



JEWISH
**ART
SALON**

JONIX

Jewish Comics; Art & Derivation



Hadera?
You mean
Haifa.



Uh...



No relatives,
no friends.
nobody.



Doesn't that
seem strange to you?
Someone disappears
and no one gives a
damn?

Sounds
depressing,
more than
anything.

Front cover:
Stuart Immonen & Scott Koblish (Michael P. Lustig Collection)
Fantastic Four, Vol. Issue 56, Page 20, Remembrance of Things Past (The Thing), 2002

Rotu Modan
Exit Wounds, Page 17, 2008

Graphic Design: Dorit Jordan Dotan

JONIX

Jewish Comics; Art & Derivation

Jewish Art Salon's Exhibition

Curated by

Joel Silverstein, Richard McBee and Aimee Rubenstein

Curatorial Advisors

Wendi Furman and Yona Verwer



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JOMIX - Jewish Comics; Art & Derivation

Curated by **Joel Silverstein**, **Richard McBee** and **Aimee Rubenstein**

From the invention of *Superman* by Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, to *Not the Israel My Parents Promised Me*, by Harvey Pekar and JT Waldman, Jewish artists, writers and publishers have served a primary role in the comics and graphic novel industry. *JOMIX - Jewish Comics; Art & Derivation* is an exhibition that documents Jewish artists creating comics and comic-book-inspired art. The term JOMIX refers to independently produced underground “Comix” of the late 60’s and early 70’s; edgy and transgressive in nature. By reinvestigating traditional genres like superhero, romance, horror, science fiction and confessionals through a Jewish lens, JOMIX artists freely examine complex questions of what it means to be both Jewish and a contemporary artist.

There are many reasons why contemporary Jews employ comics. They can return to their religious roots illustrating the traditional texts of *Torah and Tanach* in new and exciting ways: Zeev Engelmyer’s *Genesis; Abraham* and Dov Smiley’s *Jonah* demonstrate sequentiality and graphic organization in sacred stories to a wider, more visually conscious audience. Other works address issues of identity, difference, feminism, and homosexuality as confessionals: Miriam Libicki’s *Toward a Hot Jew*, Ariel Schrag’s, *The Chosen ‘Are You Jewish?’*, Yonah Lavery’s *Adventures of R. Giddal*, *Boy Mikvah Lady*. Artists use satire and parody, confronting political and/or religious hypocrisy with a particular Jewish sensibility: Josh Edelglass’ *Inglorious Basterds*, Dorit Jordan Dotan’s *Wonder Women of the Wall*, Eli Valley’s *Jungle Music* and *The Four Sons*. Finally, Al Weisner’s *Shaloman* and Josh Stulman’s *Israeli Defense Comics* make a direct reference to Superman as he appeared in 1938, but now re-envisioned as an openly Jewish character without any reservations or apologies.

The concept of Jewish identity defines even the oldest and most commercial comic book properties. The Thing; a Golem-like monster (a.k.a. Ben Grimm) in *Fantastic Four #56* drawn by Stuart Immonen, declares that he is Jewish. The script is based on creator Jack Kirby’s admission that The Thing was really a stand in for the artist/creator all along. Meanwhile, at DC Comics, Joe Kelly (script) and Howard Chaykin (pencils) produced a story whereby Superman tries to stop WW II but tragically fails. While standing at the gates of the Auschwitz, he vows that the Shoah will never occur again.

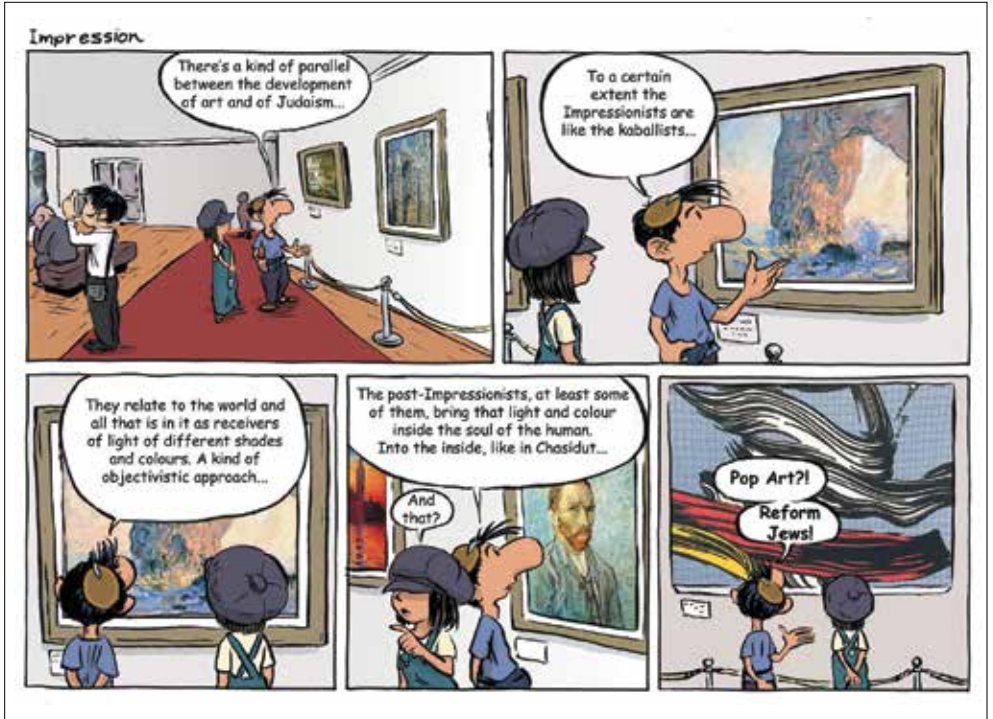
Speculations about Superman's "Jewish identity" have raged over the years, all the more so because the strips' creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster were two Depression-era Jewish teen-agers. The tantalizing question remains whether Superman was conceived as the covert Jewish Messiah and, if so, what would *The Man of Steel* have done during Auschwitz? Sixty years later, the staffs at DC and Marvel speculate on such issues and therefore, honor the Jewish origins of their characters' creators.

