

MEN OF **STEEL**
AND **WOMEN OF**
VALOR

COMIC BOOK PAPER CUTS

ISAAC
BRYNJEGARD-
BIALIK

THE TEMPLE MUSEUM OF JEWISH ART, RELIGION AND CULTURE
THE TEMPLE-TIFERETH ISRAEL
CLEVELAND, OHIO
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Every year Jews around the world build booths in their backyards and at their synagogues to celebrate the Festival of Sukkot. We invite family and friends to join us in these temporary dwelling-places, and a custom from Kabbalah encourages us to imagine who else from history we'd invite into our sukkot; we call these guests *ushpizin* and *ushpizot*.

At the heart of this exhibition is a series of large-scale portraits — the guests I've invited into my sukkah. My portraits of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs incorporate comic book super heroes as a way to explore their character and the meaning we can find in their stories. For example, Jacob's story involves the hiding of one's identity, and the discovery of one's true self, so his portrait is made of comics featuring Clark Kent, Superman's alter ego and the mask he wears. They are accompanied by additional guests from modern times.

I hope these portraits — and the rest of the work in the exhibition — are a reminder that at the heart of our tradition are the ideas of welcoming people into our lives, building community, and recognizing the hero in everyone.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'J' and 'B' with a superscript '2' (JB²).



Abraham: Ignition

Abraham and his wife Sarah were the first Jews, and their story is a journey into the unknown, with feats of strength, enemies to defeat, and secret disguises. The comics that make up this portrait of Abraham feature Reed Richards — “Mister Fantastic” — leader of the Fantastic Four and patriarch of a family of super heroes. Reed leads the four on their first adventure, which results in their super powers, and on further adventures as the family grows. A speech bubble alludes to Abraham’s often troubling conversations with God: “The sounds inside my head have started again.”

The comics in this papercut include:

- Fantastic Four #272 (Nov 1984), #286 (Jan 1986), #290 (May 1986), #296 (Nov 1986), Annual #22 (1989), #541 (Nov 2006), #543 (Jan 2007), #7 (Jun 2013), #2 (May 2014), Annual #1 (Nov 2014)
- Fantastic Four: The Final Doom (2007)
- FF #2 (Jun 2011)
- Marvel Age Fantastic Four #1 (Jun 2004)
- Marvel’s Greatest Comics Starring the Fantastic Four #95 (Dec 1983)
- Marvel Treasury Edition Featuring The Fantastic Four #2 (1974)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2018



Sarah: Forward

Sarah and her husband were the first Jews, and their story is a journey into the unknown, with feats of strength, enemies to defeat, and secret disguises. The comics that make up this portrait of Sarah feature Sue Richards, the “Invisible Woman” of the Fantastic Four and matriarch of a family of super heroes. Sue is treated as a weak character early on, but soon reveals herself to be the strongest of the four; she holds them together literally and figuratively. The comics in Sarah’s portrait feature laughter, a key part of her story, as well as a conversation highlights her partnership with her husband.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Fantastic Four #84 – Sue’s baby (Mar 1968), #272 (Nov 1984), #290 (May 1986), Annual #1 (Nov 2014)
- FF #2 (Jun 2011), #23 (Dec 2012)
- The Heckler #5 (Jan 1993)
- Marvel’s Greatest Comics Starring the Fantastic Four #54 (Jan 1975)
- Marvel Knights 4 #13 (Feb 2005)
- Ultimate Fantastic Four #1 (Feb 2004), #10 (Oct 2004)
- Ultimate FF #1 (May 2014), #6 – Sue gives birth (Oct 2014)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2018



Isaac: Hurt

Isaac's story is one of early pain, and redemption through love. Nearly sacrificed by his father, he finds love with the smart, kind, and beautiful Rebekah. Blind by virtue of old age and misled by his remaining senses, he is deceived by his son and wife for the good of generations to come. His portrait is made primarily of Daredevil comics, who loses his sight as a child in a heroic effort, and whose relationship with his father drives much of his early heroism — which is later driven by his connections to the people who enter his life later, and with whom he finds love and purpose. "I never know what might be coming at me," remarks the beleaguered hero in a speech bubble. "Things I can't see, things that might hurt."

