

B”H

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“Alef Beit: The Building Blocks of Creation”

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Biographies

Elana Amminadav, The Letter Kuf

The reality we perceive around us, in all its beauty and splendor, is only a reflection of more expansive realms. Even these realms do not fully depict the totality of Existence in that they lack that which is reflected from them. It is only when these worlds are tied together (Kashur – קשור) through our actions, thoughts and spirit, that we can begin to understand the unity of all existence. The knot (Kesher – קשר) of connection is infused with that which is sacred (Kadosh – קדוש) allowing us to experience the Divine in all Its Glory.

Elana Amminadav aims to use art as a means to become a vessel for channeling the Light that permeates our world. She is also founder and president of Derusha Publishing, LLC.

Cynthia Blackwood, The Letter Lamed

Cynthia Blackwood graduated with a B.A. in Fine Arts from Colgate University as well as a M.S. in Printmaking and Art Education from the College of St. Rose. She is the owner of The Frame House in Elkins Park and RyanJohn Art Salon in Philadelphia, and is mother to Evan, Alexander and Jacob. “Most of my time is spent working on framing projects for my customers so I always relish the opportunity to create artwork again, especially in this venue. Welcome to the Old City Jewish Art Center!

Having researched the history of the alef bet briefly, I decided to choose the twelfth letter lamed based on one particular story attributed to Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva is said to have noted that the spelling of lamed can be seen as an acronym for the phrase lev meivin da’at, meaning “a heart that understands knowledge. Rabbi goes on to say that lamed is the only letter which ascends above the other letters in the sacred texts and therefore represents the prominence of learning and understanding of the Jewish heart. So having chosen the lamed, I continued to research the meanings and history of the letter and found yet another wonderful passage. According to Jewish mysticism, the numerical value of the phrase cited by Rabbi Akiva is the same as the phrase for “the heart of eve”, suggesting that the woman’s heart is essential for a complete understanding of reality. I liked that one too!

I see letters as having particular personalities as suggested by their stature, curves or angles. With the lamed’s height I see also a responsibility to direct. If broken apart, the lamed can be seen as a union of the vav (the top pointing the way) and the kaf (gathering those in front and pulling those behind), and as a beacon being set directly in the middle of aleph bet. So in as much as the lamed demands understanding and learning of the Traditions it also demands action based on that knowledge. It then inspires us all to go out into the world, to create and requires us to care for the world around us. The lamed piece is a dimensional papercut, set in a boxed frame.

Shimon Braun, The Letter Shin, The Letter Kaf

Shimon Braun was born in Poland 1938 - survived the Nazi occupation by escaping to Russia where at the age of seven he drew his first memorable painting, a factory that he copied from a Russian newspaper. During his school days, he drew his teachers, friends, and classroom situations.

After the war, he returned to Poland. By the time he was in the fifth grade, he passed through five different schools, five different languages in five different countries.

At age 11, his family migrated to Israel. Shimon was an officer in the Israeli army. His higher education was in Wingate University in Israel for physical education. He became Israel's Gymnastic Champion in 1956, and was an internationally known dancer and choreographer.

Batsheva Rothchild was the managing director and sponsor of the Batsheva Dance Company, and under the Artistic Direction of Martha Graham. He was a soloist dancer in the company and after work he always painted. In Israel, Shimon created the Jazz Plus Dance Company. They starred weekly on Israeli television and were the most popular dance company in Israel. He choreographed the movie "Kazablan" working with Menachim Golan, it was distributed by MGM.

Shimon studied painting with Zvi Gera - he was the art director for channel 12, the educational channel in New York and he has a painting in the Museum of Art in Philadelphia.

In the U.S., Shimon spent many hours with artists, especially in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he lived for five years. He also lived in Colorado for half of a year and painted the Rocky Mountains.

Mr. Burton Wasserman, a Professor of Art at Glassboro State College after viewing my paintings wrote: "I was infinitely impressed with Shimon's paintings. They are powerful images, evoking ideas and feelings that touch me deeply. They talk to me on a subconscious or intuitive level with extraordinary eloquence and impact."

Shimon received a distinguished artist award from the Artist Guild of Delaware Valley. Some of Shimon's paintings are in a private collection.