As comics have become more adult and multifaceted it is only natural for Jewish narratives to address the complex issues within the modern state of Israel. In Rutu Modan's highly praised graphic novel, *Exit Wounds*, the protagonist fears that a suicide bomber has killed his estranged father. The irony, or tragedy as you prefer, is encompassed by the characters' cool matter-of-fact demeanor suggesting, "Which suicide bombing are you talking about?" JT Waldman's illustrated graphic novel, *Not the Israel My Parents Promised Me*, is written by comics legend Harvey Pekar. A strong supporter of Israel in his youth, Pekar grows to be highly disillusioned and critical in what he sees as constant wars and colonialist expansionism. His final appraisal is highly negative yet the pain of his affiliation is more than evident.

Comic books represent a complex visual language complete with its own internal logic. Artists have employed its structure as a ready-made example of postmodern narrative. My own *House of El*, Archie Rand's, *Had Gadya*, David Wander's *Joseph and the Coat*, Shay Charka's *Impression: Beyond the Line*, and Sarah Lightman's *The Book of Sarah*, *Shana Rishona* all bring up issues of art and representation by depicting Jewish culture in relation to Western Art. Reflecting inter-cultural anxieties, Eli Valley ponders the "difficulties" of drawing Mohammed in *I Have to Draw Him* where terrorism has rendered merely thinking about this activity a dangerous act and a conceptual art of negation.

It is fascinating to see how contemporary Jews have voiced their creativity, concerns, and interests within the comics medium. In the process, they have created a stirring visual identity and body of work that is exciting, authentic and self-defining. Finally, contemporary Jewish comic book artists are free to explore all aspects of their creativity in ways unexperienced during previous generations, triumphantly advocating paradigms of reflection, observance and transgression felt on every page.

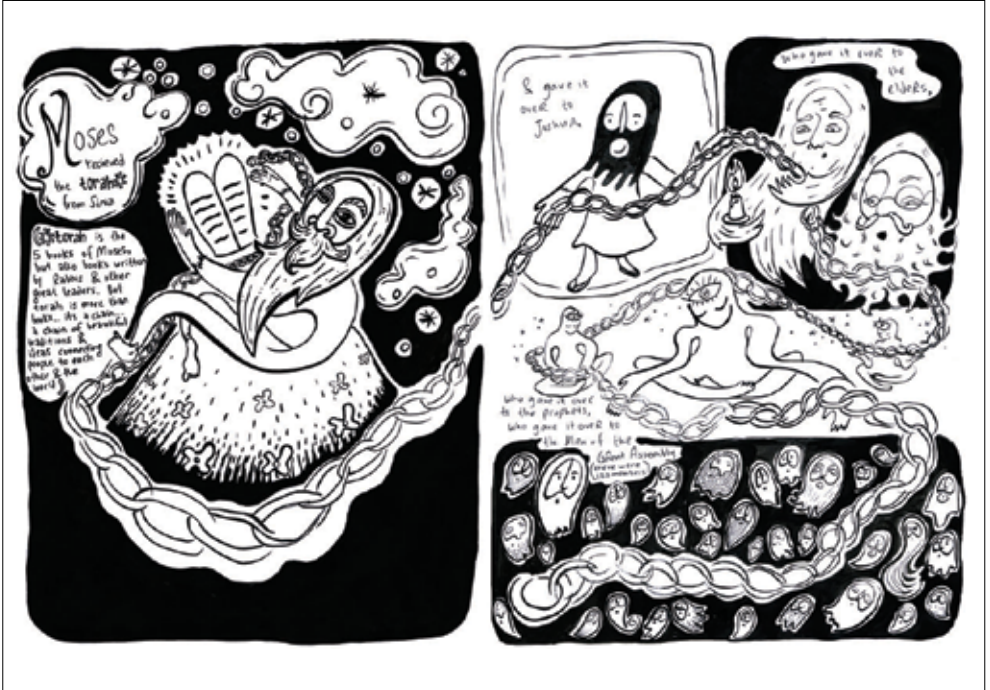
Essay by
Joel Silverstein



Two observant Jews wander around an art museum with hilarious results. As the male figure describes the art, he compares it to religion.



Corman depicts the grieving process of *Yahrzeit*, the anniversary of a parent's death, with a direct visual language of phantom limbs.