The comics in this papercut include:

- Daredevil #15 (Apr 1970), #191 (Miller Feb 1983), #294 (Jul 1991), #13 (Mack/Quesada Oct 2000), #50 (Bendis/Maleev Oct 2003), #51 (Mack Nov 2003), #72 (Bendis/Maleev Jun 2005), #0.1 (Waid/Krause Sep 2014), #1 (Feb 2016), #612 (Soule/Noto Jan 2019)
- Daredevil: End of Days – Bendis/Mack/Janson/Sienkiewicz #2 (Jan 2013), #3 (Feb 2013), #8 (Jul 2013)
- MAD Magazine #69 (Mar 1962)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2019



Rebekah: Someone

Rebekah's story starts with a search for a wife for Isaac, but she is without question the hero in her story — its subject, not its object. She is a compassionate woman with her own identity and personhood, belying the words in the speech bubbles here which cast her as "someone's girlfriend / someone's daughter." Rebekah's character comes through in her kind treatment of camels, and in her championing of Jacob over his older brother Esau as the proper inheritor of the birthright; she is the force behind her story, and she chooses her future. She is a prophetess who speaks with God, a main character in a narrative that sometimes forgets to treat her as such. Her portrait is made of comics featuring Elektra, introduced originally as a love interest for the blind super hero Daredevil, but eventually being recognized as a strong-willed hero in her own right — who is willing to make the hard decisions that Daredevil can not.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Daredevil #50 (Bendis/Maleev Oct 2003)
- Daredevil: End of Days – Bendis/Mack/Janson/Sienkiewicz #2 (Jan 2013), #3 (Feb 2013), #6 (May 2013)
- The Elektra Saga #1 (Miller/Janson Feb 1984)
- Elektra #1 (Jun 2014)
- Wonder Woman #26 (Feb 2014)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2019



