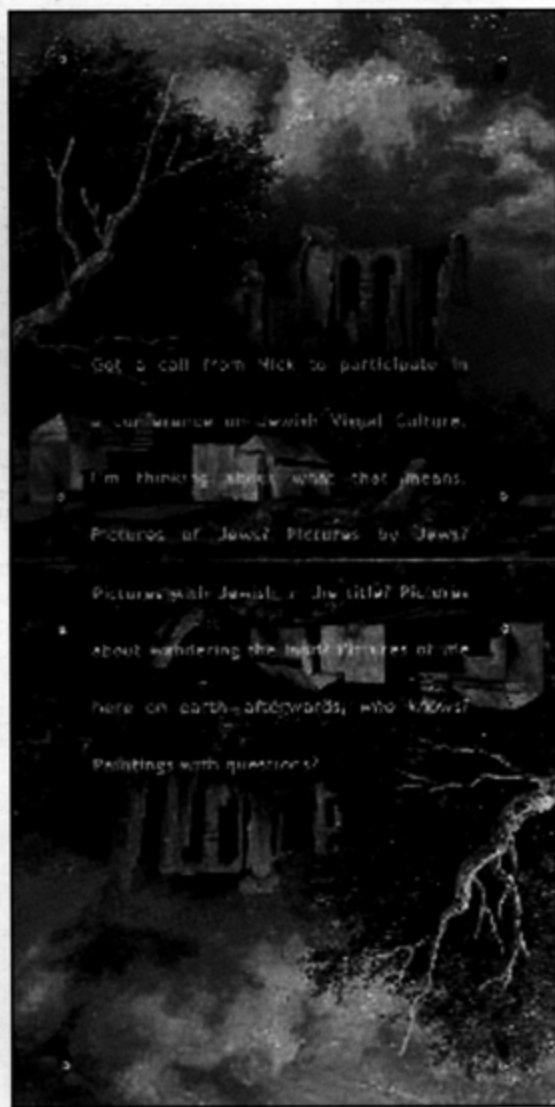


# INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

## Jewishness at the Crossroads



November 9 - December 16, 2000

University Art Gallery  
Staller Center for the Arts  
State University of New York at Stony Brook

## Jewishness at the Crossroads

The crossroads is a powerful place. You might meet the Yoruba trickster Exu there. It's where Robert Johnson met the devil down in Mississippi. It doesn't immediately feel like a "Jewish" location. What the new Jewish (typography intended) artists in this show and elsewhere do is take Jewishness and look at it otherwise, as if it has come to a crossroads. For there is a very familiar Jewish story in the United States that now goes by the name of Senator Joseph Lieberman. It's a great story but it's not the whole story. In the art world, the 1980s and early 1990s were a time in which identity and ethnicity were to the fore. Jewishness seemed to arrive late on the scene with the major show Too Jewish? at The Jewish Museum in New York City opening in 1996. Now it begins to seem that this show was the first of a new wave, not the last of the old wave. Questions now circulate around the meaning of whiteness, not whether Jews are white; about ethnicity in space as well as in the body; and newest of all, the question as to what Jewishness might mean in cyberspace and digital culture. The artists in this small exhibition address these large questions in powerful and intersecting ways. Albert J. Winn's empty Jewish Summer Camps echo and resonate with Susan Silas's installation of photographs taken of empty roads down which forced marches from the concentration camps once took place. Winn's photograph and text series My Life Until Now face and are mirrored by Ken Aptekar's repainted fragments of Old Master paintings with text superimposed on glass. Stephanie Snyder and Rachel Schreiber take different approaches to the place of Jewish identity in the hypervisuality of the new digital culture. This, then, is not a show curated by an aesthetic so much as a question: What now does it mean to represent Jewishness visually and for whom? This can only be good for the Jews.

Nicholas Mirzoeff  
Guest Curator

## Intersecting Identities: Jewishness at the Crossroads

What does it mean to visualize Jewish identity? How and where do Jewish identities intersect with other identities? What happens to preconceived notions of Jewishness in these intersections? These are just some of the pressing questions raised in the exhibition Intersecting Identities: Jewishness at the Crossroads. The metaphor of the crossroads in the title of this exhibition evokes multiple points of convergence as well as meandering points of departure. It is an apt diasporic model of continual movement through a multitude of personal experiences, geographic differences, and historical pasts. These transitions shape and define identities, which are necessarily plural as they are always in the process of being produced and transformed. The artists in the exhibition include: Ken Aptekar, painter, New York City; Albert J. Winn, photographer, Los Angeles; Susan Silas, installation artist, Brooklyn; Rachel Schreiber, video and web artist, Baltimore; and Stephanie Snyder, sculptor and web artist, San Francisco.

