



Super Heroes, Holy Land

New Work by Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik

Dortort Gallery at UCLA Hillel | Los Angeles, California | January 16 – March 14, 2014

“Super Heroes, Holy Land!” is inspired by Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik’s family trip to Israel this past summer — his first time back since he and his wife lived in Jerusalem for a year in the mid 1990s.

The work explores the Israel’s history and its present, as well as the narrative inherent in country-building and the ideals of Zionism. The papercuts show the country through his eyes, revealed in natural as well as architectural settings, in work driven by story and character.

The papercuts feature cut-up comics, including Israeli comics he purchased on his trip, as well as pieces of old books, maps and ephemera collected during the trip.



Jerusalem of Gold

“Jerusalem of Gold” references the story of Rabbi Akiva giving his wife a tiara with this name — just as the papercut explores the role of women in prayer and the continuing evolution and pursuit of gender equality at the Kotel (the Western Wall). The women in this piece are relegated to the margins, away from the Wall — and the speech bubble above Wonder Woman and her companion is blank, representing the silencing of women’s voices at this holy site.

Wonder Woman #178 (Sep 1968), #1 (Feb 1987), #46 (Nov 89), #44 (Jul 1990), #3 (Jan 2012)

Fantastic Four #314 (May 1988)

Ultimate Fantastic Four #1 (Feb 2004), #4 (May 2009), #10 (Oct 2004)

Road to Oz #1 (Sep 2001)

Fables #113 (Mar 2012)

All-Star Western #4 (Feb 2012)

Testament #1 (Feb 2006), #12 (Jan 2007)

Trinity #21 (Dec 2008)

All-Star Superman #3 (2011)

The Invincible Iron Man #20 (Sep 2007)

Misericordia #1 (Dec 2007)

Pathways Through the Bible. Mortimer Cohen (JPS, Philadelphia, 1966).

18" x 24"

Mixed media

2013



Masters of Mysticism

This scene reflects the winding roads in Tzfat, the northern city that was once the center of Jewish mysticism. It includes “The Great Staircase” that once separated the Arab Quarter from the Jewish Quarter, and now divides the Old City from the Artists’ Quarter. Backed primarily with Dr. Strange and Dr. Fate comics — who both work in alternate planes of reality — “Masters of Mysticism” explores the contrast between the solid stone beneath our feet and the ideas that can lift us to a different plane of existence.

Countdown to Mystery #1 (Nov 2007)

Dr. Strange #181 (July 1969)

Doctor Strange #65 (Jun 1984)

The Eternals #4 (2008)

The Immortal Doctor Fate #1 (Jan 1985)

Last of the Greats #1 (Oct 2011), #5 (Feb 2012)

L.E.G.I.O.N. '91 #34 (Dec 1991)

Marvel Two-in-One Presents The Thing and Dr. Strange #6 (Nov 1974)

Thor #27 (Sep 2000)

Ultimate Secret #1 (May 2005)

The Haskalah Movement in Russia. Dr. Jacob Raisin. JPS, Philadelphia (1913).

A Shabbat Manual. Ed. by W. Gunther Plaut. CCAR, New York (1972).

18" x 24"

Mixed media

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The Menorah

The Knesset Menorah is almost a history text, with scenes carved into detailing the history of the Jewish people. In “The Menorah,” cut-up scenes and speech bubbles from Daredevil comics stand in lieu of these stories; the story of this blind super hero who faces continual trials and challenges serves as a parallel to the high and low points of our people’s narrative.

Automatic Kafka #1 (Sep 2002), #3 (Nov 2002), #4 (Dec 2002)

Daredevil [vol 1] #107 (Jul 2008)

Daredevil [vol 2] #56 (Mar 2004)

Daredevil [vol 3] #14 (Aug 2012), #15 (Sep 2012), #16 (Oct 2012), #27 (Aug 2013)

Powerless #3 (2005)

Secret #1 (May 2012)

Testament #9 (Oct 2006), #11 (Dec 2006)

Jews, God and History. Max Dimont. The New American Library, New York (1964).

18" x 24"
Mixed media
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Fantastic City

This map of the Old City of Jerusalem shows its four quarters and major thoroughfares. Each of the quarters is represented by a member of the Fantastic Four: The Thing for the Jewish Quarter, Mr. Fantastic for the Christian, the Invisible Woman for the Armenian, and the Human Torch for the Muslim. The Temple Mount is backed with academic texts on these religious traditions.