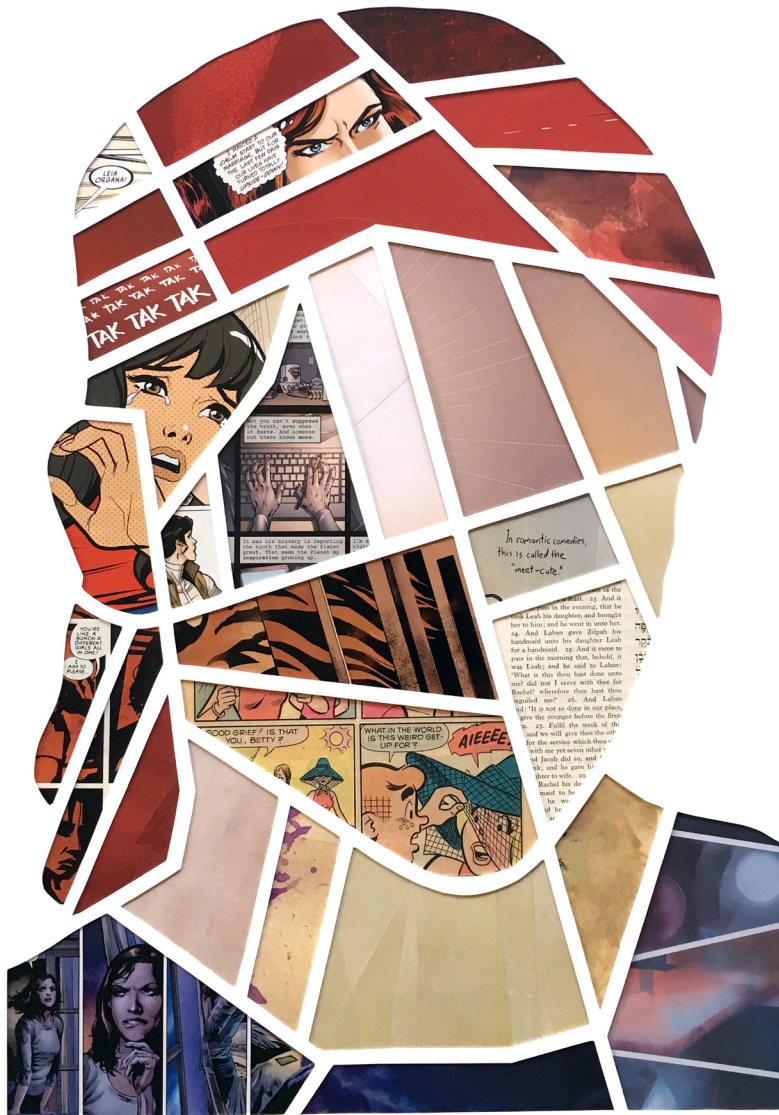
Jacob: Disguise

Jacob's story involves the hiding of one's identity, and the discovery of one's true self, so his portrait is made of comics featuring Clark Kent, Superman's alter ego and the mask he wears. Or perhaps Clark is his true identity, and Superman is the disguise. Jacob is a man of disguise and deception, a trickster — just as Kal-El is both the hero Superman and the bumbling reporter Clark Kent.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Action Comics #1000 (Jun 2018)
- All-Star Superman TPB (2011)
- The Man of Steel #1 (Jul 2018)
- Superman #1 (Aug 2016)
- Superman Unchained #9 (Jan 2015)
- Giant Superman Annual #2 (1960)
- The Superman Family #195 (Jun 1979), #201 (Jun 1980), #209 (Aug 1981)
- Superman's Pal Jimmy Olsen #1 (Sep 2019)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2019



Leah: Suppress

The rabbis suggest that Leah and Rachel are not just sisters, but twins — and so their portraits are both made primarily of comics featuring Lois Lane, award-winning reporter and love interest of Superman/Kal-El/Clark Kent (it's complicated). Both are equal in beauty, but Leah has “soft eyes” — perhaps from her sadness at being Jacob’s second choice. She has been forced by her father to fool Jacob into marrying her. In this papercut midrash Leah and Rachel work together to save Leah from embarrassment; Leah disguises herself as Rachel, and Rachel hides under their marital bed to call out in her voice so that Jacob does not catch on. “In romantic comedies,” reads a speech bubble, “this is called the ‘meet-cute.’”

The comics in this papercut include:

- Betty and Me #71 (Dec 1975)
- Kabuki #3 (Nov 2004), #5 (Jul 2005)
- Princess Leia #1 (Apr 2015), #2 (May 2015)
- Saga #8 (Dec 2017)
- Secret Wars: Secret Love #1 (Oct 2015)
- Superman #123 (May 1997)
- Superman: Leviathan Rising Special #1 (Jul 2019)
- War of the Supermen #0 (Jun 2010)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2019



Rachel: Answers

The rabbis suggest that Rachel and Leah are not just sisters, but twins — and so their portraits are both made primarily of comics featuring Lois Lane, award-winning reporter and love interest of Superman/Kal-El/Clark Kent (it's complicated). Both are equal in beauty, and though Jacob falls in love with Rachel he is tricked into marrying her older sister Leah first. In this papercut midrash Rachel and Leah work together to save Leah from embarrassment; Leah disguises herself as Rachel, and Rachel hides under their marital bed to call out in her voice so that Jacob does not catch on. “It was like there was a third person in the room with us,” reads a speech bubble in the portrait, which also includes early feminist comics by Jewish comics creators Diane Noomin and Trina Robbins.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Adventures of Superman #621 (Dec 2003), #649 (Apr 2006)
- Batgirl and The Birds of Prey #8 (May 2017)
- Event Leviathan #1 (Aug 2019)
- Goldie Vance #4 (Jul 2016)
- Lois Lane #1 (Sep 2019)
- Mockingbird #6 (Oct 2016)
- Superman #77 (Mar 1993)
- The Superman Family #209 (Aug 1981)
- Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane #25 (May 1961)
- War of the Supermen #0 (Jun 2010)
- Action Comics #317 (Oct 1964), #43 (Oct 2015)
- Twisted Sisters Comics — “The Fabulous World of Didi Glitz” by Diane Noomin (1976)
- Scarlet Pilgrim — by Trina Robbins (1977)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2019



Siegel: Chutzpah

"Siegel: Chutzpah" and "Shuster: Action" are portraits of the two creators of Superman, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Siegel, the writer, is represented with cut-up comics featuring some of Brynjegard-Bialik's favorite Superman writers from the past 90 years.

