



3080 Broadway (at 122nd Street), New York City

Exhibition Curator  
Rebecca Pristoop

Rebecca Pristoop is an independent curator and art historian. She received her MA in Art History from New York University's Institute of Fine Arts in 2008 and her BA in Art History and Dance from Skidmore College in 2004. She organized *Counter Pointe: Perceiving the Body in Ballet Photography*, the Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York (2004); *Pilgrimage: An Exploration of Collective Memory*, the Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life, New York University (2006); *To: Brooklyn, Sincerely: Soweto*, Rabbithole, Brooklyn (2009); and *Fragile Territories*, LaunchPad, Brooklyn (2013). At the Jewish Museum, New York, she served as a curatorial assistant for *Crossing Borders: Manuscripts from the Bodleian Libraries* (2012) and *Revolution of the Eye: Modern Art and the Birth of American Television* (2015), and she was a research assistant for *Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings* and *Kirchner and the Berlin Street*, the Museum of Modern Art (2008). From 2010 to 2011, Pristoop ran the art and food salon *flatbreadaffair* from her Brooklyn apartment, where she curated site-specific exhibitions, dinners, and panels. She is the recipient of a grant from the Foundation for Contemporary Arts and a research award from the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, among other honors. Her exhibitions have been featured in such publications as the *Architect's Newspaper* and *Yediot America*. She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

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Chancellor Arnold M. Eisen established the Arts Advisory Board in spring 2011 for the purpose of creating and sustaining arts initiatives throughout JTS's five schools. Together with JTS faculty and lay leaders, the board consists of artists and other professionals from a variety of visual, musical, performing, and literary arts organizations, businesses, and foundations across the United States. Its mission focuses on programs and projects with distinct creative and educational objectives that can be integrated throughout JTS curricula.