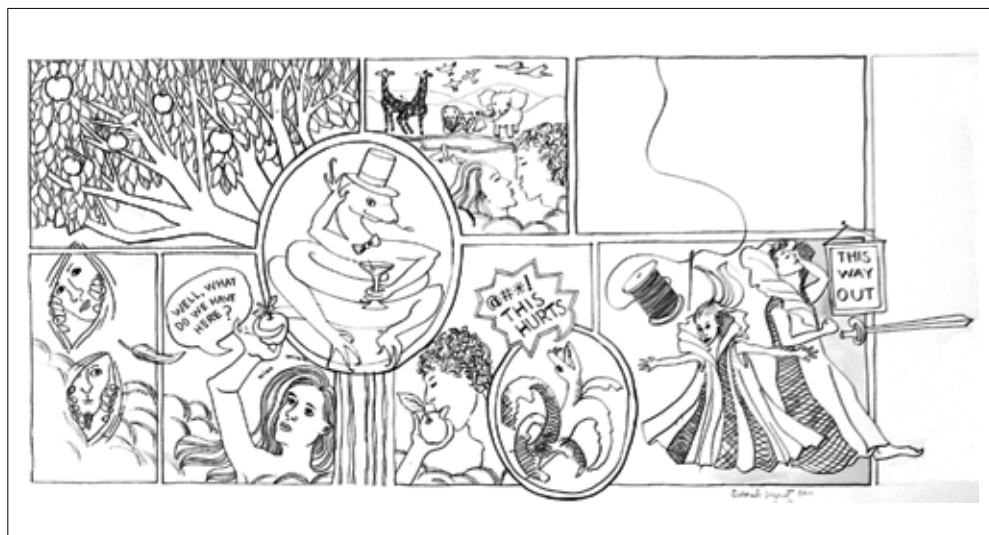
This last tractate of *Mishnah Nezikin* sets out to describe the “chain of transmission” passing the truth and wisdom from Moses at Mount Sinai to the people of Israel.



The Rabbi oversees women preparing for the Mikveh. Lavery's depiction of the Rabbi coyly questions his sexual orientation introducing a different level of commentary on the subject.



Finck relates a tale concerning her own father coming to America.



In this re-telling of *Genesis*, the snake is now a dapper dude with a bow tie and top hat. The needle and thread relate to a Midrash whereby God makes clothes for the couple out of the snake's skin.

2011-2012 SHANA RISHONA THE FIRST YEAR

If a man has recently married he must not be sent to war or have any duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married. Deuteronomy 24:5

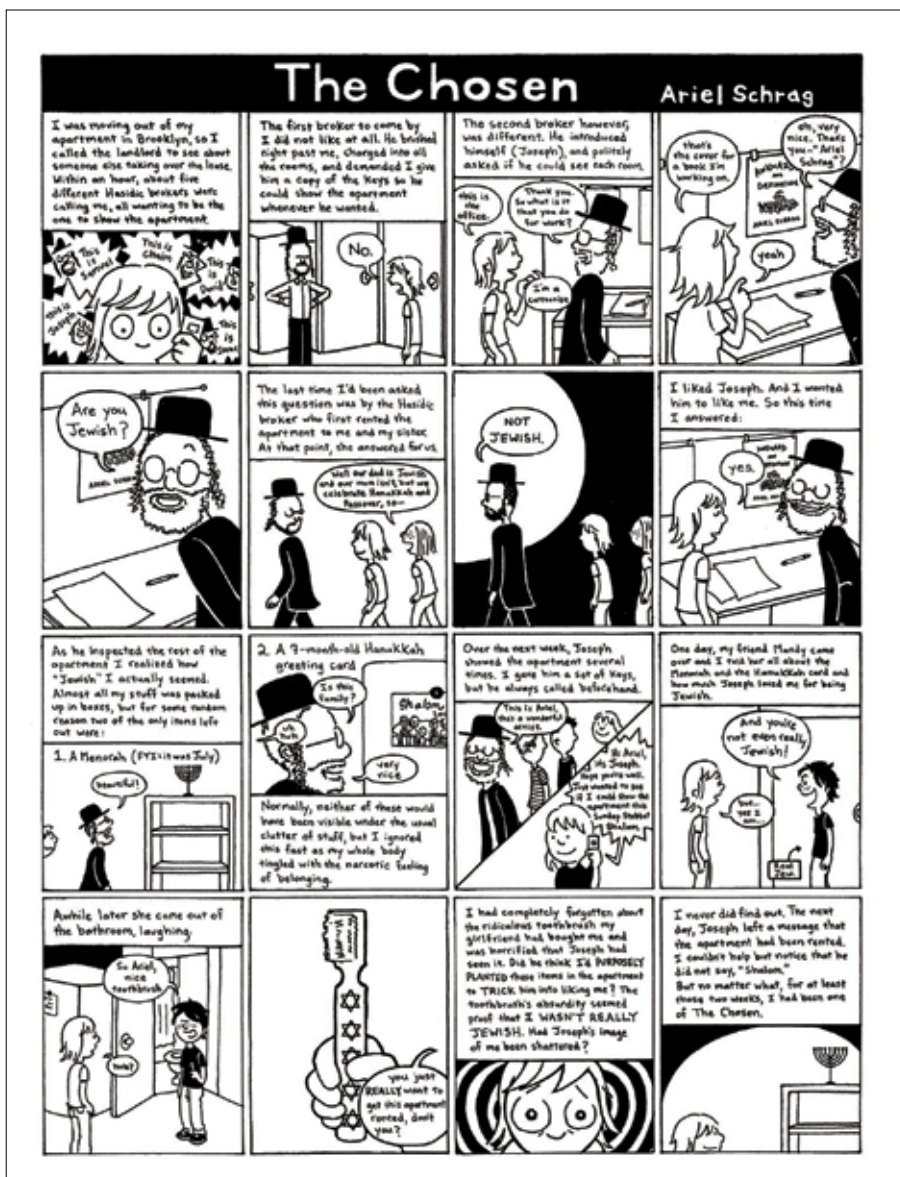


Since we've been married
we've done so much travelling.
Two wandering Jews
looking for a home.



Finding clues to the next stage of our life.

A compelling narrative about the first year of her own marriage, the artist cites the Hebrew Bible and repurposes images of the Virgin Mary and Titian's masterpiece, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1516-18.



