

Menorah #2



Artist: Peter Anton Shire (American, born 1947)

Date: 1986

Location: G362

Medium: Decorative Arts and Utilitarian Objects, Judaica | Steel, anodized aluminum, brass, chrome, enamel

Creation Place: United States

Physical Description: geometric designs in a variety of colors in a sculptural form; two notched black pyramid shapes on either end of red textured bar form base; large open gold ring on one side with small yellow bar extending out on a diagonal, attached to a purple cylinder; grey triangular shaped attached to top of gold ring, topped with black double wedge shape in shiny black enamel, yellow square shape, copper-colored rod with light blue sideways pyramidal shapes, and horizontal silver ring with three black cylinders

Accession Number: 2011.4

Los Angeles native Peter Shire's artistic career has run the gamut from craft and fine art to architecture and industrial design. Shire was the only American designer involved with the high-profile Memphis design group active in 1980s Milan. This Hanukkah lamp features whimsical colors and forms combined with the use of industrial materials, all hallmarks of the Memphis style.

Questions and Activities:

- How does this menorah compare with the other Hanukkah lamps in the gallery? How is it the same? How is it different?
- After explaining "the basics" ask, What is traditional about this menorah?
- What are some adjectives you would use to describe this menorah?
- What kind of mood does it create? What about it creates this mood? Does this mood fit the holiday the menorah was designed to celebrate? Why or why not?

Key Points:

Background

- **The Story of Hanukkah**
 - Judea became part of the Seleucid Empire of Syria in 200 BCE. King Antiochus III the Great guaranteed the rights of the Jewish people to "live according to their ancestral customs" and to continue to practice their religion in the Temple of Jerusalem. However, in 175 BCE, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the son of Antiochus III, invaded Judea, coming "upon the Jews with a great army, and took their city by force, and slew a great multitude of those that favored Ptolemy, and sent out his soldiers to plunder them without mercy. He also spoiled the Temple, and put a stop to the constant practice of offering a daily sacrifice of expiation for three years and six months." (ancient historian Flavius Josephus) Antiochus ordered an altar to Zeus erected in the Temple. He banned circumcision and ordered pigs to be sacrificed at the altar of the Temple.
 - Antiochus's actions provoked a large-scale revolt led by a Jewish priest and his five sons, referred to as the Maccabees. By 165 BCE, the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid monarchy, then led by Judah Maccabee, was successful. The Temple was liberated and rededicated. The festival of Hanukkah was instituted to celebrate this event. Judah ordered the Temple to be cleansed, a new altar to be built in place of the polluted one and new holy vessels to be made.
 - According to the Talmud, olive oil was needed for the menorah in the Temple, which was required to burn throughout the night every night. The story goes that there was only enough oil to burn for one day, yet it burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply of oil for the menorah. An eight day festival was declared by the Jewish sages to commemorate this miracle.
- **The Menorah (also called a Chanukiah)**
 - The Hanukkah menorah (pl. menorot) is a nine-branched candelabrum lit during the eight-day holiday of Hanukkah, as distinguished from the seven-branched menorah used in the ancient Hebrew Temple. (The seven-branched menorah is a traditional symbol of Judaism, along with

the Star of David.) The ninth holder, called the shamash ("helper" or "servant"), is for a candle used to light all other candles. The holder for the shamash candle is distinguished in some way from the other eight, which must sit at the same height. Traditionally, the shamash is placed higher than the others, and often in the center, with four of the other candles on each side.

- The lights can be candles or oil lamps. Electric lights are sometimes used and are acceptable in places where open flame is not permitted, such as a hospital room.
- Kindling Hanukkah lights is the most important Hanukkah custom. It is a mitzvah (commandment from God) that Jews "publicize the miracle" by lighting a Hanukkah Menorah each night during the eight days of Hanukkah. To best publicize the miracle, the Hanukkah Menorah is ideally lit outside the doorway of the house, on the left side when entering. If this is not practical, then the Menorah should be lit in a window facing the public thoroughfare. If the Menorah cannot be lit by the window, it may be lit inside the house on a table, which at least fulfills the mitzvah of "publicizing the miracle" for members of the household.
- The Menorah should preferably be lit immediately at nightfall. If necessary, however, the Menorah can be lit late into the night. The Menorah should remain lit for at least 30 minutes after nightfall. On Friday afternoon, the Menorah should be lit before sundown.
- In addition to the shamash, on the first night one candle is placed in the holder on the far right, and is lit using the shamash. Each night afterwards, for the next seven nights, one additional candle is kindled. The night's blessings are started over the newest candle. The candles are placed in the menorah from right to left and kindled from left to right.
- There are three Chanukah blessings that are sung or said immediately before lighting the candles of the menorah. The third blessing (shehecheyanu) is only sung or said on the first night. The blessings are as follows:
 - Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to kindle the Chanukah lights.
 - Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who performed wondrous miracles for our ancestors, in those days, at this moment.
 - Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us in life, sustained us, and brought us to this moment.
- After the reciting of the Hanukkah blessings and lighting the new light for the night, Hanerot Halalu is traditionally recited as additional lights are lit. Hanerot Halalu is an ancient chant mentioned in the Talmud (Soferim 20:6) that speaks of the sacred nature of the Hanukkah lights and states that the sole intent in kindling Hanukkah lights is to publicize the miracle.
- Once the candles have been lit, Maoz Tzur is traditionally sung. "Ma'oz Tzur" is a Jewish liturgical poem or piyyut. Its six stanzas correspond to five events of Jewish history, the fifth referring specifically to Hanukkah, and a hope for the future.

The Artist / Biography

- The American ceramicist Peter Shire was born in Los Angeles on December 27, 1947. He received his training in ceramics at the Chouinard Institute in Los Angeles, graduating with a BFA degree in 1970. In 1972, Shire established a studio of his own.

- In 1974, Shire made the two pieces he considers to be the first mature work of his career in clay. Auffen Gile and Gile Kilns were Shire's sculptural, geometric interpretation of the traditional teapot, complete with sun-bleached pastel glazes, uncanny angles, and a jumbled collage of parts. Influenced by Bauhaus aesthetics, the revolutionary work of Southern California ceramic artists like Peter Voulkos and Ken Price, and his own upbringing in Los Angeles, Shire sought to make a piece that meshed all this together. In his first teapots, he rolled these elements into one and found a form that he has continued to reinvent throughout his career.
- In 1975, a Hollywood gallery gave him his first solo show, where he presented his ceramic objects, teapots and other vessels, as well as painted tiles.
- Shire's early teapots were also significant because they attracted the eye of Ettore Sottsass, one of the founders of Memphis, an international design movement that came out of Italy during the 1980's. Sottsass found Shire's teapots "fresh, witty, and full of information for the future", and the members of Memphis agreed. The group, which sought to revitalize design by rejecting conventional standards in favor of a bold, colorful, novel approach to product design, invited Shire to Milan to work with them. This gave Shire the opportunity to work in glass, metal and other new mediums.
- Since the Memphis years, Shire's work has continued to expand. Drawing inspiration from his neighborhood in Echo Park and the ever-changing city of Los Angeles, he continues to construct his teapots while also branching out into large scale sculpture, works on paper, and even painting. Shire's paintings, a unique part of his work that he has been producing since the 1970's, are done on slabs of clay in ceramic glazes. Almost all in portrait format, they focus exclusively on his life in Echo Park, reflecting the many faces that make up his neighborhood. Shire has now made over 500 of these painted tiles, which have become a personalized record of the history of Echo Park. In addition to this work, Shire has done various commissions for public places and private buildings throughout Los Angeles. The colorful tile murals and large scale sculpture he creates, which playfully reflect on the good and bad of life in a modern city, allow him to add his own point of view to the streets and buildings of the city he knows so well.
- Between 1991 and 1992, Shire took five trips to Japan where he made huge, astounding sculptures for Sapporo Breweries, the Hokuden Company and the AIM factory. While at AIM, with the help of an assistant, Shire created over 30 elegant small scale sculptures. In 2008, AIM went out of business and Shire returned to Japan to recover the works, which were included in *Hokkaido Story Revisited: Late Spring* in May of 2011 at a Los Angeles gallery.
- His work is in many museum collections throughout the United States and abroad, including Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Shire has taught art and design courses at a number of Los Angeles's art and architecture schools. His public sculptures can be found in Los Angeles at Elysian Park, the Academy Village Housing Project in North Hollywood, at the Ramada Plaza in West Hollywood and in Phoenix and Las Vegas.
- Shire worked on the Design Team for the 1984 XXIII Olympiad in Los Angeles, which was recognized by the American Institute of Architects. He has been honored by awards for his contribution to the

cultural life of the City of Los Angeles. He continues to run his art studio out of Echo Park, the neighborhood of his birth.

The Artist's Philosophy, Ideas and Influences

- Quotes from the Artist:
 - "Mystical absurdism, amazing, astounding phenomena on a human scale and what is funny about the way we love and hate industrial things...is what interests me."
 - "I am a maker of things, a hand-skills guy. [There] is no separation between art and craft. They are all one, and a daily living experience is worthy of aesthetic consideration."
 - "The art world likes to categorize artists. When I think about my position in the art world, I realize it is extremely mobile because I include and cross over so many boundaries."
 - "If Leonardo were alive today he would probably be working at Cape Canaveral."
 - "A chair is more than just where we put our butts."
- "Shire does not reject the rich heritage of twentieth century art, and references to Bauhaus, Futurism, Art Nouveau or Art Deco are to be ground throughout his work. However, his art dismisses a facile linear trajectory and replaces nostalgic connotations with eclectic playfulness and subtle irony." Peter Shire official website
- Shire was also influenced by the work of Southern California ceramic artists Peter Voukos and Ken Price.
- Memphis
 - In 1981, Ettore Sottsass, a Milanese designer and architect, formed a loosely organized group to pursue an ironic approach to design in which surface decoration was paramount. When the group met one evening at Sottsass' home, Bob Dylan's song "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again" was playing. Struck by the diverse implications of "Memphis," the designers adopted the name. It suggested not only the typical American city, the blues, and suburbia, but also conjured visions of the ancient Egyptian capital, thus signaling contemporary and historical meaning as well as high and low culture. Memphis annually introduced new furniture, lighting, textiles, ceramics, and glass objects in Milan from 1981 through the late 1980s.
 - Memphis's hallmarks were super-sizing, dizzy colors, gaudy patterns and cheesy motifs.
 - Peter Shire was invited to Milan to work with the Memphis group. This led to a series of projects that toyed with the intersections of industrial design and fine art, and gave Shire the opportunity to work in glass, metal and other new mediums.

The Sculpture

- Menorah #2 was created during the time Peter Shire was working with the Memphis group and incorporates materials that he first used during his time in Milan: steel, anodized aluminum, brass, chrome and enamel.
- The menorah embodies the Memphis aesthetic: exuberant, glittery, using gaudy colors and unconventional materials.

- Notice the Star of David on the lower part of the large open gold ring, not mentioned in the museum label description. (The Star of David is a six-pointed star made up of two triangles superimposed over each other. In Judaism, it is often called the Magen David, which means the "shield of David" in Hebrew. It doesn't have any religious significance in Judaism but it is one of the symbols most commonly associated with the Jewish people.)

Sources:

- "Hanukkah", Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanukkah>
- "Hanukkah Music", Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanukkah_music#Maoz_Tzur
- Lisa Katz, "Hanerot Hallalu", About.com, <http://judaism.about.com/od/chanukah/a/hanukahanerot.htm>
- Ariela Pelaia, "Hanukkah Songs: Maoz Tzur (Rock of Ages)", About.com, <http://judaism.about.com/od/holidays/a/Hanukkah-Songs-Maoz-Tzur.htm>
- "Menorah (Hanukkah)", Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menorah_\(Hanukkah\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menorah_(Hanukkah))
- Lisa Katz, "How To Light a Hanukkah Menorah", About.com, http://judaism.about.com/cs/chanukahgeneral/ht/hol_chan_light.htm
- Peter Shire website: <http://www.linzercola.com/narainsp.html>
- "Peter Shire", Art Directory website, <http://www.art-directory.info/design/peter-shire-1947/>
- "Peter Shire ", Frank Lloyd Gallery website, http://www.franklloyd.com/dynamic/artist_bio.asp?ArtistID=28
- "Peter Shire", Ketterer Kunst website, <http://www.kettererkunst.com/bio/peter-shire-1947.shtml>
- "Artist Peter Shire unveils his gateway to North Hollywood", *Culture Monster*, July 10, 2009, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2009/07/artist-peter-shires-gateway-to-north-hollywood.html>
- "Peter Shire's Echo Park Pottery Hokkaido Story Revisited: LateSpring Exhibition and Book Release", <http://www.americantowns.com/ca/losangeles/news/peter-shire-s-echo-park-pottery-hokkaido-story-revisited-latespring-exhibition-and-book-release-4829678>
- "Memphis Group", Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memphis_Group
- Jane Adlin, "Design, 1975–present", Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dsgn4/hd_dsgn4.htm
- Alice Rawsthorn, "Love it or loathe it, Memphis style with its color and kitsch is back", *The New York Times*, Sunday, September 16, 2007
- "Memphis, Product + Furniture Designers (1981-1985)", Design Museum Collection, <http://designmuseum.org/design/memphis>
- Jonathan Glancey, "Love it or loathe it?", *The Guardian*, Wednesday, September 5, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2001/sep/06/artsfeatures.arts>

Submitted by Helen Leslie