These two Jewish boys from Cleveland created the super hero who is arguably the most famous of the genre. Superman's story is a Jewish one: he begins life as an immigrant who must find a way to maintain the traditions of his ancestors and also live amongst a new people. He has powers and abilities that enable him to help others, and he considers it his responsibility to use those powers in the service of truth and justice.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Jerry Siegel — Action Comics #274 (Feb 1960)
- Jack Kirby — Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen #133 (Oct 1970)
- Louise Simonson — Superman: The Man of Steel #1 (Jul 1991)
- Geoff Johns and Kurt Busiek — Action Comics #839 (Jun 2006)
- George Perez — Superman #5 (Mar 2012)
- Grek Pak — Action Comics #25 (Jan 2014)
- Scott Snyder — Superman Unchained #9 (Jan 2015)
- Grant Morrison — Action Comics #15 (Feb 2015)
- Dan Jurgens and Jeff King — Convergence #0 (Jun 2015)
- Brian Michael Bendis — The Man of Steel #3 (Aug 2018)
- Brian Michael Bendis — Action Comics #1004 (Dec 2018)
- Frank Miller — Superman Year One #1 (Aug 2019)

12" x 16"
Mixed media
2019



Shuster: Action

"Shuster: Action" and "Siegel: Chutzpah" are portraits of the two creators of Superman, Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel. Shuster, the artist, is represented with cut-up comics featuring some of Brynjegard-Bialik's favorite Superman artists from the past 90 years.

These two Jewish boys from Cleveland created the super hero who is arguably the most famous of the genre. Superman's story is a Jewish one: he begins life as an immigrant who must find a way to maintain the traditions of his ancestors and also live amongst a new people. He has powers and abilities that enable him to help others, and he considers it his responsibility to use those powers in the service of truth and justice.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Joe Shuster — Action Comics #1 Reprint (Jun 1938)
- Jack Kirby — Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen #135 (Jan 1971)
- Curt Swan — Superman #376 (Oct 1982)
- Jerry Ordway — The Adventures of Superman #424 (Jan 1987)
- Alex Ross — Superman: Peace on Earth (Jan 1999)
- Derec Aucoin — Adventures of Superman #622 (Jan 2004)
- Francis Manapul — Trinity #4 (Jul 2004)
- Jim Lee — Superman #205 (Jul 2004)
- Karl Kershl and Renato Guedes — Adventures of Superman #645 (Dec 2005)
- Frank Quitely — All-Star Superman TPB (2011)
- Jim Lee — Justice League #1 (Oct 2011)
- John Romita, Jr. and Klaus Janson — Superman #39 (Mar 2015)
- Patrick Gleason — Superman #1 (Aug 2016)
- Ivan Reis, Joe Prado and Alex Sinclair — The Man of Steel #1 (Jul 2018)

12" x 16"
Mixed media
2019



Priesand: My Turn

"Priesand: My Turn" is a papercut portrait of the first woman to be ordained as a rabbi in the United States, Sally Priesand; it was made as part of a series of *ushpizin* ("guests") invited into a metaphorical Sukkah in the form of an exhibition in Cleveland, Ohio — Priesand's birthplace.

Rabbi Priesand is a trailblazer and role model, and so this portrait is made of female comic book heroes with similar characteristics, including Kitty Pryde, an explicitly Jewish super hero introduced as a new member of the X-Men 1980, whose heroism is informed by her Judaism; Black Canary, who brings a powerful woman's voice (literally and figuratively) to the Justice Society and Justice League; and Batgirl, whose journey has been from a young and innocent sidekick to an experienced and knowledgeable team leader and inspiration to others. "Now it's my turn," reads a speech bubble from Kitty Pryde in this portrait.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Batgirl and the Birds of Prey #4 (Jan 2017)
- Black Canary #8 (Apr 2016)
- Excalibur #66 (Jun 1993)
- Excalibur Special Edition (1987)
- Shazam! Power of Hope (Nov 2000)
- X-Men Classic #72 (Jun 1992)
- Astonishing X-Men #7 (May 2005), #13 (Apr 2006), #15 (Aug 2006), #16 (Oct 2006)

12" x 16"
Mixed media
2019



Meir: Fight

"Meir: Fight" is a papercut portrait of Golda Meir, the first woman to serve as Prime Minister of Israel. Meir has been described as the "Iron Lady" of Israeli politics; she was seen as a woman of strong will and straight talk, side-by-side with her image as a Jewish grandmother. "I took the fight to the enemy," reads a comic book speech bubble in the portrait.

This portrait is made of female comic book heroes whose strengths echo Meir's, including Kitty Pryde, an explicitly Jewish super hero introduced as a new member of the X-Men 1980, whose heroism is informed by her Judaism; and Sabra, an Israeli super hero whose secret identity is as a Mossad agent.

