

EONS OF EXODUS, 2008

By Harriete Estel Berman
2009.9.29
G362

Seder Plate constructed from recycled tin cans; 10 k. gold, sterling silver and aluminum rivets; stainless steel and brass screws.



Key Points:

- Plate for the Passover Seder (SAY-dur) dinner. Passover is one of the most widely celebrated of the Jewish holidays. It is celebrated for 7-8 days each Spring. It commemorates the story of the Exodus, when the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt.
- Outer images depict Jewish emigration over thousands of years. The narrative begins with the original exodus from Egypt (over the black triangle) and continues with images of Jews over the centuries in the places they have lived. The final scene depicts African refugees in the twenty-first century fleeing the violence in Darfur, linking the Jewish story to others' stories of exile.
- The top of the Seder Plate is a framework that is both an intersected Jewish star and cuts a path across the centuries. The traditional symbolic foods are embossed in the tin cans on the top, with the addition of an orange.
- An orange is out of place on a Seder plate, but has become a symbol of support for including gays, lesbians and women as full-fledged participants in Jewish ritual.
- A Plexiglas panel fits snugly recessed into the top which protects the Seder Plate from food and makes it completely functional.
- Primarily constructed from recycled tin cans
- Berman considers herself a metalsmith, working with many recycled materials.

Open Ended Questions:

- Think of a favorite dish or serving piece you use for family celebrations. Please share.
- Think of items in your home that are discarded or go unused (in storage or in drawers or up on closet shelves, for example) – what 'old' items might you use to construct an object of art?

Additional Notes / Information:

- In the narrative of the Exodus, the Bible tells that God helped the Children of Israel escape slavery in Egypt by inflicting ten plagues upon the Egyptians before Pharaoh would release his Israelite slaves; the tenth and worst of the plagues was the slaughter of the first-born. The Israelites were instructed to mark the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a spring lamb and, upon seeing this, the spirit of the Lord *passed over* these homes, hence the term "Passover".
- The five symbolic, traditional Seder foods (depicted on the top of the plate) include: the lamb shank bone, parsley, roasted egg, horseradish root, and charoset (a mixture of chopped apples, raisins, wine and possibly nuts, which is supposed to represent the mortar used to build the bricks of the pyramids.)
- At the Seder table, a special book called the Passover Haggadah is read out loud. The Haggadah includes the story of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt as well as Seder rituals and traditions.
- The orange is a recent addition to the Seder Plate. The story goes that during a heated discussion about whether women should be ordained as rabbis, a heckler called out that a woman belongs on the Bimah (the pulpit) as much as an orange belongs on a Seder plate. Since then an orange is often placed on the Seder plate as a statement about both women and gay/lesbian participation in Judaism.
- Many of Berman's works are social commentaries. She is currently working on a large scale sculpture made entirely of used pencils, as a commentary on the effects of standardized testing on education. She is requesting students to participate in the project by contributing their own pencils to the sculpture.
- She has done many large scale installations entitled "grass," made from tin cans – photo attached at end of this document.
- Berman resides in California. Her website, which includes the MIA's Eons of Exodus, is: <http://www.harriete-estel-berman.info/>

Possible Tours (from the MIA tour topics listed online):

- Absolutely Fabulous: Highlights of the MIA Collection
- Art Since 1950
- Made in America
- Women in Art (female artist)
- Concerning the Spiritual in Art
- Decorative Arts: Beauty in the Useful
- How Was It Made?

Grass, by Berman – made from recycled tin



Researched March 2011
3 of 3