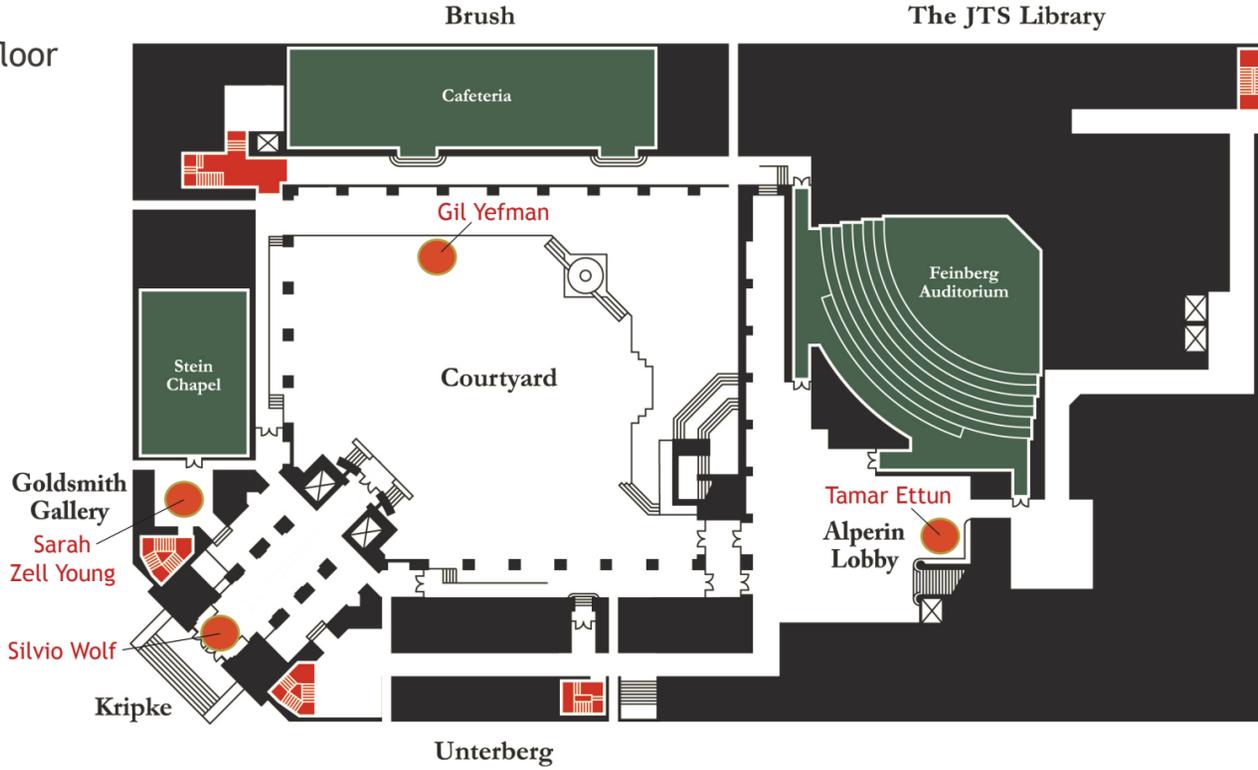
The JTS Arts Advisory Board presents

# Traversing Tradition Transformation in and of Contemporary Jewish Life

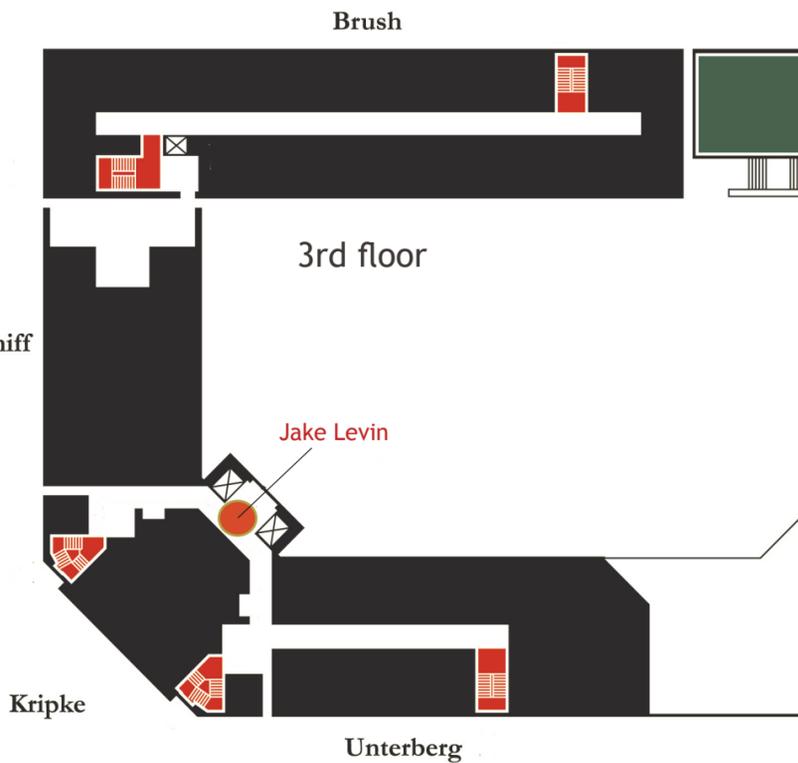
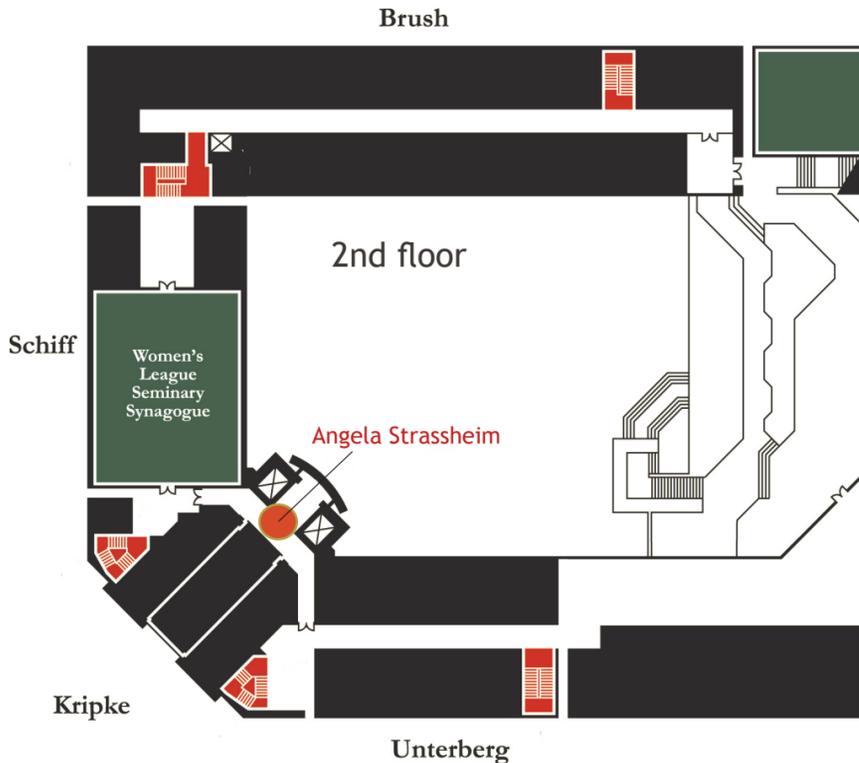
Tamar Ettun | Jake Levin | Angela Strassheim  
Silvio Wolf | Gil Yefman | Sarah Zell Young