Ken Aptekar's work is a dialogue with history—specifically the history of art—and his self-identification as an American Jewish male. Aptekar's paintings are copies of fragments appropriated from historical masterpieces (often with slight variation) overlaid with narrative inscriptions etched onto glass and bolted to the reproduction. These textual fragments are often autobiographical—stories from Aptekar's childhood, for example—but sometimes it is the words of others, such as visitors to a museum or historical figures. The conjoining of the visual details and the textual fragments evoke the substance of memories at once clear and distinct, and still opaque and distant. In his painting I went searching for Jews in the Corcoran, for example, the overlaid text tells of Aptekar's looking for Jewish subjects in artworks at a museum, only to find them "in the background, huddled, anxious, busy," in a painting by Charles Frederick Ulrich. Aptekar's reproduction of the detail of the Jews brings people who were marginalized in the original to the center in his work. The text and image speak to the historical position of Jews in society and also to Aptekar's desire to find himself, or at least his ancestors, within the walls of the museum.

Albert J. Winn's photographs and framed texts document his life through his many identities—an artist, a writer, a gay man, a man with AIDS, a son, and a Jew, among others. Winn's black and white photographs in his My Life Until Now series appear

documentary but, rather than illustrate his life in a linear, limiting fashion like traditional documentary photography, the pictures expand our vision of the artist and the many facets of his life. The framed texts are short stories Winn has written about his life—stories such as his coming to terms with his given name and its associations with the dead cousin he was named after, his coming of age as a gay man, and his witnessing of the suicide of a stranger. In Winn's Jewish Summer Camps series, the focus is on the artist's memories of going to summer camp as a child and later working as a camp counselor. The photographs, however, do not show a vibrant campground full of excited young campers but, rather, the camp in the off-season—rows of empty beds, an overturned shed, deserted cabins. These now-empty spaces are at once nostalgic, wistful, and frightful, as they recall both happy memories and tragic loss—the vacant beds of the camp inevitably evoke imagery of abandoned concentration camps and empty hospital beds in the wake of AIDS.

Susan Silas's photographs of unpeopled landscapes in Germany and the Czech Republic are both eerie and evocative. For her project Helmbrechts walk, 1998, Silas re-traced the steps of women prisoners at the close of World War Two. An excerpt from this project is presented as projected slides of photographs taken along the path the prisoners marched in 1945, but shot some fifty years later. The images are of the beautiful yet desolate German landscape where prisoners traveled down the road towards an unknown endpoint. This literal pathway becomes a personal crossroad for Silas as her personal experience intersects with historical memory. Silas brings a feminist perspective to this landscape—there is a vaginal quality to these images visually reminding us that the sorrows Silas investigates are those of female prisoners. The photographic installation is accompanied by a sound piece called In the Waiting Room of Death. Reflections on the Warsaw Ghetto in which Silas reads an essay of the same title by Holocaust-survivor Jean Améry written to accompany a photographic exhibition of images on the Warsaw Ghetto.

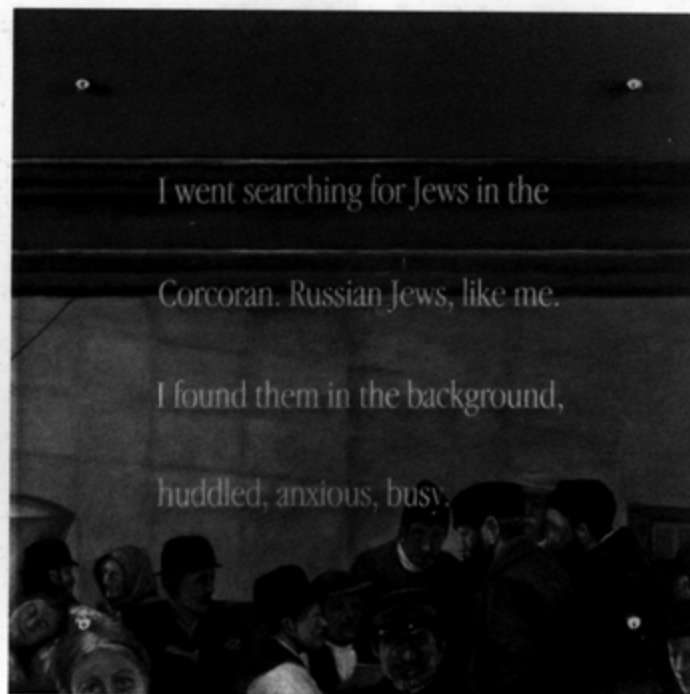
For her Anne in New York project, Rachel Schreiber stenciled the familiar portrait of Anne Frank onto various unexpected places throughout New York City—a brick wall, the side of a bus, a trash bin, a street vendor's cart. In what appears to be an irreverence for this quintessential Holocaust victim, Schreiber eschews familiar trappings of Holocaust imagery while exploring what she calls the "Cult of Anne Frank." The pervasive veneration