Ruthie Feldman, The letter Daled "My Daled"

The Aleph-Bet has captured my imagination. Once I began thinking about the project, I wanted to explore the Torah's description of the giving of the Tablets of the Ten Commandments--the letters could be seen from different directions; each was carved through the stone with a fiery force, the midrashic idea of an artistry beyond human capability. I was content to depict, in a mobile form, the idea of the letters rotating.

When I thought about the letter "Daled" I first thought about the many words that begin with that letter, and how the word in Hebrew, *Delet* (meaning "door"), seemed to offer a pictorial symbol--the letter itself as a door (opening). So I began to work on the concept of "the door to a Jewish home," with a Mezuzah on the doorpost itself.

Much of my fascination with nature, and my efforts to include elements of the natural world in my artwork, brought me to the word *Desheh* (meaning "field"). I was intrigued by the "inside-outside" paradigm of a doorway (to the inside) and a field (outside).

I went back to my initial thoughts about the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The image of the "field"/*desheh* began to merge with the idea that, while there was lightning and thunder at the top of the mountain, the mountain itself was beautiful, with flowers and a fence keeping the people at a safe distance from the Divine Presence.

I hope that the finished piece captures the intrigue of inside/outside, of field and of home. I hope that the imagination of the viewer is piqued by the turning “Daled,” to see how the letters of the Torah come to life not in a fiery force on a mountain top, but as we bring them into our homes.

“My Daled” is my effort to combine these thoughts: one, the Hebrew words *Delet* (“door”) and *Desheh* (“field”), and two, the force and holiness of the Aleph-Bet. Just as they could penetrate stone, so, too, can they penetrate our lives.

Susan Feldman, The Letter Hey

Susan Feldman is a professional painter and art teacher living in Bala Cynwyd, PA. She received her MFA degree from Tyler School of Art and runs Art in Progress, a program for advanced painters at Harcum College in Bryn Mawr. Susan has been painting and teaching both figure drawing and studio art for over 20 years.

Choosing Hey: This letter is seen as symbolizing the breath of G-d in creation.

Working on this painting provided immersion in the awesome challenge of seeking visual form to express the divine presence.

Eleanor E. Feller, The Letter Zayin, The Letter Resh

Eleanor Feller, artist by nature, accidentally fell into this wonderful, newfound world during a time of her life of complete sorrow. Her Mother, of Blessed Memory, Anni Nossek, was in the autumn of her years when Ellie visited her in the rehabilitation home when lovely paintings on the walls in the corridor gave her solace.

Also, knowing full well that her Mom was ending her life, Ellie knew to keep herself together, she began to have a strong need to paint. During this time, she ran into an artist acquaintance, Ann Call, who invited her for lessons.

Ellie for this happening to her at this moment in time felt it was (bashert), meant to be.

Each week her work became more meaningful. Later when Ann Call passed away, Ellie turned to a neighbor artist and friend, Len Wexler, and continued learning technique from him, as the love and the need to learn was 100% there. Then came the decision of going to an art school. She then enrolled into Markheim Art Center in Haddonfield, NJ. Here is where Ellie now is being trained under, Ann Kelly, an accomplished teacher and artist.

Ellie stated that when the children were home, being a full time Mom, she began to take art courses. While residing in NY, Ellie went to Rockland County Community College for Art History and Art Appreciation. All of these bits and pieces led to this moment. The moment of bringing together her born-with art talent along with technique makes her a unique up and coming artist today.

You can see in her work her biggest influence and love is Claude Monet. The color is what mostly enhances her approach. Both the colors and movements of nature are so enticing to her.

These paintings “Road To The Lighthouse”, shows an upward journey headed towards the glow of light. The letter Resh, is subtly hidden under the road. In “Glass”, one can see this simply by looking at glass and dancing Zayins, a various design connecting a similar gamma of color while depicting the various textures unfolding. In addition, the painting, “New Horizon”, is a combination of poetry stating “Never Again”, and the background of the horrific atrocities the Jews suffered during WWII. Here the Resh is blatantly placed in the top of the barbed wire fence.

Sari N. Fogel, The letter Tet

As an artist I am interested in portraits and expressions, clusters of people and how their forms relate to one another. There were so many clusters of people that could have been portrayed in this painting. This is the group that emerged.