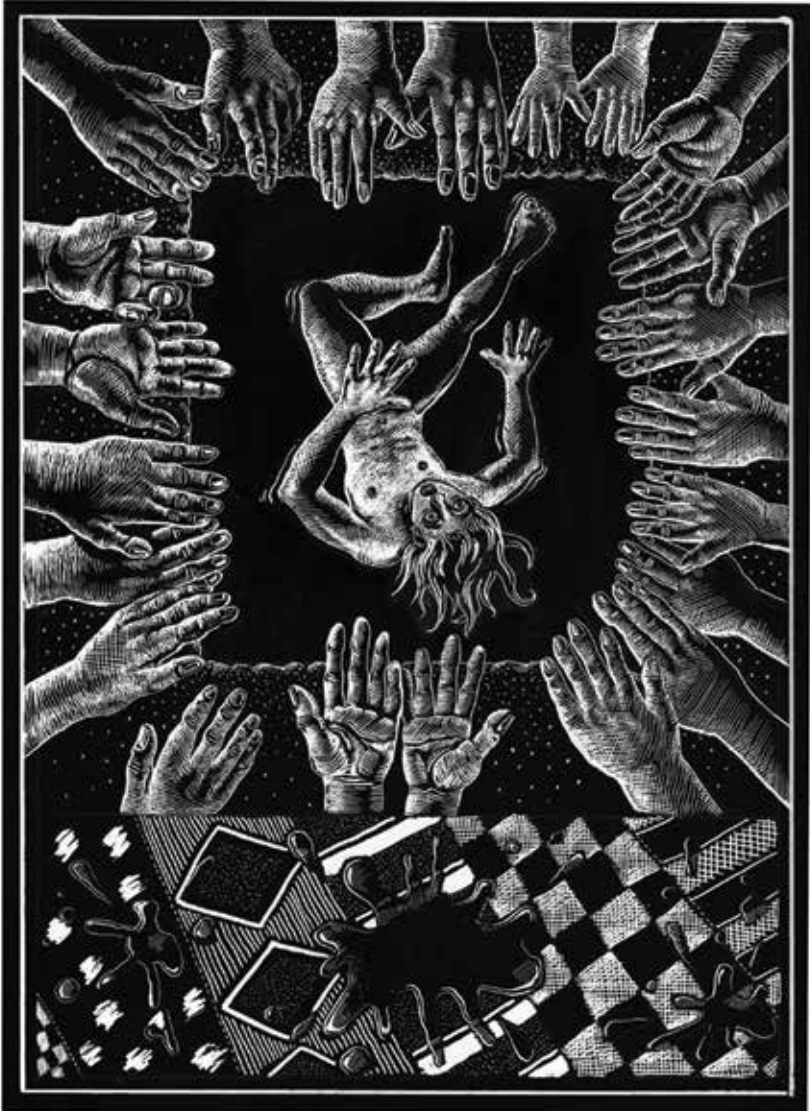
Schrag's dealings with a Chassidic real estate agent and the simple question 'Are you Jewish?' compels her to rattle off a litany of mixed messages concerning Jewish identity.



The young Nahum buys a burial site from Laban with the stipulation that he “rest” next to the late great Reb Yehuda. Laban cheats Nahum with predictable supernatural results.



A man who has spent most of his life searching for justice discovers a magical tree where lit lamps represent human souls. His sense of justice is put to the test as he tries to cheat Death.



These scratchboards update the Biblical narrative by recalling WPA art works from the 1930-40s, noir crime comics from the '50's and the age of 20th Century Totalitarianism.

Dov Smiley

Jonah, 2014



Smiley renders the “great fish” in the Jonah tale as a giant crab monster from a 1950’s science fiction movie, reminiscent of current horror comics like *Hellboy*.



Using photoshopped images from Pop culture, this artist examines the book of *Genesis*, Chapter 12: - Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee. -And what will be the property value?