The comics in this papercut include:

- The Incredible Hulk #386 (Oct 1991) — Sabra
- Shazam! Power of Hope (Nov 2000)
- X-Men #1 (Jul 2013)
- X-Men Gold #28 (Jul 2018)
- X-Men: Kitty Pryde - Shadow & Flame #5 (Dec 2005)
- X-Men Legacy #238 (Sep 2010)
- Astonishing X-Men #15 (Aug 2006)

12" x 16"
Mixed media
2019



Jerusalem: Krypton

"Jerusalem: Krypton" is a fantastical Jerusalem cityscape made of cut-up comics featuring Superman's home planet, Krypton; it is a companion piece to "Jerusalem: Fortress of Solitude." Jerusalem is two things to the Jewish people: a historical place remembered with fondness and longing, and also a place in the present that serves to inspire and recharge; "Krypton" is the former, while "Fortress" is the latter.

Krypton is "a place of wonderment and dreams," where Superman was born. It represents his ancestors, his family, his traditions — all of the things he left behind when his parents launched him into space to escape the planet's imminent destruction. Superman is constantly trying to balance his respect for Krypton and his connection to the past with his desire to live amongst the people of Earth, learning their ways; Superman's story is the story of the Jewish immigrant in America. Jerusalem has a similar place in Judaism as Krypton does for Superman, and so this Old City landscape is made of cut-up comics featuring Krypton, from Superman's 90 years of publishing history — including a 1960 map of Krypton from noted Superman artists Wayne Boring and Stan Kaye.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Giant Superman Annual #1 (1960)
- The Man of Steel #1 – Silver Edition (1986)
- The World of Krypton #2 (Jan 1988)
- Superman: Peace on Earth (Jan 1999)
- Adventures of Superman #589 (Apr 2001)
- Action Comics #836 (Apr 2006)
- Superman #17 (Apr 2013)
- The Man of Steel #2 (Aug 2018)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2019



Jerusalem: Fortress of Solitude

"Jerusalem: Fortress of Solitude" is a fantastical Jerusalem cityscape made of cut-up comics featuring Superman's Fortress of Solitude, his Earth hideaway that serves as a place of reflection and contemplation, with reminders of his past and present to soothe and inspire him; it is a companion piece to "Jerusalem: Krypton." Jerusalem is two things to the Jewish people: a historical place remembered with fondness and longing, and also a place in the present that serves to inspire and recharge; "Krypton" is the former, while "Fortress" is the latter.

"It's my heritage," thinks Superman to himself in a speech bubble in this papercut, and that's what the Fortress is to him: his past, present, and future — all in one. Jerusalem is such a place for the Jewish people, and so this papercut is made of cut-up comics featuring the Fortress of Solitude, from Superman's 90 years of publishing history — including a 1961 guide to the Fortress from noted Superman artists Wayne Boring and Stan Kaye.

The comics in this papercut include:

- Superman #2 (Sep 2016)
- Superman: Up In The Sky #1 (Sep 2019)
- Giant Superman Annual #3 (Summer 1961)
- Superman #1 (Sep 2018)
- Action Comics #844 (Dec 2006), #1000 (Jun 2018)
- All-Star Superman TPB (2011)
- The Man of Steel #3 (Aug 2018)

18" x 24"
Mixed media
2019



Elephant Sukkah

"Elephant Sukkah" is an exploration of a Talmudic discussion on building a sukkah for the Jewish festival of Sukkot (Sukkot 23a). In particular the rabbis argue about what animals — if any — would be acceptable to use as part of a sukkah. This papercut focuses on the rabbis' consideration of whether one could use an elephant as one of the sukkah's walls, and under what conditions. The near-absurdity of the argument, couched within a discussion designed to encourage participation in a meaningful ritual, is both serious and silly — and illustrative of a tradition of never-ending questioning and consideration.

16" x 20"
Mixed media
2019



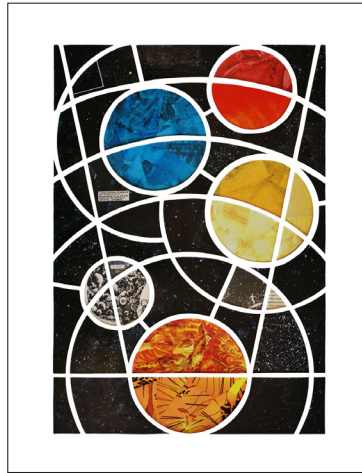
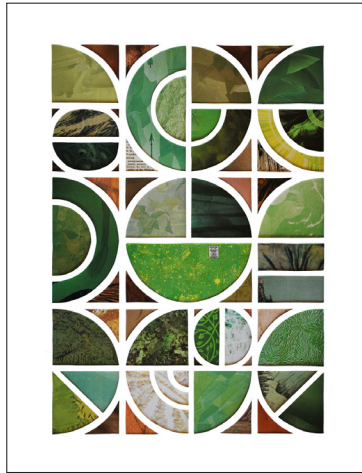
Camel Sukkah

