A man wearing a black top hat, a white long-sleeved shirt, a black vest, and black pants with white side stripes is leaning against a large, textured concrete wall. The wall is covered in black graffiti. The man is looking directly at the camera and has a serious expression. The ground is a rough, gravelly surface.

The New Authentics

Artists of the Post-Jewish Generation

The New Authentics

Artists of the Post-Jewish Generation

by Staci Boris

Foreword by Rhoda Rosen

Essay by Stephen J. Whitfield

Excerpt from *The History of Love* by Nicole Krauss

Artist essays by Sarah Giller Nelson and Lori Waxman

This book has been published in conjunction with the exhibition
The New Authentics: Artists of the Post-Jewish Generation, organized by Spertus Museum.

SPERTUS MUSEUM, CHICAGO
November 30, 2007–April 13, 2008

THE ROSE ART MUSEUM, BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY, WALTHAM, MA
May 9–July 27, 2008

Spertus Press Chicago
Copyright © 2007 by Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, Chicago.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission of:
Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies
610 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60605

Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies is a partner in serving our community,
supported by the JUF/Jewish Federation.

ISBN-13: 978-0-935-98265-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007923149

Curator and author: Staci Boris
Editor: Jennifer Liese
Designer: JNL Graphic Design, Chicago
Printer: Everbest, Hong Kong

Excerpt from *The History of Love* by Nicole Krauss is used by permission of
W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright © 2005 by Nicole Krauss.

Cover image:
Lilah Freedland, *dream as though you'll live forever, live as though you'll die today*, 2003, c-print, 24 x 20".

MADE IN CHINA

David Altmejd
Cheselyn Amato
Johanna Bresnick
Shoshana Dentz
Lilah Freedland
Matthew Girson
Karl Haendel
Laura Kina
Fawn Krieger
Jin Meyerson
Collier Schorr
Mindy Rose Schwartz
Ludwig Schwarz
Joel Tauber
Shoshanna Weinberger
Jennifer Zackin