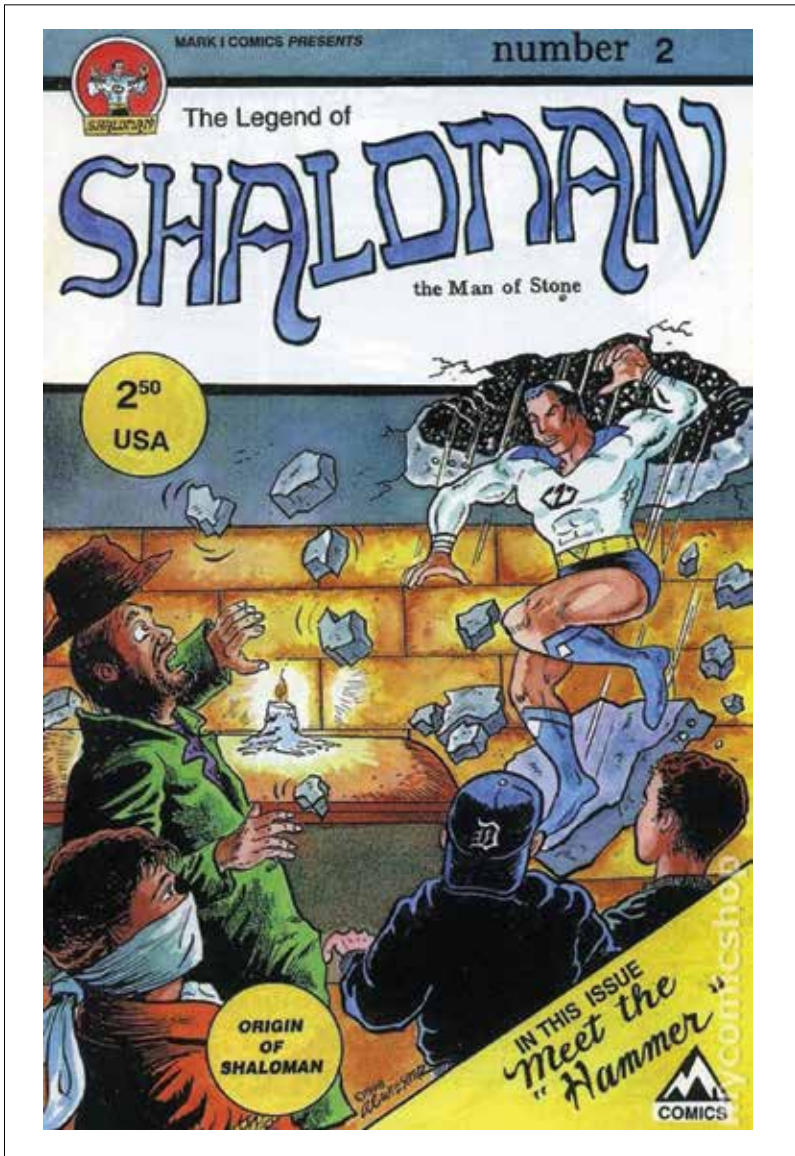
Joshua Stulman

Israeli Defense Comics

Number 2, Backcover



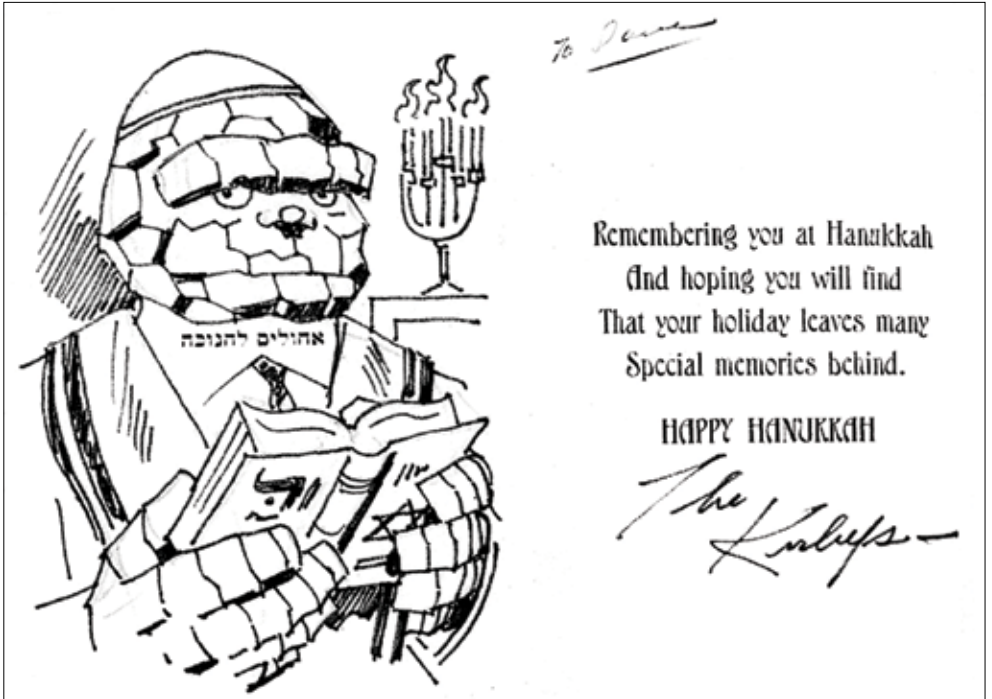
In this comic, the Golem of Prague, a mystical Jewish monster created from clay, functions as a surrogate for Jewish rage against anti-Semitism.



Weisner, a veteran of the comic book industry takes the Jewish Superman metaphor and creates *Shaloman*, an overtly unapologetic Jewish superhero.

Jack Kirby

Chanukah Card



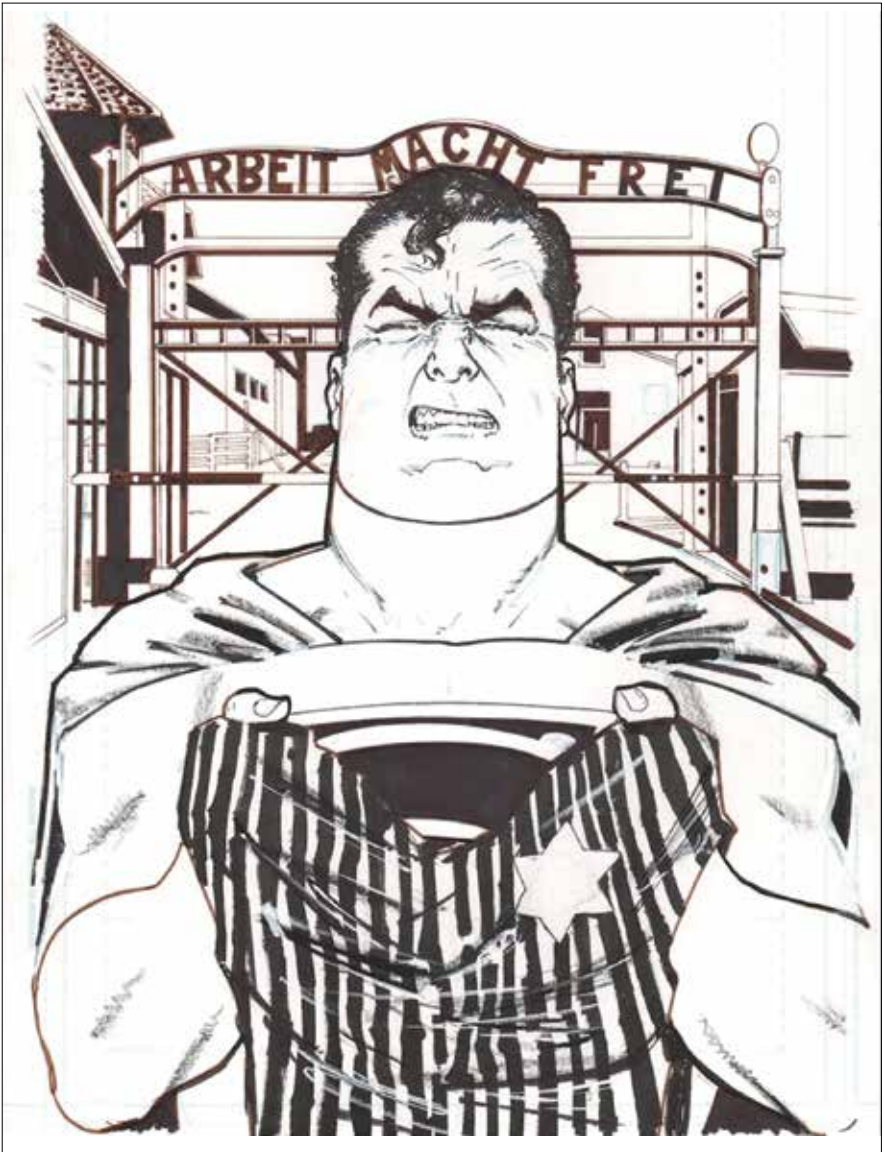
Jack Kirby, (1917-1994), was arguably the greatest comic book artist of the 20th Century, having invented most of the Marvel Universe. Kirby admitted during the 1990's that Ben Grimm of The Fantastic Four, aka The Thing was really Jewish and a stand-in for Kirby himself.