Cover: Silvio Wolf, *Double Doors* (detail), 2015-2016, site-specific installation, UV ink-jet printed films applied over eight windows and eight glass doors. Courtesy of the artist.

Main floor



The installations are located in JTS's main entryway, the Goldsmith Gallery, the elevator landing on the second floor, the elevator landing on the third floor, the Alperin Lobby, and the Courtyard. These areas may be accessed via the elevators or stairways.



# Traversing Tradition

## Transformation in and of Contemporary Jewish Life

Tamar Ettun | Jake Levin | Angela Strassheim | Silvio Wolf | Gil Yefman | Sarah Zell Young

September 10, 2015, through May 19, 2016

The artistic process is one of inquiry and proposition. Artists encounter an idea, explore it from multiple perspectives, and propose new meanings that expand, challenge, or do away with the idea's preexisting connotations. This act of creating new meaning is inherently spiritual: it changes the usual system that a person holds as a basis for self-definition. Artists stand on the precipice of transformation, willing to ask the questions: Who do I want to be? How do I want to live? What do I want to do to get there?

*Traversing Tradition: Transformation in and of Contemporary Jewish Life* explores the possibility of transformation as it intersects with Judaism. Prompted by a period of change and reflection—as JTS begins a major renovation and expansion of its campus facilities, creating a centralized and modernized residence hall, a prominent auditorium and conference center, and a state-of-the-art library—this exhibition emerges in two stages. On view beginning in fall 2015, installations by Tamar Ettun, Jake Levin, Angela Strassheim, and Sarah Zell Young make use of JTS's historic campus with works that consider the possibility of transformation in one's personal life as well as in contemporary Jewish culture. Using a wide range of media, including video, photography, and neon, the artists witness, question, respond to, and reinterpret Jewish communities, texts, and traditions. Their artworks reflect upon the transformations intrinsic to the rituals, customs, and observances associated with Jewish dietary laws, prayer, birth, and death.

Installed in the spring of 2016, works by Silvio Wolf and Gil Yefman join the exhibition. Wolf symbolically inaugurates the new campus construction with a piece focusing on the transition between nature and culture, outside and inside, while Yefman's work pays tribute to JTS's monumental 2006 decision to ordain gay and lesbian rabbis with an installation that engages the complexity of gender and sexual identities.

*Traversing Tradition* is the fourth visual arts exhibition presented by the Arts Advisory Board as part of JTS's ongoing initiative to create and sustain arts programming throughout its five schools. Installed in different parts of the campus, these site-specific works allow the JTS community to pause amid everyday activities to reflect upon the practices addressed by each artist and to consider the moral, ethical, and spiritual choices they make each day.

### THE ARTISTS



**Tamar Ettun** is a sculptor and performance artist whose work examines the transformation of cultural and psychological narratives through personal accounts and perspectives. Born into an Orthodox family with strong religious and political beliefs, Ettun cultivated her art practice as a form of resistance to set ideologies. Using Jewish rituals as a template, she creates her own rules and physical acts to explore human emotions, trauma, and the divine. For *Traversing Tradition*, Ettun presents her video *Standing Prayer (Amidah)* (2008) within a site-specific "bubble" (enclosed canopy) on

view in JTS's Alperin Lobby through November 2015. Playing upon the biblical practice of *aliyah l'regel*, the thrice-yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem, *Standing Prayer (Amidah)* is the culmination of the artist's self-imposed ritual practice. One Saturday a month for three and a half years, Ettun walked a reverse pilgrimage along the main highway connecting Jerusalem (Israel's center of religious life) to Tel Aviv (its center of artistic life). During the final months of her practice, she recorded herself emulating the set choreography of bowing and stepping performed at the end of the *Amidah* prayer while she was rigged up to such manmade and natural structures as an electrical tower, a tunnel, and an olive tree. Her act literally took her up by the legs (*aliyah l'regel*) to explore the expanse where religion, art, spirituality, and the everyday intermix.