Tet is Tov is Good.

The Wailing Wall in this painting is composed of Tets. There is an energy and power at the wall that gives life to our goodness and spirituality. On any given day there are hundreds of people at the wall - women and men praying for their children; brides and grooms praying for good marriages filled with love; soldiers praying for safety and peace.

We are all pouring our souls into these towering stones and pleading for unity, acceptance and goodness in this world.

Natalia Kadish, The Letter Vav

Natalia Kadish is a surrealist artist inspired by the joy received from contemplating the infinite. She received a BA in Illustration from School of Visual Arts. Her art has been displayed in several concerts including Irving Plaza in NYC. While incorporating the realism of her father, Laszlo Kubinyi's illustrations she explores mystical concepts and understandings inspired by her visit to the Artist Colony in Tzfat, Israel. Her goal is to reveal the love in hearts and share her inspiration with all.

Gennadiy S. Kaplan, The Letter Shin

Gennadiy S. Kaplan was born on November 25, 1957, in the city of Korosten' in Ukraine. His career as an artist began in 1975 after he finished high school and attended the Kubansky State University; which he graduated in 1980 as a Master of Art in Technical Graphics and Design.

The very first exhibition of Gennadiy's paintings took place in the art departments of the University in the year of 1979. The still life and landscape paintings that were represented at the exhibition were highly graded by both, the professors and the students. Thus, three of the paintings were taken into the faculty fond of the art and painting department.

Beginning in 1980, Gennadiy Kaplan taught in the Central School of Art in town Sochi. The beauty of this little town inspired him to paint numerous paintings of it- including "Sochi", "View From the Window", and Evening in the Mountains of Caucasus," which were done in both techniques of oil and watercolor.

Today the artist still likes to work with many different techniques. His watercolor paintings are saturated and very bright in color. Additionally, Gennadiy uses a mixture of techniques of gouache and pastel.

Between the years of 1982 and 1999, the artist worked in Kiev. There, in this city's downtown and its suburbs, his paintings were displayed in mobile exhibitions. During that time, Gennadiy's paintings were also presented at the exhibit of the Museum of Kavakeridze in the center of Kiev. Among those workers were the "Swan's Lake" (oil), "Indian Summer" (oil), "Velvet Lilac" (oil), "A Windy Day" (watercolor), and "A Night on the Desna River" (watercolor).

In 1999, Gennadiy and his family immigrated to the United States, and a year later, in 2000, nine of his paintings, with a Jewish theme, were exhibited in the JCC Klein Branch. After a personal exhibition in 2002 at the Russian Book Store, the artist's paintings were presented in the Art Gallery of Itshakov, in the years of 2003 and 2004. In addition, in the following two years, from 2004 to 2006, the artist's paintings were displayed in the Turo Gallery. Currently, Gennadiy showcases his painting in Riverbank Arts Gallery in Stockton, NJ.

Beginning in the year of 2001 and until the present day, Gennadiy Kaplan gave art lessons in Rabbi's Sholom Goldsmith's Hebrew School. Twice, in the years of 2000 and 2001, the art works of Gennadiy's students were also exhibited in the JCC Klein Branch, or the Jewish Club, in Philadelphia.

Paintings of Gennadiy Kaplan represent him in more than 20 countries around the world. His art may also be found in private collections in Venice, Tokyo, Osaka, Kiev, Moscow, and Haifa.

Harriet Knopman, The Letter Pey

Harriet Knopman Bernstein, graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, is a pioneer of the 1970's Old City Arts era and is an accomplished artist, photographer, and skilled RN. Nature and world events contribute energy to her artwork of abstract expressionism, impressionistic or realism. Harriet has exhibited her artwork over 35 years and is represented in numerous private collections.

My piece worked out like the page of a children's book. I thoroughly enjoyed working on it and hope that those who are enjoying it today (and the other works here) find the message intended, which is to create your own ease in communication and expression.

Pey is the 17th letter in the Alef-Biet (alphabet).
Pey also represents the number 80.

The Semitic word Pey literally means mouth and its symbolic meaning is to open or speak. I selected the letter Pey initially because I felt its shape was beautiful and fluid. Pey means mouth and is the means by which we all communicate.