"Camel Sukkah" is an exploration of a Talmudic discussion on building a sukkah for the Jewish festival of Sukkot (Mishnah Sukkah 2:3). In particular the rabbis argue about what animals — if any — would be acceptable to use as part of a sukkah. This papercut focuses on the rabbis' consideration of whether one could use a camel as part of a sukkah. They dismiss the idea of a camel serving as a wall, but allow that one could build a sukkah on top of a camel and still satisfy the biblical commandment — though Jewish law says you could not ride in that camel-mounted sukkah on holy days. The near-absurdity of the argument, couched within a discussion designed to encourage participation in a meaningful ritual, is both serious and silly — and illustrative of a tradition of never-ending questioning and consideration.

16" x 20"
Mixed media
2019

Paper Mishnah

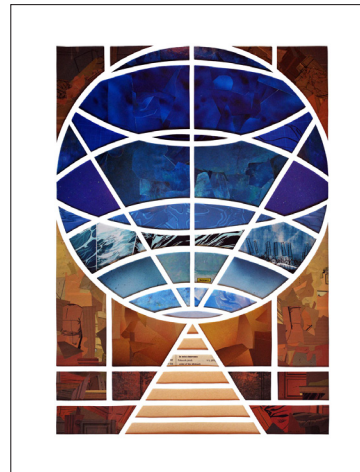
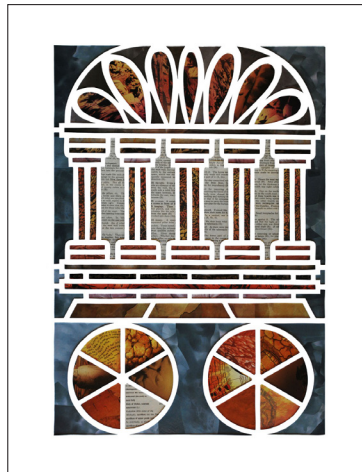
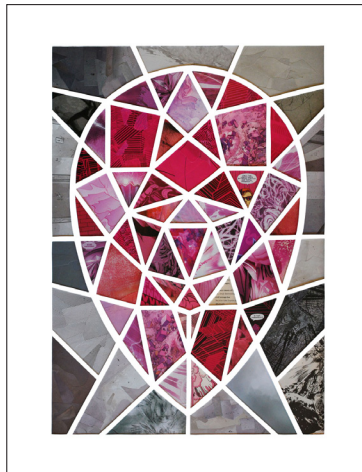
The Mishnah is the oldest authoritative post-biblical collection and codification of Jewish Oral Law, and dates back to the second century C.E. It consists of six orders, which are the foundation for Brynjegard-Bialik's "Paper Mishnah" series. All the cuts in the series incorporate cut-up Daredevil and She-Hulk comics — superheroes who also work as lawyers. Each of the papercuts in the series measures 18" x 24".



"Seeds" (Zera'im) is the first order of the Mishnah, and it deals with prayer and blessings, tithes, and agricultural laws. I've built this papercut to resemble an aerial view of farms and fields. Among other comics, Seeds includes pieces of a Superman story (drawn by Alex Ross) in which he works his parents' Smallville farm.

"Festival" (Moed) is the second order, which addresses the laws of the Sabbath and the Festivals. I wanted this piece to reflect the orbital dance of our solar system that results in the changing of the seasons. The Silver Surfer can be found touring the orbital byways, and Captain Atom comics are also a source.

"Women" (Nashim) is the third order, and it concerns marriage and divorce. This papercut is structured as an "old country" shtetl wedding ring; the artist has described it as a love letter to his wife. The papercut incorporates the Silver Surfer to create the ring's silver texture — he volunteered to become a herald for Galactus in order to save his planet and the woman he loved.



"Damages" (Nezikin) is the fourth order, dealing with civil and criminal law, the courts, and oaths. I've modeled the cut as a giant sapphire, drawing from the midrash which tells us that Moses fashioned the Ten Commandments tablets from a giant sapphire he found at the top of Mount Sinai. The character of Star Sapphire (from Green Lantern comics) is used throughout.