The Thing created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby acknowledges his Jewish heritage, including the recitation of the Sh'ma Yisrael prayer Script: Karl Kessel, Pencils: Stuart Immonen, Inks: Scott Koblish.

Howard Chaykin (Michael P. Lustig Collection)

Superman (Vol. 2), Issue 226, page 15; "This is Your Life, Part 1," 2006



Superman created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster tries to stop WW II and fails, vowing at the gates of Auschwitz that the Shoah will never happen again. Script: Joe Kelly, Pencils/Inks: Howard Chaykin

House of El, 2013. acrylic on canvas, 76" x 48"



The artist's series, *Jo-El/Jore-El*, seeks to locate the Jewish origins of the Superman story as in this painting; a Renaissance altarpiece, self-portrait and an ode to the Man of Steel. The artist/model sports a beard and hat favored by observant Jewish males.

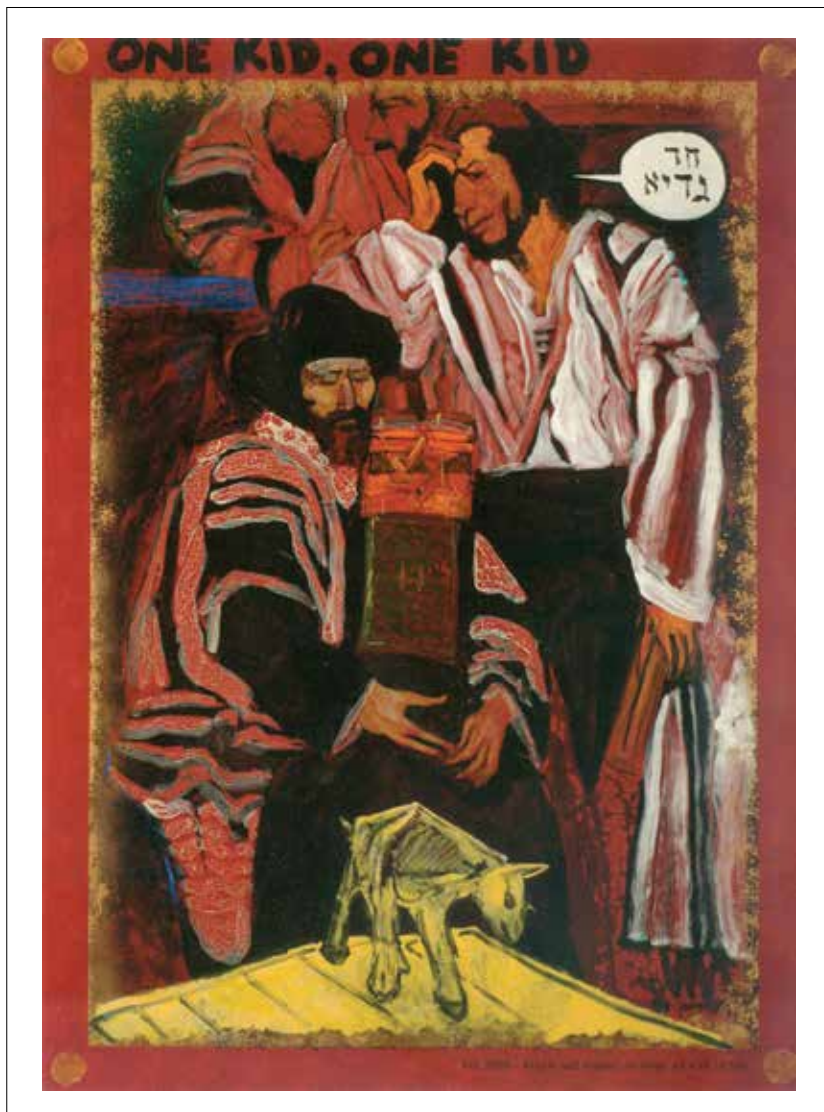
Arthur Szyk (Michael P. Lustig Collection)

Visual History of Nations: Israel, 1948



A Polish-Jewish artist of the Mid-century, Szyk created this image in honor of the founding of the state of Israel. His visual language strongly prefigures comic book composition and sequentiality.