Tamar Ettun was born in 1982 in Jerusalem. She received her MFA from Yale University in 2010 and her BFA from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, in 2008. Her work has been shown throughout the United States and Israel, including at the Watermill Center, in Water Mill, Long Island; at Braverman Gallery in Tel Aviv; and in New York at Andrea Meislin Gallery and the Jewish Museum, among other venues. She has been featured in various critical publications, including *Modern Painters*, the *New York Times*, and *Hyperallergic*. Ettun lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.



**Jake Levin's** art practice is intimately connected with his work as a nose-to-tail butcher. Within this framework, he began studying the Jewish dietary laws of *kashrut*, questioning what is actually "proper or fit" to eat. For *Traversing Tradition*, Levin participates in the Judaic tradition of inquiry and presents *Mashiach's Pig* to consider the most taboo of all unkosher animals as a symbol of the messianic age. Referring to a statement in Midrash Rabba that connects the root of the Hebrew word

*hazir* (pig) with the Hebrew word *hazar* (return), Levin investigates the pig's meaning in the context of the messianic age, when human behavior is purified and the pig is returned to Israel cleansed of its deceitful reputation. On view on the third-floor elevator landing in Kripke, *Mashiach's Pig* is a site-specific installation that includes video, text, sculpture, and drawings. In exploring the paradoxical position of the pig in Jewish culture and the allegorical implications it has for the larger state of food production and consumption today, *Mashiach's Pig*, according to the artist, "proposes a certain kind of reclamation . . . we are *hazir*—pretending, yearning to be clean . . . yearning for a time and place where violence, filth, and oppression does not exist." Dr. David Kraemer, Joseph J. and Dora Abbell Librarian, professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS, and author of the book *Jewish Eating and Identity through the Ages* (2007), will participate when Levin hosts a "Mashiach's Pig Seder," using his *Mashiach's Pig Haggadah*, for students and faculty during the 2016 spring semester.

Jake Levin was born in 1984 in New York and studied at the Bard MFA program. He received his BA in Studio Art and Art History from Wesleyan University. In 2010 Levin apprenticed as a nose-to-tail butcher at Fleisher's Meat in Kingston, New York. His work has been shown at various venues in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. He lives in New Marlborough, Massachusetts.

Tamar Ettun, *Standing Prayer (Amidah)*, 2008, single channel video 5 min., 59 sec. Courtesy of the artist.

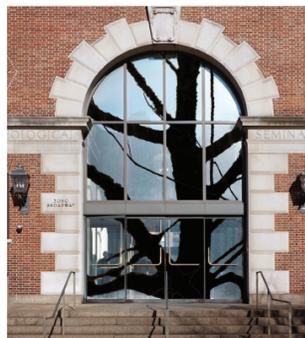
Jake Levin, *Mashiach's Pig* (detail), 2013, glass, lard, string, skull, pomegranate. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Silka Glanzman.



**Angela Strassheim** creates images that capture intimate moments of reverie during pauses in the commotion of everyday life. Growing up in a conservative Christian home, she began questioning her inherited beliefs, eventually finding clarity in and converting to Judaism. Her life has been transformed by the traditions and practices she has learned from witnessing and participating in Jewish life. For *Traversing Tradition* she pairs portraits of subjects from diverse communities in Israel with still lifes inspired by the food in her mother-in-law's kitchen.

Musings on identity and tradition, these images reflect the multiplicity of transformations inherent in the process of growing up and defining one's self. Strassheim explores these changes both in her own life and as they are experienced by the individuals she photographs. Her photographs are on view on the second-floor elevator landing in Kripke.

Angela Strassheim was born in 1969 in Bloomfield, Iowa. She received her MFA from Yale University in 2003 and her BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1995. Her photographs have been exhibited throughout the United States, Israel, and Europe, and have been written about in critical publications such as *ArtPulse*, *Flash Art*, and *Art in America*. Works by Strassheim are in major museum, corporate, and private collections, including the Whitney Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Israel Museum, and many others. Strassheim lives in Connecticut and works in New York and Israel.