"Holy Things" (Kodashim) is the fifth order, and it is concerned with sacrificial rites and the Temple. In K'far Nahum, in the north of Israel, is the ruin of a synagogue with the image of a wheeled Ark of the Covenant, presumably to aid the Jews in taking it with them on their wanderings in the desert. The inside here is filled with laws concerning the building of the Temple.

"Purities" (Tehorot) is the sixth and final order of the Mishnah, and pertains to the laws of purity and impurity. I have built a mikveh — a bath for ritual immersion, filled with flowing water and entered via seven steps. The piece includes cut-up Wonder Woman and Moon Knight comics, as well as portions of comics titled Revival and The Infinite Horizon.

The three papercuts that comprise Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik's "triangle" series are an exploration of femininity through images of secular mythology and cultural power. The papercuts are titled to reflect the feminine aspects of three of the Jewish people's origin stories: "The Place" is the burning bush; "The Womb" is the revelation at Sinai; "The Source" is Miriam's well. These terms are all euphemisms used by Jewish sages to refer to the vagina, reflecting the female-focused narrative in the papercuts, which are made of cut-up comics featuring female super heroes. "The Place" is made of Captain Marvel (Carol Danvers), "The Womb" is made of Thor (Jane Foster), and "The Source" is made of Mera (Queen of Xebel and Atlantis); the triangles at the bottom of each are made of that hero's hair.



The Place

18" x 24"

Mixed media

2017

The comics in this papercut include Ms. Marvel #15 (Mar 1977), Ms. Marvel #15 (Jul 2007), Captain Marvel #1 (Nov 2015), and Captain Marvel #1 (Mar 2016).



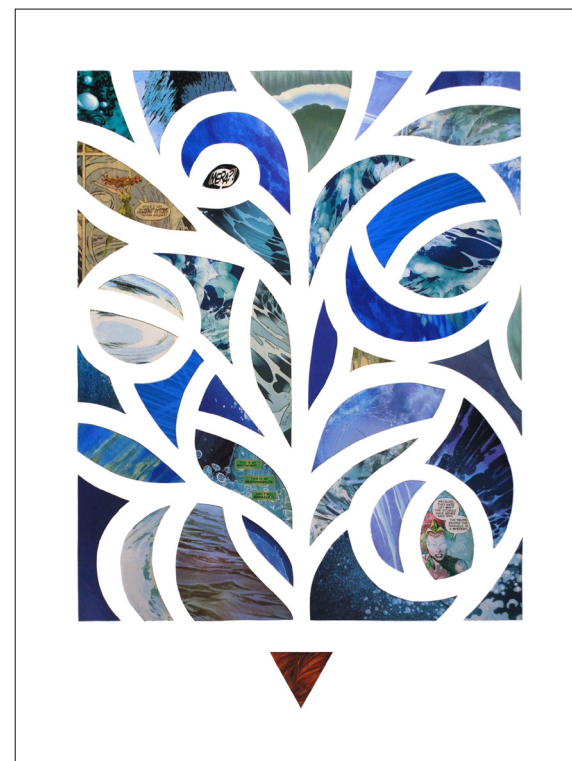
The Womb

18" x 24"

Mixed media

2017

The comics in this papercut include Thor #168 (Sep 1969), Astonishing Thor #1 (Jan 2011), Thor #1 (Dec 2014), Thors #1 (Aug 2015), and Mighty Thor #8 (Aug 2016).



The Source

18" x 24"

Mixed media

2017

The comics in this papercut include Aquaman #30 (Dec 1966), Aquaman Special #1 (1988), Aquaman #18 (Jul 2004), Aquaman #2 (Dec 2011), and Aquaman #21 (Aug 2013).

ISAAC BRYNJEGARD- BIALIK

Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik cuts up comic books and reassembles them into papercuts that explore the stories of the Jewish people, connecting popular culture with sacred texts. Blending pop culture and traditional Jewish narratives in seamless graphic compositions made of cut-up comic books, Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik's work is emblematic of the 21st century's mash-up culture. His work explores the role of narrative in the development and expression of identity, incorporating the stories and traditions of the Jewish people, filtered through the twin lenses of the traditional art form of papercutting and contemporary pop culture storytelling techniques.



www.NiceJewishArtist.com