for Anne Frank becomes cultlike since, as a young girl, Anne's gender and age translate easily to an idea of "innocence" unjustly taken away from her. In the graffiti form kindred to the streets of New York, the stenciled images of Anne Frank's face mingle with other "tags"—identifying markings with significance to those who understand their visual language but essentially invisible to those who don't. Documenting photographs show passers-by largely ignoring the silhouetted face as it becomes a part of their everyday life. The benign portrait of Anne Frank overshadows the reality of her eventual murder, which Schreiber shows us has been culturally tucked away in the safety of the distant past.

Stephanie Snyder's sculptural installation is made up of thousands of small blocks of wax which together create the appearance of a pixel-based image. The "pixels" of wax form patterns influenced by topographical images of Jerusalem, Athens, and Auschwitz which Snyder obtains from the Internet. The piece concerns her interpretation of the emotional aspects of being Jewish, Greek, female, and an active participant in digital culture. Snyder's installation is entitled kefi, a Greek word which, in her words, means, "...emotional exuberance, losing yourself to joy and pain..." For the wall-sized installation, Snyder cast and hand-tinted thousands of blocks of wax, some with a small bas-relief symbol or hieroglyph—snakes, faces, blood vessels, buttons, teeth—which appear to form a personal iconography. The obsessive, repetitive pattern of the grid evokes traditional women's handicrafts such as textile weaving, as well as the ancient practice of inscribing words onto wax. In her related website <[www.kefi.com](http://www.kefi.com)>, Snyder connects the pixel-based grid of her sculpture to the actual pixels of words on the computer screen. Running across the screen is the National Socialist slogan "*Arbeit Mach Frei*"—work will make you free—a quotation from the gates of Auschwitz which Snyder has now reclaimed and transformed into a labor of love.

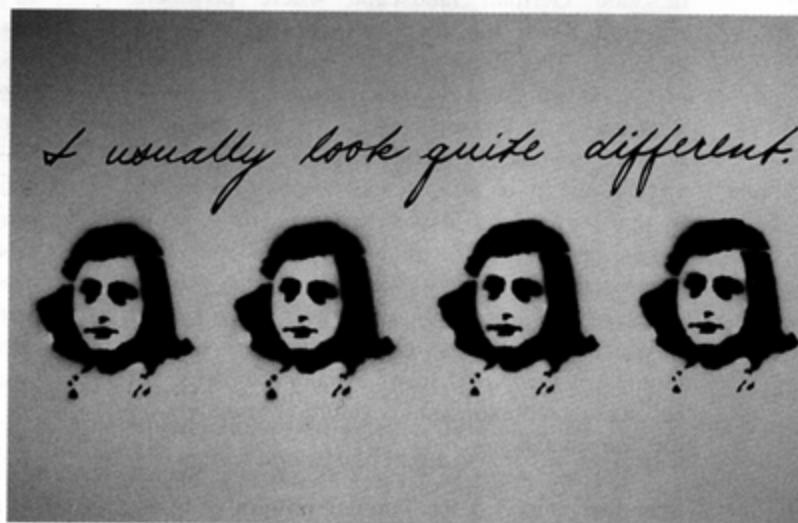
Karen Levitov  
Guest Curator

## KEN APTEKAR



I went searching for Jews in the Corcoran, 1997  
Oil on wood, sandblasted glass, and bolts, 30" x 30"  
Collection of Dr. Gail Postal, NYC

## RACHEL SCHREIBER



"I Usually Look Quite Different," 1996  
Spray paint and acrylic paint (dimensions vary)  
Lent by the artist