Stephanie Lubin and Natalie Eisen, The Letter Kaf by Outre Art

Artists who work together, to complete one piece are considered highly unconventional, or "outré". Stephanie Lubin and Natalie Eisen are two artists with different styles and subject matter interests, who look at images in a similar humorous vision. Stephanie Lubin graduated from Philadelphia College of Art, now the University of the Arts.

She worked as an Art Therapist and in various corporate positions. Her individual work focuses on bold expressionistic portraits of people whose "story" she wants to tell through her imagery.

Natalie Eisen is a Hussian School of Art graduate who began her career in advertising and design. She eventually built her own decorative arts business specializing in trompe l'oeil and murals. Nature and its endless subject matter are her continuing inspiration for landscape and floral pieces'. Their unique collaborative work combines their individual strengths and creates a bold cohesive style.

Outre Arts original mixed media Judaica works are in private and Synagogue collections.

The letter we have chosen to interpret is the "Kaf". There are multiple meanings for this letter among them are the number 20, the three stages of light before G-d created the world and the vessel for the divine force we receive.

In our interpretation, there are 19 Kaf letters placed as "leaves" in the shape of a kippah (skullcap), while the 20th Kaf is held on the palm of an outstretched hand in the "vessel" of the tree. The three stages of light in the background are represented by air, sky and ground. The hands form a tree reaching up to the heavens to receive G-d's divine will. The repeated gesture of open hands refers to the "Laying of Hands" with "Open Palms" as the place in the body where potential is realized. When we work simultaneously, we act out a "laying of hands" as we crisscross over the paper together,

sharing the same mind. In this way we are the vessel that allows the act of artistic creation to reveal itself to us.

Deborah Kaplan Mouhib, The letter Ayin

A graduate in the Fine Arts, I'd worked in the "sweet" plastic art of cake decoration as owner of SUD FINE PASTRY INC. for 30 years. The custom bakery provided opportunities to work in 2 and 3 dimensional design - building edible structures elaborated with various surfaces, painted, piped and sculpted.

After retiring, my love of drawing led me to study portraiture with a focus on light and a large, direct presence of the model.

Michael Neff, The Letter Chet, The Aleph Beis

"Chet" is the first letter of "Chava," the Hebrew name of Eve, the first woman.

I have been meditating on the subject of Eve's "transgression." Is it possible for us to become mature and yet remain innocent? Throughout the history of art, the temptation of Eve has been portrayed as a titanic event. See Michelangelo's depiction. Yet, our sins and our troubles often seem to stem from quite small events.

Eve

It was such a small snake, and to tell the truth, it was a small apple.

and

The Aleph Beis

'Aleph-Beis" painting, I have been painting alphabets for close to thirty years. Jewish legend has it that G-d created the World with the letters of the alphabet.

Michael Neff was born in Philadelphia in 1945. He was educated at Penn and Cambridge University. For many years he has combined teaching and painting, and has given many pictures to schools and libraries. He currently teaches at Temple University.

B. Leah Palmer, The Letter Nun

B. Leah Palmer is a local Philadelphia photographer for the past twenty-five years. She is a winner of the Jewish Exponent Israel Travel Photo Contest and has had her work published in Nature's Glory the International Library of Photography. Her work is exhibited in many area venues such as the Juried Art Show at the William Penn Charter School, Falling for the Arts in Chestnut Hill and the JCC Klein Branch.

"To bring to light significance and quiet recognition from what seems ordinary. The ordinary Hebrew letter NUN found on the children's game piece, a dreidel, is raised to significance as the Channuka miracle in 'a great miracle happened there'."

Sharon Ritz, The Letter Aleph

Aleph: The Strong Silent Type. A Mosaic Piece by Sharon Ritz

Sharon Ritz has chosen to represent the Hebrew letter Aleph simply because it is a very exciting letter! Aleph is not only the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet, but it also represents the number One. It is the first letter in the first word of the Ten Commandments (YKNA ... "I am"). It is the first letter of many of Hashem's names, such as OYHLA. It is the first letter of the word "truth"... TMA. These important words would simply not exist without the Aleph. The Aleph finds its voice with the Hebrew

vowel sound that it supports. Aleph's silent strength has made it an important consideration in the study of Kabbalah – Jewish mysticism.

