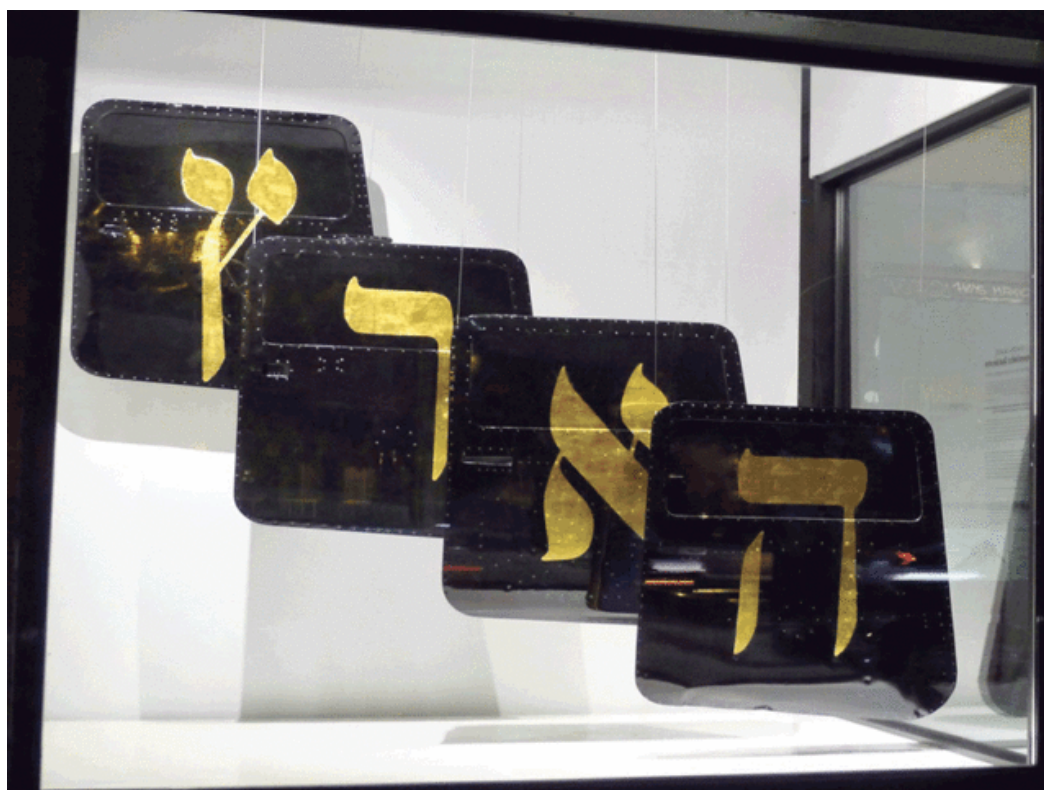




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ARTISTS'S WORK IS BASED ON A BIBLICAL SOURCE

By **Amy Grief** - August 13, 2017



Simon Glass's installation

Kensington Market might not be the epicentre of Jewish life in Toronto anymore, but the area around College Street and Spadina Avenue still shows signs of Yiddishkeit, thanks to a couple of restaurants and an exhibition space hosted by the grassroots Jewish community group, Makom.

Until Aug. 29, those passing by Makom's storefront window will get to see Hebrew lettering on display, thanks to artist Simon Glass's latest installation at this small gallery, known as Fenster (which means "window" in Yiddish).

Glass put hand-gilt Hebrew letters on blackened airplane doors, to spell out the word “*ha’aretz*” (land). He used materials from a 1960s-era Cessna passenger plane for the piece.

Like much of Glass’s work, this one, which he initially created back in 2011, is based on a biblical source – specifically, the book of Jeremiah and the verse:

“I saw the land and it was unformed and void; and to the skies and they had no light. I saw the mountains and they were quaking and all the hills shook. I saw and there was not a man and all the birds of the sky fled. I saw, and the grove was a desert. And all its cities were demolished in the face of the Lord, in the face of his anger. For so says the Lord: all the land shall be desolate but I will not make an end.”

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Glass has used biblical sources as inspiration for much of his work over the past two decades. In regards to Jeremiah, he told *The CJN* that, “It started when I noticed that Jeremiah used the words ‘*tohu va-bohu*,’ which I consider to be a very special text.

“Those words occur twice in (the) Tanach – once in Bereshit and once in Jeremiah. Those are the only two places where those two words occur together.”

Glass looks at how Jeremiah’s “mirroring” of the text from Bereshit is reflected in contemporary life. He places the word for “land” on blackened airplane doors, which he considers debris from modern life, suggesting that we can all get a more objective sense of the land by viewing from above.

“He (Jeremiah) takes the story of creation and turns it upside down, into a story of destruction,” says Glass. “And the kinds of detritus we create as societies around the world, there’s a kind of resonance with Jeremiah’s prophecy.”

Along with being an exhibiting artist, Glass teaches photography and cross-disciplinary art at OCAD University. He also translates biblical Hebrew into English and says that while he had a traditional Jewish upbringing, he started working with biblical and mystical texts in the early 1990s.

But, he explains, he doesn’t only create work for Jewish audiences.

"I create my work for audiences," he says. "But most Jews have kind of a different entry to the work, they're often able to understand at a different level." All of his pieces that include Hebrew come with a translation or interpretation.

His installation on College Street is Fentster's sixth exhibition to date. The gallery, which is curated by Evelyn Tauben, gained prominence after it featured an exhibition based on the old Mandel's Creamery sign that famously left 29 Baldwin St. in 2015.

Glass also has fond memories of that sign. "I used to enjoy eating at John's Italian and being able to see this Yiddish window," he says of the restaurant that preceded the bubble teashop currently at 29 Baldwin. "I thought what a fantastic piece of history."

Now he's helping bring that history back to the neighbourhood.

*Ha'aretz will be on display at Fentster (402 College St.) until Aug. 29. Glass will exhibit *The Ten Commandments/Prohibited Weapons* at the McMaster Museum of Art in Hamilton from Aug. 17 to Dec. 2.*



Amy Grief