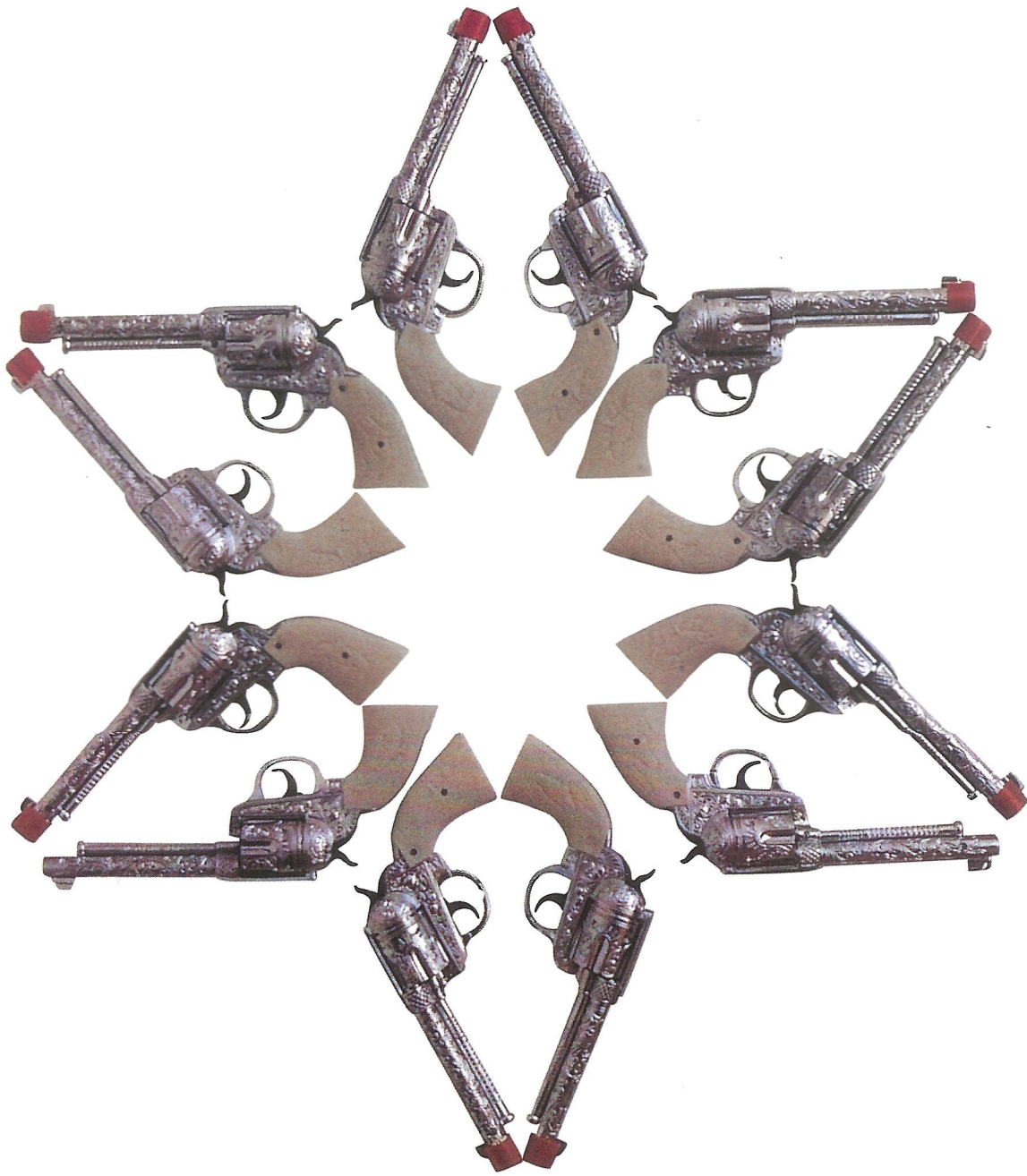
Jewish Generation

Curated by Staci Boris

Contents

14	DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD Rhoda Rosen
18	THE NEW AUTHENTICS: ARTISTS OF THE POST-JEWISH GENERATION Staci Boris
44	BETWEEN MEMORY AND MESSIANISM: A BRIEF HISTORY OF AMERICAN JEWISH IDENTITY Stephen J. Whitfield
56	EXCERPT FROM THE HISTORY OF LOVE Nicole Krauss
58	ARTIST ESSAYS David Altmejd 60 Cheselyn Amato 64 Johanna Bresnick 68 Shoshana Dentz 72 Lilah Freedland 78 Matthew Girson 82 Karl Haendel 86 Laura Kina 92 Fawn Krieger 96 Jin Meyerson 100 Collier Schorr 106 Mindy Rose Schwartz 112 Ludwig Schwarz 116 Joel Tauber 120 Shoshanna Weinberger 124 Jennifer Zackin 128
132	ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES
140	WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION
142	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS Staci Boris and Rhoda Rosen

Cheselyn Amato



WE LIVE OUR LIVES SURROUNDED BY AN EVER-INCREASING AMOUNT OF STUFF.



Fig. 31 **Flower Arrangement (#1)**, 2003, inkjet print, 23 x 32".

◀ Fig. 30 **Six-Pointed Star in Silver with Orange Tips**, 2006, plastic toy guns, 24 x 24 x 4".

Fig. 32 **Effluxes** (detail), 2004, radiant film with wood, wire, and light, dimensions variable.



Stuff we find, stuff we're sent, stuff we eat, stuff we store, stuff we wear, stuff we buy, stuff we throw away. These everyday objects have an intended purpose, be it to feed, clothe, inform, or otherwise occupy us. But objects can also be used against their intentions, as demonstrated when Marcel Duchamp made a sculpture from a urinal, Meret Oppenheim from a teacup covered in fur, and Robert Rauschenberg from a stuffed angora goat. Such metamorphic tactics lie at the core of Cheselyn Amato's inventive body of mixed-media works.

How else to explain the transformation of a bucket full of scrub brushes into a work aptly described by the title *Flower Arrangement (#1)*, 2003 (fig. 31)? The witty repositioning of quotidian things evident in this and Amato's other "bouquets" provides a fresh look at common objects rarely beheld for more than their cleaning power. The work's charm rests in the incongruity of finding prettiness in something banal, of the goods simultaneously existing as sweet flowers and crappy cleaning implements. A strikingly different effect ensues when Amato uses similar means but dissimilar materials, arranging twelve plastic guns on a wall in the form of a Star of David. Here too a magical kind of transformation occurs, of cheap toys morphed into a symbol central to both Judaism and Islam. Unlike the more innocuous floral apparition, *Six-Pointed Star in Silver with Orange Tips*, 2006 (fig. 30), blatantly mixes the sacred and the profane, questioning the intermingling of religion and violence, as well as one of the ways in which the latter becomes part of daily life, namely through children's play.

This transformation of ordinary material into something stranger and more meaningful can occur at various stages in an artwork's life, from studio process through viewer reception. In the installation *Effluxes*, 2004 (fig. 32), Amato makes this metamorphic moment visible within the exhibition space itself. Sheets of radiant film,



Fig. 33 **Fabric Collage (Grey Camo)**, 2003, inkjet print, 34 x 22".

suspended between a series of lightweight wood and wire frames, colorfully refract the light of a nearby projector, throwing dazzling effects onto the wall. The artist describes these works as “visual events,” highlighting their ephemeral and spectacular nature, but also pointing to the importance of the act of creating, an act that occurs literally and repeatedly as the viewer witnesses *Effluxes*’ spectral shift.