With this in mind, I have chosen to represent Aleph in strong solid black on a strikingly loud and colorful background, both of which are laid on a parchment-white base.

In The Hebrew Alphabet, a Mystical Journey, Edward Hoffman writes, "To bring greater energy into your everyday activities, meditate upon the Aleph. It is especially useful to do so when seeking that spark of creativity to forge a new project". It was a unique pleasure to meditate on this Aleph while creating my piece.



Sharon Ritz loves glass and making mosaic art and crafts. Sharon began her exciting journey in creating her colorful pieces fairly recently and she has had the benefit of wonderful teachers to help her along the way. She enjoys making secular as well as Judaic pieces. Sharon has shown her work at the OCJAC, Perkins Center for the Arts and the Blank-Rome Festival of Arts, Book & Culture in Cherry Hill. Sharon lives in Cherry Hill, NJ with her family and has her studio in her home. Her online gallery can be seen at <http://sharpartsmosaics.tripod.com>.

Aleph: The Strong Silent Type (2010); glass, mirror, glass gems on wedi board and wood bases. Hoffman, Edward, The Hebrew Alphabet, A Mystical Journey, San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 1998.

Mordechai Rosenstein, The Letter Tzaddi

A unique figure in the art world, Mordechai Rosenstein designs watercolors based on the ancient art of Hebrew calligraphy. Drawing upon the inherent grace and lyrical qualities of the Hebrew alphabet, this truly gifted artist embellishes the letters and gives them a special rhythm and excitement to make virtually dance across the page.

A graduate of Akiba Hebrew Academy and the Philadelphia College of Art, Rosenstein's work emanates a timeless energy that appeals to buyers of ages and tastes. Not to mention that of gallery owners, museum curators and collectors worldwide.

For the past 30 years, Rosenstein has been designing and selling prints, and has worked on special projects with many organizations including, Hadassah, the Jewish National Fund, State of Israel Bonds, and American Jewish Committee. In addition, Rosenstein's designs have been commissioned for synagogue interiors and Jewish Community Centers stained glass windows and Torah mantels. The Franklin Mint commissioned original designs from Rosenstein for Hanukah coins and he has designed stamps for the country of Curacao. His work has been presented to leaders throughout the world including, President George Bush, Menachem Begin, and Supreme Court Justice Breyer, and Pope Benedict XVI.

Karen Shain Schloss, The Letter Chet

Karen Shain Schloss is a calligrapher, illustrator and cut-paper artist. She has been a ketubah artist for over 25 years; creating custom designed ketubot with texts calligraphed in English and Hebrew, decorated with cut-paper borders, painted with gouache and illuminated with gold or silver leaf. She has several limited-edition lasercut ketubot that are sold through major Judaic wedding websites.

She is the owner of Calligraphics Gallery in Elkins Park; a store/studio specializing in ketubot of her own making and of the fifty or more ketubah artists she represents.

She is a founding member of The Guild of American Papercutters and a long-standing member of the American Guild of Judaic Artists. She is the Chair of the Temple Judea Museum of Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel in Elkins Park, PA.

She is married to Andrew Schloss, food writer and author of 17 cookbooks. They live in Elkins Park, PA.

Jeff Shapiro, The Letter Yud

Jeffrey Shapiro has studied at the Barnes Foundation for two years, and more recently at the Main Line Art Center. Although enjoying and appreciating representational art in many of its forms, he has been influenced by the Duchampian proposition that art can be other-than optically-attractive...and, of course, by the 'Second Commandment', not to make "...any manner of likeness...". Although understanding that this mitzvah is usually not understood to discourage the drawing of a letter, in this particular case the drawing/painting/printing of the letter would be a 'likeness', and not the letter itself. He is pleased to be on the Center's Board of Directors, and appreciates the possibility of combining his love of art, Judaism, and group process which the Board provides.

Rachel Shoham, The Letter Shin

Rachel Shoham began her fascination with glass about eight years ago. She learned and discovered some of the unique properties of glass and surveyed a few of them. She learned to cast and fuse glass, paint and gild it.

Her work was shown in three museum exhibits, numerous shows, and is in possession of some collectors. Lately, her work appeared in her teacher's book, as an example of his method.

