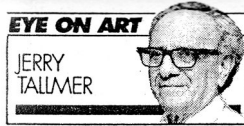


Rebuilt museum resumes its tale of Jews' journey



THE reach of the Jewish Museum — the renovated, expanded Jewish Museum — goes from the destruction of the First Temple, in 586 B.C., to a 1993 wall installation by Barbara Steinman that, borrowing from the poet Osip Mandelstam, just says: “SILENCE” over and over again in 40 or 50 blinking red electric signs.

If that doesn't hit you in the eye, you may already have been socked by William Nastasi's “jew,” in huge black lower-case letters, on another wall, a white one, on another floor. To me, basically, that's what this museum is about. It says it all.

The Jewish Museum started as a gift of 26 ritual objects to the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1904, and 47 years later moved into the 1908 Warburg mansion, Fifth Avenue and 92nd Street — a gift from Frieda Schiff Warburg, widow of banker Felix Warburg. Today the 26 objects have multiplied to 27,000, and in this past couple of years — while the museum took up temporary shelter across the park at the New-York Historical Society — some \$36 million has gone into in restorations that have doubled the former 92nd Street exhibition space, including purchase of the brownstone next door. Architect for all this has been Kevin Roche of Roche Dinkeloo, backed by a host of consultants.

Among the added amenities are a basement cafe (kosher), a new glass-brick interior staircase, an auditorium that incorporates some of the stained glass from the old staircase, a French Chateau Gothic false front in Indiana limestone over the 1963 List annex on the Fifth Avenue side, two new elevators that (unlike the old one) really work, two new gift shops, an education center, and a little room to teach kids about the Sabbath with hands-on exhibits like a “What's Missing?” layout with a handle that pops up a pair of candles.

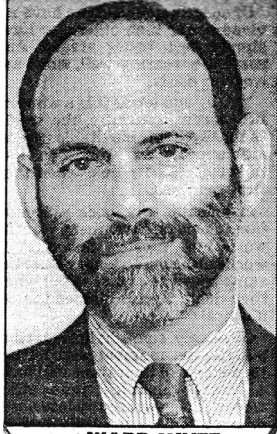
Heart and soul of the expanded museum is a new, permanent two-floor exhibit that starts with a quotation from Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi: “The choice for Jews as for non-Jews is not whether or not to have a past, but rather — what kind of past shall one have.” It is this exhibit, “Culture and Continuity: The Jewish Journey,” that will serve as core to all future museum endeavors, says assistant director for programs Ward Mintz. “We're asking a big question: Why, how, did Jews survive over 4,000 years?”

Did you know what a *Schulkopper* was? It's a carved-wood club with growling beasts, used in 19th-century Poland to knock on people's doors to tell them to go to Synagogue. Next to it in another case is a fantastic large agonizingly detailed cut-paper *mizrach*, like a giant doily, also from Poland.

The Jewish journey. It's told

Tallmer, Jerry. “Rebuilt museum resumes its tale of Jews' journey.” *The New York Post*, June 19, 1993.

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY



WARD MINTZ

Asking a big question.

through four major subthemes, Law, Land, Covenant, Exodus, set forth in a small stark anteroom of four upright slabs of Jerusalem stone — a miniature Jewish stonehenge — incised with appropriate Hebrew lines from Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy.

The journey proceeds through foods, fruits, clayware, bas-reliefs, books, maps, scrolls, other texts, huge Torah arks from 16th-century Italy and 18th-century Bavaria, a Torah wall in mosaic tile from 16th-century Persia, a whole section of a synagogue from northern Israel with zodiac floor and blazing Byzantine wall recreated — incredibly — in Styrofoam, right down to the cracks, by a Bulgarian craftsman now living in Chelsea.

Not to mention a case of about 50 of the museum's 2,500 menorahs — "the greatest collection of menorahs in the world," says Mintz. Of them all, the ones I liked best were two downstairs in the gift shop, in glass, chaste and stunning, by a California artist named Buzz Blodgett.

And of the art, old and new, from Chaim Soutine and Jack Levine to Weegee and Alice Aycock, I was most moved by Eleanor Antin's "Vilna Nights," with its tailor in his bomb-blasted novel stitching, stitching into eternity; and I laughed, well, smiled, at Allen Wexler's meshugenah assemblage of Rokeach soup cans.

And William Anastasi's "jew" — a different, tighter kind of smile there. The inspiration for it, Anastasi told me, came in equal parts from Voltaire, who reminded all rational thinkers that Jesus was born a Jew, lived a Jew, died a Jew, and from Lenny Bruce, who would throw the bad words in the face of the audience — *wop, nigger, kike* — because "if you leave them under a rock, these words, they draw maggots."

Anastasi also said that when he first started doing some small "jew" paintings back in 1981, he "thought I probably would never show them." Good for us he changed his mind.

Jewish Museum, 1109 Fifth Ave., (212) 423-3200.

730 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK NY 10019
TEL 646 336 7183
FAX 646 336 7185
WWW.GERINGLOPEZ.COM