Fantastic Four #17 [trade book] (Aug 1963), #248 (Nov 1982), Annual #18 (1984), #265 (Apr 1984), #272 (Nov 1984), #296 (Nov 1986), #297 (Dec 1986), #300 (Mar 1987), #314 (May 1988), #354 (Jul 1991), #410 (Mar 1996), #542 (Jan 2007)

Fantastic Four: Flesh and Stone (2001)

Fantastic Four 2099 #6 (Jun 1990)

The Last Fantastic Four Story #1 (Oct 2007)

Marvel Adventures Fantastic Four #34 (May 2008)

Silent War #1 (Mar 2007)

The Thing #22 (Apr 1985)

Ultimate Fantastic Four #4 (May 2004), #10 (Oct 2004), #42 (Jul 2007)

Life World Library: Israel. Time Incorporated, New York (1965).

Sacred Books of the World. A.C. Bouquet. Penguin Books, London (1954).

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Jacob and Esav

This papercut puts the viewer in the position of Isaac, blessing his sons as they separately approach him toward the end of his life. Time is flattened, showing both brothers reaching out their arms to their father though these moments were not simultaneous; it provides opportunity to compare the brothers' arms, to try to identify which son is which – and who deserves the blessing of the first born son. Made with Thor and Loki comics, representing the often-tumultuous relationship between the siblings.

Astonishing Thor #1 (Jan 2011)

Loki #1 (Dec 2000)

The Mighty Thor #449 (Jul 1992)

Siege: Loki #1 (Jun 2010)

Thor #191 (Aug 1971), #342 (Apr 1985), #356 (Jun 1986), #394 (Aug 1988), #616 (Dec 2010), #620 (Apr 2011)

Thor: Ages of Thunder #1 (Jun 2008)

Thor: Giant-Size Finale #1 (Jan 2010)

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Nahal David

With King Saul in pursuit, the young David hid in a cave at Ein Gedi near “Nahal David” (David’s Waterfall), where a quick-acting spider spun a web across the cave entrance, hiding his presence and saving his life. Here, the cave openings are obscured with bits of Spider-Man and his webs, leaving David safe in this craggy oasis asking for Divine help.

The Amazing Spider-Man #258 (Nov 1984)

Automatic Kafka #4 (Dec 2002)

Batman: The Dark Knight #23.3 (Nov 2013)

Dazzler #41 (Jan 1986)

Infinite Vacation #5 (Jun 2013)

Iron Age Featuring Dazzler #3 (Oct 2011)

Justice League #23.4 (Nov 2013)

Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man #91 (Jun 1984), #99 (Feb 1985)

The Sensational Spider-Man #35 (Apr 2007)

Pathways Through the Bible. Mortimer Cohen (JPS, Philadelphia, 1966).

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The Thicket

“The Thicket” captures the moment in the Binding of Isaac when Abraham finds a ram trapped nearby and sacrifices it in place of his son. The setting is Mount Moriah, now the site of the Temple Mount in the Old City. Within the thicket we find both Isaac’s confusion and Abraham’s certainty. The comics in the background include some snippets featuring Loki, the trickster god of Norse mythology, as a comment on the nature of God’s request of Abraham and his response.

Batman: The Dark Knight #4 (Feb 2012)
Daredevil: Marvel Knights #56 (Mar 2004)
Giant-Size Incredible Hulk #1 (Jul 2008)
Incredible Hulk #28 (Jul 2001), #38 (May 2002)
The Mighty Thor #324 (Apr 1984)
Powerless (2005)
Siege: Loki #1 (Jun 2010)
Swamp Thing #63 (Aug 1987)
Testament #1 (Feb 2006)
Thor: Ages of Thunder #1 (Jun 2008)
Tor #5 (Nov 2008)
War of the Gods #2 (Oct 1991)

How the Early Hebrew Lived and Learned. Edna M. Bonser. The MacMillan Company, New York (1957).

The Oxford Universal Dictionary. Ed. by William Little. The Clarendon Press, London (1955).

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Tower of David

The Tower of David as it now stands is actually an Ottoman structure, having been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times since it was first built in the second century B.C.E. — with no connection to King David at all. Nonetheless it has come to represent him and his palace, and has a place on every Jerusalem tourist's list. In addition to the stone textures taken from comics used to build this paper tower, there are pieces from Theodore Herzl's speech at the First Zionist Conference and from a traveler's phrasebook, underscoring the dichotomy between the history of Israel and the way these sites are experienced by the tourist.

Automatic Kafka #1 (Sep 2002)
300 #2 and #3 (Jun and Jul 1998)
Aquaman #23.1 (Nov 2013)
Dreadstar and Company #6
(Dec 1985)
Green Lantern #23.3 (Nov 2013)
The Infinite Horizon #4 (Sep 2011)
Infinite Vacation #5 (Jan 2013)
Justice League of America #7.4 (Nov 2013)
Secret #2 (Jun 2012)
Warlock and the Infinity Watch #12 (Jan 1993)
Wonder Woman #23.2 (Nov 2013)

Berlitz Hebrew Phrase Book. Grosset & Dunlap, New York (1964).
Israel. Ed. by Yigael Yadin. Massadah Publishing Co. Ltd., Tel Aviv (1958).
Portion used is an essay by David Ben-Gurion.
"The Jewish State." Theodore Herzl, 1896.