## SUSAN SILAS

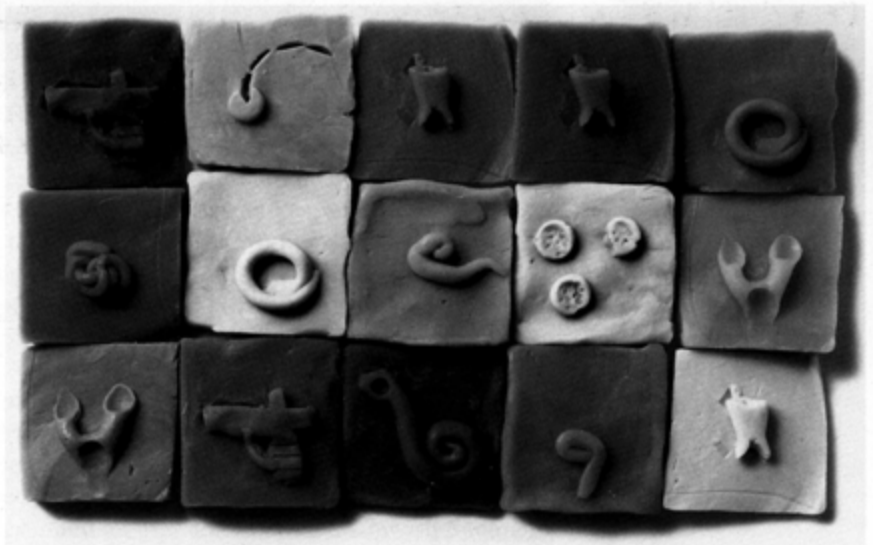


Excerpt from Helmbrechts walk, 1998

Installation: 480 slides, 6 slide projectors, and 3 dissolve units,  
approx. 12' high x 41' wide (dimensions vary)

Lent by the artist

## STEPHANIE SNYDER

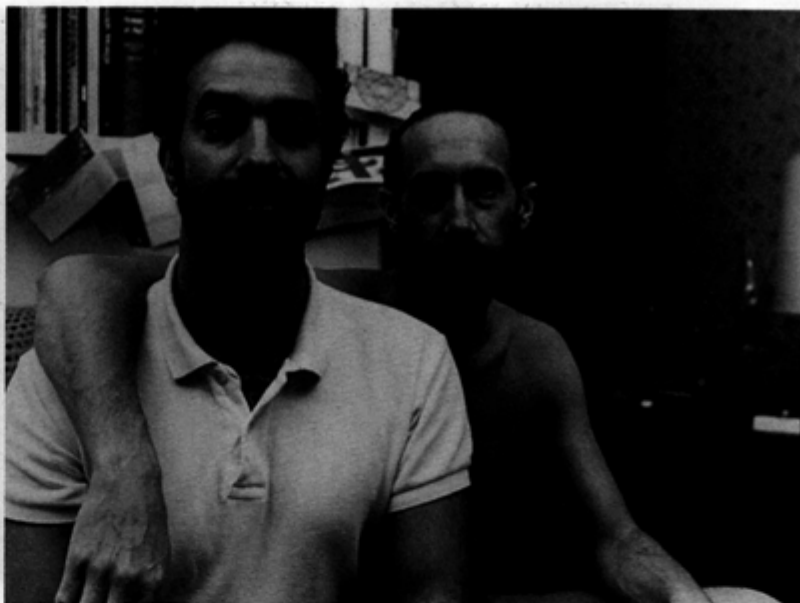


kefi, 2000 (detail)

Beeswax and organic pigments, 6' x 12' (dimensions vary)

Lent by the artist

## ALBERT J. WINN



My Life Until Now, 1991

Black and white gelatin silver print, 39" x 49"

Lent by the artist

## **ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES**

**Ken Aptekar** is a two-time National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship award winner in painting. His other awards include Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, Artist-as-Catalyst Award, a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award, and a Rockefeller Foundation Artist Residency, which took him to Bellagio, Italy. He received his MFA in 1975 from the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn. He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions in the US and abroad, including upcoming solo exhibitions at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, Kansas City; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; and the Bernice Steinbaum Gallery, Miami. His work is included in the collections of the Denver Art Museum, The Jewish Museum in New York, the National Museum of American Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and in numerous private and corporate collections.

