

Andy Diaz Hope

# THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN

— DAILYCAL.ORG —

## ‘Artist as Maggid’ exhibit at Contemporary Jewish Museum considers art, stories, tradition

By Dani Hilborn  
January 25, 2018

**SF**

248 Utah Street  
SF, CA 94103  
+ 415 399 1439

**NY**

313 W 14th Street 2F  
New York, NY  
By appointment only

**WEB**

[www.cclarkgallery.com](http://www.cclarkgallery.com)



JKA Photography/Courtesy

An ambitious exhibit at the Contemporary Jewish Museum imagines the artist as a modern “maggid.” “Maggid” is a Hebrew word defined as “a wandering Jewish preacher whose sermons contain religious and moral instruction and words of comfort and hope.” For the exhibit, 16 local artists drew from various folktales in Howard Schwartz’s “Leaves from the Garden of Eden: One Hundred Classic Jewish Tales.” Through the conflation between artists and maggids, the way in which art is a form of storytelling becomes clear as one wanders from piece to piece.

Though each piece draws its focus from traditional folktales, each subject feels particularly prescient. From considering the role of women in religious tradition to asking what makes a good leader, the exhibit, whether intentionally or not, brings to mind contemporary discussions about the role of women in male-dominated areas and probes of modern political leaders.

Julia Goodman's "200 Year Present" is based on a folktale about a young peasant boy who became king. After his royal ascendance, he would go out to a shed for a period of time each day. Determined to find out what he did alone in the shed, the townspeople discover that the boy would spend a few hours in his peasant rags each day. There is poignancy in the reminder of the importance of humility in leaders, one that was expertly conveyed through Goodman's use of pulped bed sheets and t-shirts to as her medium. Standing in between the two sections of nine sheets, the viewer feels physically drawn into a place of contemplation.

The exhibit also involves a project entitled "Haptic Encounters," on which Georgina Kleege, a UC Berkeley professor in the English and disability studies departments, collaborated. Kleege was interested in the appreciation of art through senses other than sight. She sought to consider the relationship between blindness and visual art by looking at "qualities such as texture, temperature, weight, resilience, and density that may not be apparent to the eyes alone." Kleege's observations illuminate different aspects of the exhibit that one might not otherwise notice — the physical, rather than visual, realms.

Though each piece requires careful consideration and contemplation, Andy Diaz Hope and Laurel Roth Hope's "The Woulds" is particularly mesmerizing. The Hopes' artwork involves the use of mirrors, wood, ceramics, glass, video, motors and paint. The final product is a collection of silver-painted tree trunks reflecting fragments of light — light which is produced by the distortion, reflection and inversion of a number of home video clips. This stripping of submitted video clips — to an extent that the original images cannot be discerned — lends the art a universality rooted in sincerity. The reflected light could have contained any number of video clips and could have featured footage of any and every memory and experience. Just as the mirrors reflect the video, the piece reflects the viewer.

"The Woulds" draws from a folktale specifically about a couple trying to have children, but it seems fitting that it more generally considers themes of family and memory. This folktale also serves as inspiration for Young Suh and Katie Peterson's "Scenes from a Forest." This work is composed of a series of photographs featuring a family standing in a forest, spaced apart but clearly together as a unit. The connection between a landscape filled with trees and the depiction of a family tree is obvious, but the pieces also considers the complicated, diverse ways a family tree can grow. The juxtaposition of two pieces that are drastically different yet based on the same folktale is thought-provoking, highlighting the way we each uniquely experience and interpret stories.

These pieces provide just a handful of examples that demonstrate the exhibit's appeal as a whole. The meta consideration of how art tells stories gives the exhibit a sense of self-awareness as to the true purpose and importance of museums in the first place.

The exhibit leaves its viewer considering what it means when the same stories visually translate differently for different artists — how the same pieces of art can call to mind different stories. The exhibit manages to invoke these questions because of the sheer range of works it includes. The

diversity of mediums and interpretations it presents is astounding — marking “Jewish Folktales Retold: Artist as Maggid” as a crucial entry in the tradition of Jewish storytelling.

“Jewish Folktales Retold: Artist as Maggid” can be seen at the Contemporary Jewish Museum through Jan. 28, 2018.