The transformative power of the artistic process alights at a different but equally transitory moment in a series of fabric collages that Amato has been making since 2000. Rather than glue her material elements together, the artist reinvents the collage process by arranging her swatches directly on a digital scanning bed and printing the results, a method that allows her to reuse materials and even compositions from one work to the next. Amato includes textiles ranging from camouflage to a MacDonald tartan to psychedelic flowers and polka dots; by simply adding or subtracting, she can shift a work’s formal and thematic pattern (see fig. 33). Achieving a visual balance between these cacophonous juxtapositions is a primary goal of the work, and is helped by the seamless nature of the scanning technique.² Nevertheless it’s a precarious equilibrium, growing even headier when historical imagery enters

the mix, as in *Fabric Collage (Placemats, Napkins, & Deathcamps)*, 2004 (see fig. 5). Here, dully pleasant geometric patterns layer beside the deep maroon of a Nazi concentration camp plan, whose identification—encouraged by an explicit title—abruptly interrupts the expected aesthetic pleasure of viewing.

That promise of visual pleasure suggested by Amato’s rich swaths of color and pattern is also complicated by the underlying organizational concern of the series “Dot Collages/Tree of Life Chronicles,” 2000–2006 (see fig. 35). Here composition is predetermined in both form and meaning: it is based on the Tree of Life, a central symbolic icon of kabbalistic teaching that vertically diagrams the ten Sephiroth, which are commonly understood as the ways in which God is made visible in the world.³ In Amato’s many versions of this Jewish mandala, the Sephiroth materialize as small circles of paper cut from a variety of found printed matter, including packaging, children’s drawings, and advertising. These rest atop equally unconventional grounds, from wallpaper to sewing patterns, whose linear designs serve to connect the dots. Links between individual Sephiroth are also drawn in traditional Tree of Life schema, but here they are made playfully and aesthetically, the happy accident of overlapping stripes, dots, and curlicues. The double title of the series seems to suggest that a purely formal reading can be as valid as a spiritual one.

Amato’s use of base materials to fashion sacred symbols found a new challenge in *Tablets*, 2005 (fig. 36), for which she turned to that most ubiquitous of common goods, commercial product packaging, to create the image of biblical tablets and the tabernacle. By opening flaps and flattening boxes, and then laying the results one atop the other—complete with glue spots and torn paper—she created assemblages that elevate the ugly everyday not just to the level of aesthetic worth but even further, to that of religious icon.

Fig. 34 **A Temple in Honor of Everyday Life Lived Every Day—
An Unfinished Song of Love**, 1996, mixed-media installation, dimensions variable.



This work harks back to *A Temple in Honor of Everyday Life Lived Every Day—An Unfinished Song of Love*, 1996 (fig. 34), an early room-size installation for which Amato covered eighteen columns in twenty-five thousand paper balls made from twelve years of personal notes, junk mail, photographs, and so on, to create a kind of secular sacred space that symbolically aired the artist's personal life and freed her from it, or at least from the materiality of it.

Each of these acts is simultaneously iconoclastic and spiritual, recognizing potential in the lowliest materials and contriving to redeem them through imaginative and unexpected reuse. Like so much of Amato's work, the stuff-of-life columns and the box-top tabernacles evidence a Midas-like vision—she is able to turn everything from junk mail to cereal boxes to cheap toys into gold. It's a powerfully useful vision in the everyday world of direct-mail campaigns, supermarkets, and dollar stores in which we live.

—LORI WAXMAN

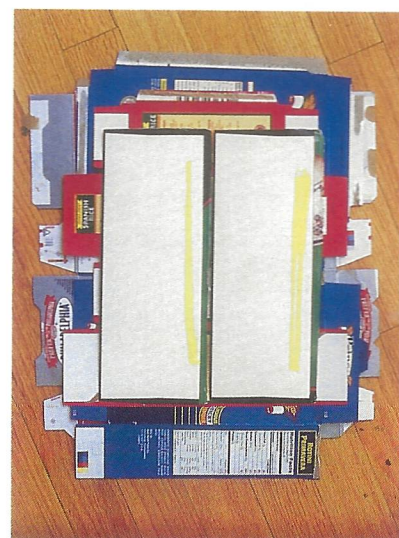
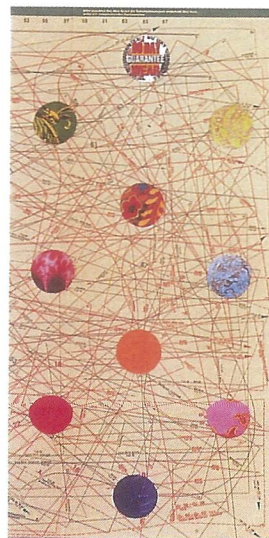


Fig. 35 **Dot Collages/Tree of Life Chronicles (German apparel paper)**, 2000, paper collage, 21 1/2 x 10 3/4".

Fig. 36 **Tablets**, 2005, cardboard and plastic packaging materials, 24 x 18".

1. Amato, artist statement, "Effluxes, Effluence, Effulgency & Effluviums," 2006.

2. Amato, artist statement, "The Fabric and Textile Collages," undated.

3. See Miriam Seidel, *The Hidden Garden: Three Artists Explore Kabbalah*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Borowsky Gallery, The Gershman Y, 2005).