24" x 36"
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Altar Flame

The eternal flame on the altar was a symbol of God's continuing presence with the Jewish people, and people from across the land would journey to Jerusalem during the three festivals — as these sacrifices could only be fulfilled in this one spot. The presence of this flame and the sacrifices that were made on the altar were a very physical process that we have since replaced with the work of our minds and the recitation of words, hence the inclusion of parts of the Life Science Library volume titled, *The Mind*.

300 #2 (Jun 1998)

5 Days to Die #2 and #5 (Sep 2010)

Automatic Kafka #2 (Oct 2002) and #3 (Nov 2002)

Avengers vs. X-Men #1 (Jun 2012)

The Infinite Horizon #6 (Nov 2011)

Paradise X #8 (Feb 2003)

Ten Grand #3 (Jul 2013)

Wonder Woman #44 (Jul 1990)

X-Infernus #1 (Feb 2009)

X-Men #199 (Nov 1985)

Life Science Library: The Mind. Ed. by John Rowan Wilson. Time-Life Books, Virginia (1980).

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Altar Smoke

The smoke rising from the altar at the Temple's Holy of Holies was the physical remnant of communicating with God in ancient times – it was evidence that we had engaged with the Eternal. The smoke would bring sweet smells up to the very anthropomorphized God that could only be addressed in this way, in this particular spot. The smoke represents the direct line of communication with God; Jerusalem is still considered the place with that direct connection to God.

Astonishing X-Men #26 (Oct 2008)
Automatic Kafka #1 (Sep 2002) and #4 (Dec 2002)
Batman: The Black Glove (2008)
The Infinite Horizon #4 (Apr 2009) and #6 (Nov 2011)
Judenhass (2008)
Marvels: Eye of the Camera #1 (Feb 2009)
The Mighty Thor #399 (Jan 1989)
The New Mutants #27 (May 1985)
ROM #31 (Jun 1982)
Superman #77 (Mar 1993) and #18 (May 2013)
X-Men Legacy #246 (May 2011)

The World of Ancient Israel. David Meilsheim. Tudor Publishing Company, New York (1973).

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Tree of Knowledge

The “Tree of Knowledge” is inspired by a vision of Israel in its early years being planted with trees funded by Jews around the world. This tree is a representation of this bustling growth of the state, backed by cut-up dictionaries and representations of books and libraries from comics.

300 #2 (Jun 1998)
Action Comics #23.1 and #23.3 (Nov 2013)
Age of Reptiles #2 (Jun 1996)
The Authority [Israel] (Aug 2010)
Automatic Kafka #2 (Oct 2002)
Batman 23.3 (Nov 2013)
Batman: Dark Victory (2001)
Batman: The Dark Knight 23.2 (Nov 2013)
The Flash #23.2 and #23.3 (Nov 2013)
The Infinite Horizon #4 (Apr 2011) and #6 (Nov 2011)
JLA: Liberty and Justice (Nov 2003)
Justice League #23.2 (Nov 2013)
Popeye [Israel] #58 (1972)
Secret #1 (May 2012)
Teen Titans #23.2 (Nov 2013)
Ten Grand #3 (Jul 2013)

Sacred Books of the World. A.C. Bouquet. Penguin Books, London (1954).

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Dreamer

In this papercut Joseph, the favorite son of Israel, holds out his arms to show off his coat of many colors, stitched together from many different comics representing his dreams, his difficult path, and his future role in saving his family by bringing them into Egypt. Joseph's pride is evident in his posture, and his resilience in the collage of comics in the background, as he faces up to the many hurdles in his way and creates his own narrative of success in the face of these obstacles. Pieces of the comic book Ragman (issue #1) are used in the background; he was one of the first openly Jewish super heroes, and wears a multi-colored patched cloak as a disguise.

All-Star Superman (2011)
 Automatic Kafka #2 (Oct 2002) and #4 (Dec 2002)
 Captain America: The Chosen #1 (Nov 2007)
 The Flash #15 (Feb 2013)
 Green Lantern Corps #2 (Dec 2011)
 Dial H #7 (Feb 2013)
 The Power Company #4 (Jul 2002)
 Ragman #1 (Dec 2010)
 Scarlet #6 (Feb 2013)
 Testament #8 (Sep 2006)
 Ultimate New Ultimates #1 (May 2010)

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The Story of the Jewish People. Gilbert Klaperman. Behrman House, Inc., New York (1956).

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