Rachel had won a fellowship last summer and worked with an intergenerational group, creating a wall panel made entirely of glass. She now has a fully equipped studio in Manayunk.

The letter "Shin" is a very unique letter. It appears on the Mezuzah for "shma Israel" It appears in the Tefillin in two versions-one "shin" with three heads on the right, believed to represent this world and another "shin" on the left, with four heads which represents the world to come.

For me, "shin" represent the word Shalom.

We need Shalom in our outside world and the inner world.

The more Shalom we'll have the more "shlemoot"-(wholeness) we'll experience.

Shalom is our daily greeting word and a hope for a better future.

With Shalom, we'll be free to pursue our personal and community's goals freely.

Claudia Tung, The Letter Gimmel

Claudia Tung graduated from the School of Visual Arts in NYC, with a Bachelor's in Fine Arts during the time when Keith Haring painted graffiti and everyone wanted to be a famous illustrator. At the time she experimented with pastels, colored pencil drawings and computer fine art to name a few.

She had the opportunity to show her pieces in the Duggal Gallery, Digital Salon Show, and the Coffee Works Cafe'. With her knowledge in many mediums she is currently working in 3-D mixed media with a passion for abstract art. Her art is an expression on how she feels about life around her.

For the past eight years, she has been teaching Hebrew classes at Temple Beth El in Hammonton, New Jersey, and for 3 years worked in the Winslow Township School District as a Teacher's Assistant for preschool. She is currently a Student Aide for a child with Autism in their middle school. My art inspiration has been from the children I've encountered. They create art with the simplest of ease.

Claudia lives in Atco, New Jersey with her husband David, daughter Sierra, and her son Dillon.

Ever since I was a little girl I've enjoyed art. Art is found everywhere, it's up in the sky it's on the ground or standing right in front of you!

When asked what I want to be I've always answered I am an artist. Currently, I am work in many mediums, because I enjoy the science of watching what happens when mixing mediums together. My mixed media piece is made up of cut paper, hand painting, wire and jewelry.

I have even worked with my mistakes, because I can intertwine it into my artwork.

For my piece "Gemilut Chasidim" I was asked by family members and friends why I chose Gimmel for my letter. Especially since Gimmel stands for winner take all on the dreidel. For me, Gimmel means Gemilut Chasidim, the act of loving kindness. In my life, Judiasm and martial arts has taught me to give a helping hand, to have kindness to others, and to be gentle to the earth.

My favorite part of looking for inspiration is magnification of objects, such as leaves, insects, and animals. There is a different sense of beauty looking at textures in this way. I am also inspired by the artwork of children. Watching children draw and paint is a delight because it is nature at its best.

Joan Turner, The Letter Chof

Joan Turner is a Philadelphia-based artist. She works in a variety of mediums, creating layered pieces. Her piece "TUFF CHOF" is comprised entirely of the Hebrew letter Chof. The strong use of repetition value in this dimensional linear design showcases Ms. Turner's innate sensitivity to the disposition of materials used. To convey a message, Humans use different verbal and written languages. In this piece the language of drawing is fused with the Hebrew language to convey a connection with ones essence.

Elsa Wachs , The letter Samech

My creative perspectives are expressed through my eclectic and diverse methods which include digital technology and mixed media, incorporating tr47additional and non-traditional elements all helping me extend my visual messages. Color and rhythm with text and texture play a significant role for me, bringing the sense of touch to provide an intimacy for the narrative.

The fifteenth letter, the *SAMECH* is the narrative in this offering. It is the only letter in the Hebrew alphabet that contains an enclosed space within itself. The circle that is formed by *Samech* is allegorical to G-d, Who has no beginning and no end. According to Kabbalah philosophy the *Samech* has an inner, dynamic circle within an outer, static circle. This is the secret of the phrase in the vision of Ezekiel: "*the wheel within the wheel.*" The *Samech* can be regarded as the fulcrum for achieving equanimity as it can be seen as the struggle of our inner striving taking place within the context of external pressures.

Creating with the mixture of these elements along with researching the texts makes my creative spirit soars giving voice for body & soul. I love the process!