One Kid, 2006, acrylic and enamel on vinyl, 68" x 48"



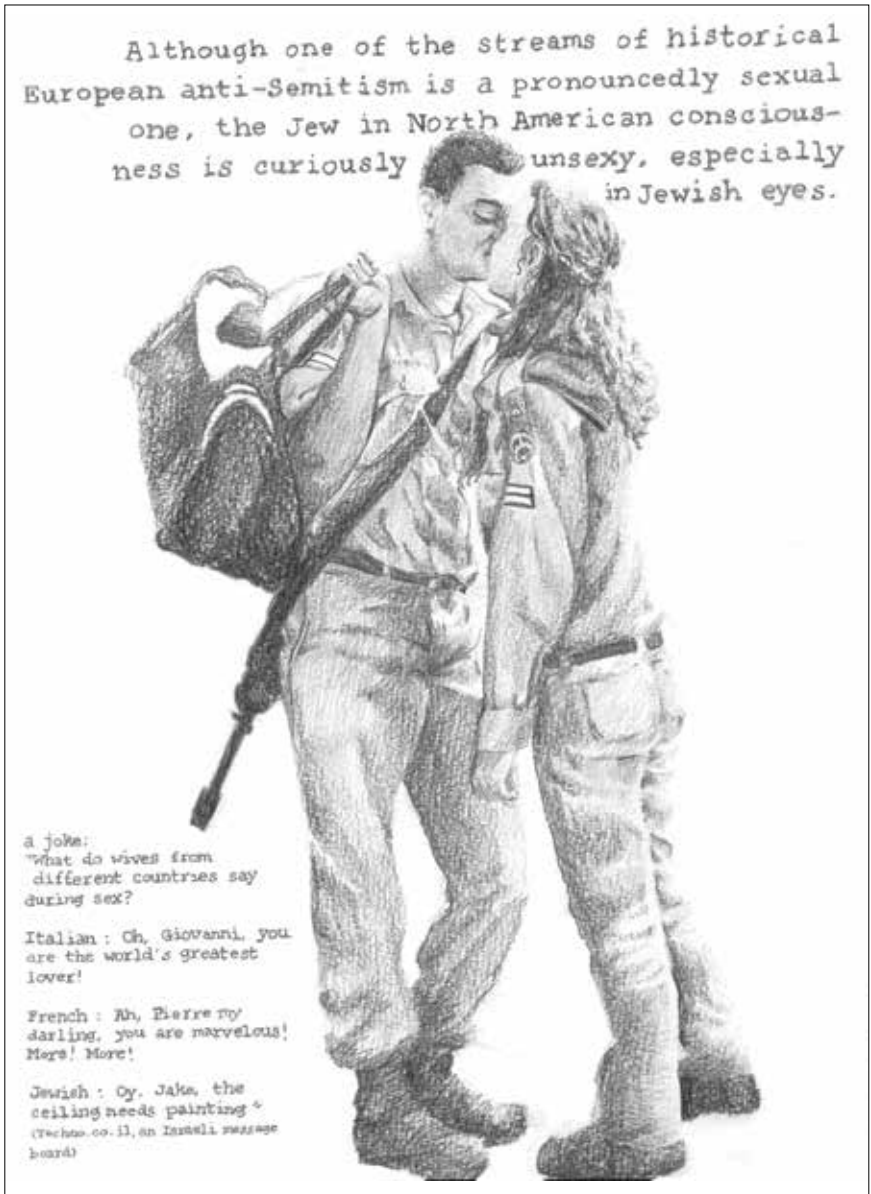
Rand illustrates the Passover song, *Had Gadya*. This image is based on *Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur*, (1878) by Maurycy Gottlieb and Horror Comics from the 1950s, like *Tales from the Crypt*.



A group of Israeli female soldiers listen over the radio to the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1960. As the event blares over the radio, the insidious nature of the "Final Solution" comes into terrifying focus.



This image of the night sky relates the wonder, awe and fear of living in Jerusalem, a place of Jewish solidarity, conflict and imminent danger at every turn.



