings of cherished documents (like photos, *mizrachs* or *ketubahs*) or producing decorative wall art and jewelry. We will experiment with transferring images onto glass or sturdy plastic sheets and creating unique framed objects. We'll also make smaller, wearable items from glass gems.

Faculty: Emily Socolov with Tine Kindermann