

Travel, Arts & Business

Photo images, Hebrew text joined in compelling exhibit

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TORONTO — YAHWEH! is a compelling exhibition of photo-based work by local artist Simon Glass.

On view from Feb. 6 to March 8 at Gallery 44, it addresses the themes of Jewish history, language, folklore and religion.

Featured are four suites (or groupings) of silver prints that combine photographic images with Hebrew text, thus creating a series of juxtapositions and seeming contradictions.

Yahweh, the first suite, is comprised of four prints displaying the letters that spell the unutterable name of G-d in a 6-foot-high vertical column. The brilliant white letters are superimposed upon photographs taken in 1945, after the liberation of various concentration camps.

Although the photos illustrate the emaciated corpses of Holocaust victims, the contrast provided by the white Hebrew lettering overpowers the dark images.

"What I'm trying to do with the Hebrew letters has to do with connecting them to Jewish ideas and these specific events in history," says Glass.

The *Book of Formation* suite features 22 silver prints, each with

a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in the texture of skin derived from up-close photographs Glass shot of various men and women. Drawing from an ancient kabbalistic creation myth, *Sepher Yetsira*, or *Book of Formation*, the group encapsulates the concept that the entire universe is created from the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

In *Book of Formation*, Glass arranges these letters in such a pattern that, according to many interpretations of the *Sepher Yetsira*, they can be used to animate a clay figure such as the golem.

Glass enlivens the letters of the Hebrew alphabet by punctuating them with the textures of human skin.

Merciful and Gracious includes nine silver prints, each a photograph taken by the Nazis of prisoners at Auschwitz. Glass took these photos from the Archive of the Polish State Museum at Auschwitz and placed a Hebrew letter on each to spell the words *rachum v'chanun*, merciful and gracious, two of the Thirteen Attributes of G-d. Behind these ornate letters rest the pallid faces of Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners bearing identification numbers.

Golem I and Golem II is the final suite and features two silver prints, each an out-of-focus photograph of a child bathed in deep shades of blue. Written upon the

foreheads of these two anonymous children is the word *emet*, truth.

"I chose children because I picture children as being a symbol of hope and positivity and looking towards the future," Glass says.

In addition, Glass selected the word *emet* because, according to Jewish folklore, it also appeared on the forehead of the golem, a clay creature who was brought to life to protect the Jews.

"It seemed particularly appropriate that folklore about a creature called to life to protect the Jews from their enemies is still relevant," Glass says.

However, the golem could be brought to a halt by its master by removing the letter aleph to spell *met*, or death.

As with all of his suites, Glass juxtaposes the narration of truth with the stark realities of death, always with the promise of hope and the power of creation.



Golem II, a silver print with blue toner and gouache.