Lois Yampolsky, The Letter Bet

For the last several years, Lois Yampolsky has been a printmaker. Before that Lois painted using acrylics. She is a self taught artist and for the last 10 years has attended Cheltenham Center f the Arts, under the guidance of her teacher Merle Spandorfer.

In creating my collagraphs, I draw my inspiration from the environment in which I work I feel that in life, it is important to constantly search for the things that make me feel happy and fulfilled. My environment at work is Judaism at its most complete level.

I have been able to find answers to some of my questions on a daily basis and I try to incorporate them into my pieces. Collagraphs enables me to use my creative expression in a spiritual process helping me achieve my best work. When you begin the process you are piecing together elements and textures and it takes you on a journey until the finished piece and then it reveals itself in its most complete form.

Susan Yitzhak, The Letter Mem

Color has always played a major role in all of my artwork. It can inspire excitement, just as the lack of color can create a somber mood. Boldness and size have also played a contributing factor to my work. I've worked in a variety of mediums ranging from paints and pencils to metals and fiber. My inspiration, since the time I've been in school, has always been my religion.

"Mem", the thirteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, is also the first letter of the word "mizrach" meaning "east". The word "mizrach" has come to be known as an important word among the Jewish people. It refers to the Bais HaMikdash (the holy Temple), the second one dedicated in 515BCE. Located in East Jerusalem, the Jewish people conducted their ritual sacrifices there. After it's destruction in 70AD, our sages instituted praying in lieu of sacrifices. They stated that our praying should face east (mizrach) towards Jerusalem and the destructed Bais HaMikdash.

Susan Yitzhak has a BFA from the Crafts Department of the University of the Arts and presently resides in Philadelphia with her husband Gidon and five children. Her work has been exhibited in Philadelphia, New York and Israel. She is currently working in multi-medium crafts and paintings as well as designing and creating jewelry and Judaica.

Gail Zelikovsky, The Letter Vav

Art has always been my passion. I began exploring and experimenting with oil paints and pastels while still a child. I used these media for a long time, way beyond my formal Art School education. My subjects at that time were mostly landscapes and still life. After losing my son to cancer I searched for new avenues with which to express myself artistically.

I learned to paint on silk from a master silk painter some 15 years ago and became captivated by this graceful medium. This elegant medium holds many challenges and just as many rewards, and its exciting possibilities inspired and intrigued me. The tactile feel of the material and the luminous and pearlescent quality of the silk that comes through the dye are alluring. The color combinations one can create on silk are exquisite.

Painting on silk demands your total concentration. Unlike painting with oil paints or pastels, when painting on silk, you cannot correct any mistakes. If you make a mistake, your design needs to take a turn in a different and unplanned direction, so even with all the careful planning, at times there are spontaneous moments. Controlling the fluid dye and bending it to my will and mixing my own colors are important aspects in the creation of my artworks. I continuously experiment with a wide variety of colors and often discover unexpected and surprising combinations that help keep my art fresh and exciting.

My inspiration comes from observation of my surroundings. When I have a clear vision I draw it on paper, and go from there.

My designs on silk are representational and come mostly from nature: flowers, trees, and animals (birds, horses, etc.). These are motifs with which I hope to give the viewers a sense of serenity and refuge from their lives. After I finalize my design on paper, I transfer it to the silk by drawing the wax

resist onto the silk. That is when I begin the most enjoyable aspect of my creative process - breathing life into a black and white drawing.

I use the Serti technique in which Gutta or water-based resist are applied to pre-washed silk that has been dried and stretched. When the Gutta has dried, it acts as a barrier for the dye or paint keeping the color within the outlined areas of the design. I'm currently experimenting with the technique in which the white resist lines are hidden. This technique presents a new and difficult challenge in that the sequence of drawing and painting has to be even more carefully planned.

I turn my silks into wearable art: scarves, neckties, bowties and cummerbunds, vests, tote bags, pillows, as well as wall hangings. I use hobatai silk (8-12 momie or thread count), crepe de chine (12 momie), and charmeuse (19 momie).

I am a graduate of The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. For the last sixteen years I have been painting on silk. Painting on silk presents a challenge like no other medium.

I choose the letter Vav because it inspires me to think of vav as bridge that brings everything together. Vav is a letter of unity. Thus the name of my painting, "Vav the letter of unity".