

Isaac Bashevis Singer and His Artists

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This year marks the 15th anniversary of the Ashkenaz Festival. The festival, a biannual event, boasts more than 80 acts and 200+ individual performers this year and is North America's largest festival of Jewish and Yiddish culture. Traditional and cutting-edge Klezmer and Yiddish music, Sephardic and Mizrahi and cross-cultural music, plus diverse offerings in dance, theatre, film, literature, panel discussions, kids and family activities and the Ashkenaz Parade.

One of the events that captured my attention is the exhibit "Isaac Bashevis Singer and His Artists." I called the festival artistic director, Eric Segal, who contacted me with the show co-presenter, Lindy Green of the Al Green Gallery, and the collection's curator, Laura Kruger, from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York.

Kruger is a specialist in contemporary fine art. She has been honoured with the American Jewish Distinguished Service Award for her work at HUC in bringing significant works of Jewish art to the greater community for the purpose of education and cultural enrichment. As creator of the exhibit "Isaac Bashevis Singer and His Artists," Kruger will visit Toronto, and will discuss in a curatorial talk (Sunday, September 5, 3:30pm, Marilyn Brewer Community Gallery, FREE) the process through which she assembled this unique exhibition and reveal the fascinating stories of its unique treasures.

On a phone call to New York, and via a quick email with some images from the show, I got a quick peek on this special treat coming to our city. As Kruger told me, this is the first time that anyone is presenting the full collection of illustrations created especially for Singer's books. Winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize for Literature, Isaac Bashevis Singer's (1902-1991) prolific legacy of books and stories are a pillar in the canon of Yiddish and Jewish literature. Of his many books and stories, 32 have been illustrated. The visual interpretations given to his work by various artists reveal a fascinating variety of approaches, matching the authors own varying themes and moods. This unique exhibit features over 80 paintings, drawings and photographs created by 17 different artists for Singer's books and stories. Exhibited artists include Larry Rivers, Maurice Sendak, Raphael Soyer, Roman Vishniac, William Pene Du Bois, Ira Moskowitz, Eric Carle, Leonard Everett Fisher, Antonio Frasconi, Nonny Hogrogian, Yuri Shulevitz, Irene Lieblich and Margot Zemach.

The small peek here includes some representation of the diverse talent of artists and illustrators who conveyed Singer's spirit in pictures. Most of them were declined meetings with the author, and never spoke with him. They were chosen by the publishers, based on their style and fit to the text. One is Uri Shulevitz, who illustrated two books, *The Golem* and *The Fools of Helem*. Both are not illustrated in traditional children style, but either elegant and timeless, like the first, or cartoonish and funny, like the later. Another is Larry Rivers (1923-2002), a significant American artist who considered by many scholars to be the "Godfather" and "Grand Father" of Pop art. Rivers illustrated one of the more expensive editions of "The Magician of Lublin", by the Limited Edition Club, on which both author and illustrator are signed. He was so moved by the characters in the book, that it is attributed to say that he sees parallels in the story to his own life, how foolish he was as a young man, but lately was reading the Talmud.

Two of the illustrators who actually met and knew Singer very well were Ira Moskowitz and Irene Lieblich. Moskowitz, who lived within five blocks of Singer, was a close friend. In his illustrations for five of the adults' books, he captured more than anyone the period of

time that Singer is depicting. Lievlich was a Holocaust survivor from the same area in Poland where Singer was born and raised. They met at the Artists Equity gallery on Broadway, New York City, in 1973, where Lieblich's art was on display, and their artistic connection was immediate. Lieblich illustrated two children books, including *A Tale of Three Wishes*.



Irene Lieblich, "Old Man with Lantern" from "A Tale of Three Wishes", 1976



Larry Rivers, "He had seen the hand of God. He had reached the end of the road" from "The Magician of Lublin", Limited Edition Club, 1984



Uri Shulevitz, cover from the book "The Golem", 1982



Ira Moskowitz, "Dance With Kerchief" from the book "Satan in Goray", 1981

For full festival info please visit <http://www.ashkenazfestival.com> or call 416-979-9901

The exhibit Isacc Bashevis Singer and His Artists will be presented on September 4-6, at the Marilyn Brewer Community Gallery, Harbourfront Centre, 235 Queens Quay West, Toronto, FREE admission.

Curatorial Talk, Laura Kruger (New York) "Isaac Bashevis Singer and His Artists" September 5, 3:30pm, Marilyn Brewer Community Gallery, FREE admission.

The exhibit continues September 8-30 at the Al Green Gallery, 64 Merton St., 416-440-3084

Reception September 14, 6-8pm

Regular Gallery Hours: Wed, Fri, Sat – 12-5pm, Thu 12-7pm
www.thealgreengallery.com

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