**Rachel Schreiber** received her BFA in graphic design from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1987 and MFAs in Photography and Critical Writing from the California Institute of the Arts in 1995. She participated in the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York and is currently Acting Director of the Master of Digital Arts program at the Maryland Institute, College of Art in Baltimore. Her video and digital works have been exhibited at such venues as the L.A. Freewaves Festival, the World Wide Video Festival in Amsterdam, the New York Video Festival, the London Jewish Video Festival, the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, CEPA Gallery in Buffalo, and the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester. She has lectured internationally and has published numerous articles on her work. Her most recent project is a text and image web project entitled Third Generation: Family Photographs and Memories of Nazi Germany.

**Susan Silas** received her MFA from California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, in 1983 and her BA from Reed College, Portland, in 1975. Her work has been exhibited individually and in group showings in the United States, France, and Slovenia, including solo exhibitions at Art Resources Transfer, Jose Freire Fine Art, and fiction/nonfiction in New York; Stephen Wirtz in San Francisco; and Antoine Candau in Paris. She has received awards and grants from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, The Lee and

Lawrence J. Ramer Foundation, The Puffin Foundation, Ltd., The Andre and Elizabeth Kertesz Foundation, and Art Matters, Inc. She has taught at New York University and has been a Visiting Artist at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art College in New York. She has also published numerous feature articles for ArtNet magazine.

**Stephanie Snyder** is a San Francisco-based artist whose installations and drawings have been exhibited in the United States and Greece. She received her undergraduate degree in Studio Art from Reed College in 1991 and her master's degree in Studio Art and Art Education in 1998 from Columbia University. She has received artistic fellowships from the Thomas J. Watson Foundation, the Prince's Trust, the British Arts Council, and the Pilchuck Glass School and has completed intensive studio residencies in Greece, Scotland, and the United States. Her most recent solo exhibition, Anne, was presented at the Vortex Gallery in San Francisco in January 2000. Her first curatorial endeavor, Performing Judaism, was commissioned by the Nathan Cummings Foundation in New York and will debut at the Cooley Gallery at Reed College in February 2002.

**Albert J. Winn** is a Los Angeles-based photographer whose works have been exhibited across the United States and in Australia. He received his MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in 1991. His solo exhibitions include The Jewish Museum in New York, the Judah L. Magnes Museum in Berkeley, Metro Center for the Visual Arts in Denver, and the A.R.C. Gallery in Chicago. His work was also included in recent group shows at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Skirball Museum in Los Angeles, and in a traveling exhibition organized by The Jewish Museum in New York. Among his many awards is a National Endowment for the Arts /Western States Arts Federation fellowship, a UCLA AIDS Institute Katz Fund award, and, most recently, a fellowship from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture for work on his Jewish Summer Camps series.



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UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

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## SYMPOSIUM

### **“Jewish Visual Culture: Images, Identities, Intersections”**

November 9, 4:30 – 6:30 p.m.

November 10, 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Humanities Institute  
Melville Library E4340  
SUNY Stony Brook

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my gratitude to Professor Nicholas Mirzoeff, Department of Art, University at Stony Brook, and Karen Levitov, Assistant Curator, The Jewish Museum, NYC for curating this exhibition and for writing the essays in the exhibition catalogue.

I also want to thank Dr. Gail Postal for generously participating in this exhibition.

The curators and I gratefully acknowledge the Friends of the Staller Center and the Humanities Institute for their generous donations, which have helped to fund this exhibition.

Special thanks are also extended to members of the Staller Center for the Arts staff: Pete Pantaleo, Howard Clifford, Jr., and Michelle Wacker, for installation assistance; Pauline Cullen, Hedy Yue, Coyette Perkins, Ana Maria Ramirez, and Jinzhou Zou, Gallery Assistants; Julie Annunziato, Alex Chirivas, Carolyn Hoffman, Alex Klaric, and Gene Rossi, Gallery Interns; Liz Silver, Technical Director, Neil Creedon, ATD, and the Staller Center Technical Crew for exhibition lighting; and Marge Debowy, Assistant to the Gallery Director and Education Coordinator.

Most of all, I wish to thank Ken Apetkar, Rachel Schreiber, Susan Silas, Stephanie Snyder, and Albert J. Winn for sharing their work with the Stony Brook community.

Rhonda Cooper  
Gallery Director

Front cover: Ken Apetkar  
Got a call from Nick, 1999  
Oil on wood, sandblasted glass,  
and bolts, 60"x30" (two panels)  
(not in exhibition)

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