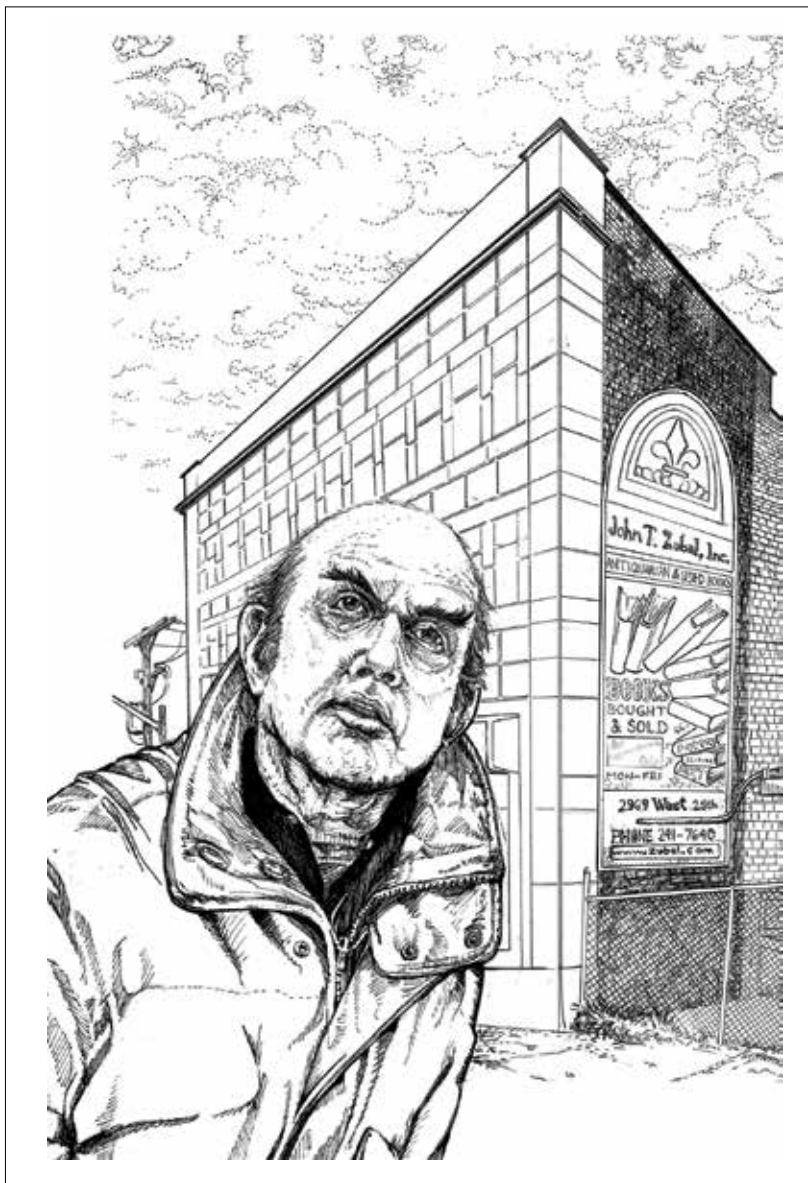
The sexual stereotype of Jews within American culture is contrasted with the Israeli military, where a palpable sensuality and unique personality is granted to them.



The group, Women of the Wall, is dedicated to women's rights at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Jordan Dotan's work represents them celebrating Purim dressed as superheroes.



Modan's graphic novel narrates an Israeli man investigating the possible death of his estranged father by a suicide bombing. The characters maintain a cool matter-of-fact demeanor, which suggests, "Which suicide bombing are you talking about?"



Written by comics' legend Harvey Pekar, the artist documents and renders the author's journey from American Zionist sympathizer to highly negative, anti-Zionist critic.



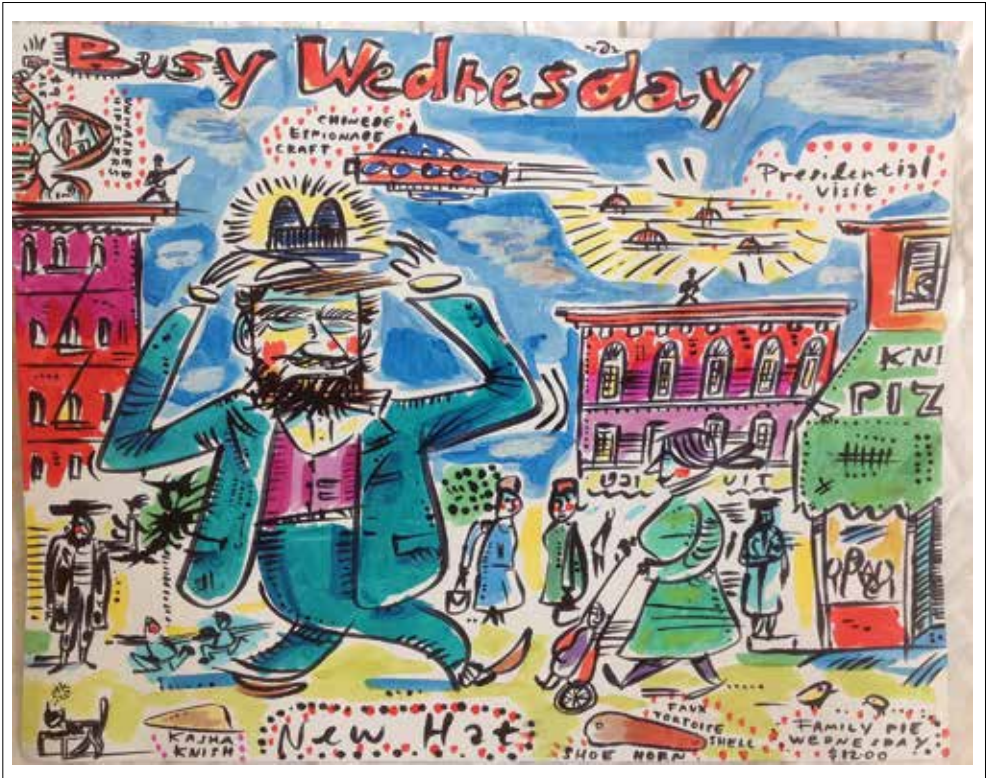
Benjamin Melendez, a Puerto Rican living in the Bronx, experiences gang violence and crime only to discover his Crypto-Jewish roots and a life changing transformation.



Completed immediately after the tragedy of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre in Paris, Valley bravely addresses the issues of religion, fundamentalism and art in uncompromising terms.

Ephraim Wuensch

Busy Wednesday, 2013



Wuensch captures the air of his observant community in Crown Heights with a bit of Rube Golderg-style wackiness including a kasha knish, a new hat, a Chinese espionage craft and a Presidential visit.



The Quentin Tarantino movie of 2009 depicts a band of Nazi-killing-Jewish Commandos during WW II. The troops have been transformed into well-known Jewish comedians, barnstorming their way into American culture.

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