**Silvio Wolf** uses moving images, still projections, light, and sound to create installations that engage the history of specific venues. For *Traversing Tradition*, Wolf transforms JTS's public entrance into an experiential threshold of Jewish study and spirituality entitled *Double Doors* (on view beginning spring 2016). Motivated by the renovation of The JTS Library, Wolf lines the doors and windows of the Green Family Entryway with adhesive films of translucent imagery symbolically referencing the missing library stacks. These images are intertwined with interpretive elements alluding to the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge and invite the viewer to contemplate the relationship between tradition and the free will that accompanies the acquisition of knowledge. Experienced

most intimately in the vestibule between the glass doors opening onto Broadway, this site-specific installation creates a high-tech stained-glass effect. As natural light transitions to artificial and day passes into night, *Double Doors* transforms the facade and entrance of JTS into a participatory space of meditation amid the everyday activities of public life. On view in the Green Family Entryway (Kripke lobby) beginning January 19, 2016. *Double Doors* is made possible with the generous support of DUGGAL.

Silvio Wolf was born in 1952 in Milan and is a professor of Fine Arts at the School of Visual Arts of the European Institute of Design, Milan, and at the School of Visual Arts, New York. He has had numerous solo exhibitions and has created permanent installations in galleries, museums, and public spaces in the United States, Europe, and Asia. His work has been shown at Robert Mann Gallery in New York and included in *Aktuell* in Munich in 1983 and *Documenta VIII* in Kassel in 1987—both in Germany—and the Venice Biennale in 2009. The artist lives and works in Milan and New York.



**Gil Yefman** deconstructs and transforms myths from numerous traditions to create spaces where characters with elusive gender, sexual, and political identities become heroes. His installation, *Zygote*—originally created for the promenade in Bat-Yam, Israel, in 2010—is refabricated for the courtyard at JTS. A living sculpture, consisting of chromosome-shaped dolls sewn from flesh-colored fabrics and filled with seeded grass, *Zygote* symbolizes a site

where people of all gender and sexual identities have the freedom to grow and thrive. Planted beneath a rainbow lamp and nourished by water and sun, the chromosomes transform into a plush landscape representing the proliferation of diverse gender and sexual identities. On view in the Courtyard beginning April 4, 2016.

Gil Yefman was born in 1979 in Haifa and received his BFA from the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem, in 2003. Recent solo exhibitions include *Bay Mir Bistu Sheyn (To Me You Are Beautiful)* at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York; *H* at The Container, Tokyo; and *In Return* at Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv. He has held artist residencies around the world, including in Düsseldorf, Tokyo, and New York. Yefman lives and works in Tel Aviv.



**Sarah Zell Young** creates works that consider issues related to Judaism, feminism, and the body. Her site-specific installation in the Goldsmith Gallery, *In the Shape of the Name*, comprised of a neon sculpture, Duratrans print, videos, and diverse sculpted and found objects, explores the sanctity of incarnation by investigating the symbolic meaning of the golem. The Hebrew word *golem* directly translates to "an unshaped form." In Jewish folklore, the golem is a being formed from clay, then brought to life through mystical practices.

According to various accounts, animating the golem requires applying or inserting the letters of one of God's many names in a specific permutation onto or into the body of the golem. Using the golem as a metaphor, Young invites viewers to contemplate how much divinity is required in one's own life to be fully animated. As the artist explains, "We are all molding ourselves into fully formed people; but without the divine spark, what are we really? We are always yearning for something—is it the divine spark that we seek, to feel fully alive?" Young wonders, "In our personal quests to become animate, which of our actions are futile and which will bear fruit?"

Sarah Zell Young was born in 1988 in Boston. She received her MFA from Hunter College in 2013 and a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2010. The recipient of numerous awards, including a grant from Asylum Arts Small Grants Program, a Fischl/Kohn Family Stipend from the Rafael Schächter Institute for Arts and Humanities at Terezin, and the Judy and Arthur Zankel MFA Award in Art from Hunter College, she also presented her solo show *Occupy Sanhedrin* while artist-in-residence at the Haddassah-Brandeis Institute at Brandeis University in 2012. Young has exhibited at galleries in New York and has a painting in JTS's permanent collection. She lives in New York and is on a one-year Dorot Fellowship in Jerusalem.

Angela Strassheim, *Soldier Wearing His Father's Suit*, 2008/2015, archival pigment print. Courtesy of the artist.

Silvio Wolf, *Double Doors*, 2015-2016, site-specific installation, UV ink-jet printed films applied over eight windows and eight glass door. Courtesy of the artist.

Sarah Zell Young, *In the Shape of the Name* (detail), 2015, multi-media installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Gil Yefman, *Zygote*, 2010 (to be reconstructed 2016), grass dolls, water pump, rainbow lamp. This image shows a version of *Zygote* installed on the promenade in Bat-Yam, Israel, in 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery.