



Conversations for the Future

Dages Juvelier Keates

Amit Leblang's "Another Haggadah" is a visual conversation about the past, a conversation for the future. A Haggadah ("telling") is a text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder, a series of acts involving telling a story, asking questions, and ritualized food and drink. The Haggadah is a rare liturgical work in two ways: as a guidebook for families to conduct a labyrinthine, abstruse religious ritual, and as the only sacred Jewish book that encourages open retelling and personal intervention. Leblang deconstructs the text, intervening on intergenerational co-imbrications of identity.

Words lie at the heart of both the traditional Haggadah and Leblang's recomposition. The Haggadah is written across languages of exile (Aramaic) and of redemption (Hebrew). Leblang works across visual and poetic languages, rendering a blended script of mother tongues and engraved images. She cuts, collects, and curates. We read excerpts from her grandmother's diary interspersed with retranslated/recomposed liturgy. We overhear a conversation between the artist and her parents about the Haggadah's role in legitimating weaponized nationalism.

Leblang's artistic research emerges from the urgent need to locate herself in history. Another Haggadah has evolved from collages, etchings, and early performances of translated transcriptions. Like the Seder, she looks backward to order the place of a self. As a descendant of those who fled European antisemitism in the hope of a safe Jewish state, Leblang has returned to Europe, a Jewish minority, for the first time. She maps a complex identity—'a child of ancestors "returning from exile," a future ancestor seeking "redemption" from militarized state violence.

One is born into a rubric of existence that extends impenetrably backward, unfathomably forward. Ritual time is nonlinear. Leblang's presentation of poetic fragments and images on the same plane mirrors the leveling of objects on the seder plate. Seder means order; its activities are enumerated, and the tasks leave their mark: crumbs of matzoh, red rings of wine glasses forming a collage, a map, a lead back.

Historical maps are topographical, accreting in significance to form a landscape that can be named, divided, owned. Leblang intervenes on the violences of mapmaking. How else might we locate when and where we are? What gives an identity? A name? Another Haggadah imagines another cartography for locating the possibilities of a place, of a person.