

AROUND TOWN

Through the Looking Glass: The newest works by Eric Finzi are subtitled "Reflections of Lewis Carroll's Untold Stories." On view from Sunday through Aug. 4 at Heineman-Myers Contemporary Art, 4728 Hampden Lane, Bethesda. An opening reception with the artist will take place from 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday. For more information, visit heinemanmyers.com.



"The Family Noachovich: Rainbow Coalition" by Nahum Halevi is among the paintings currently on display at the JCC of Northern Virginia.

ARTSCAPES

Bible stories retold in modern art

By Robin Tierney
Special to The Examiner

Full of color, vitality and captivating figures, Nahum Halevi's oil paintings can be enjoyed simply at face value. But each is a mystery box of poetry and allegory inspired by the Old Testament in which viewers can get lost in thought.

The modernist painter seeks "the transcendent meaning of the Bible" through the imagery of plants, animals and humans, some possessing unusual anatomical augmentations. To divine the primal meanings of Old Testament stories, he adds ancient Hebrew words, pre-ancient ideographs with roots reaching back to 2000 BC, Greek and Yiddish words and even Egyptian hieroglyphics.

"I consider my collection of work a postmodern illuminated biblical manuscript," explains Halevi, whose new exhibition, "Echoes of Illumination," runs through July 25 at the Bodzin Art Gallery, located at the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia. His lifetime goal is to visually express the entire Bible in this intensely unique manner.

Halevi is nearly as complex as his art. His day job is chief of neurosurgery at Shady Grove Adventist Hospital, where he is known as Dr. Nathan Moskowitz.

Speaking of Bible-themed art, here's an intriguing venue just off Rockville Pike in Bethesda. The Dennis and Phillip Ratner Museum features exhibitions of local and international artists. A Peruvian exhibition is wrapping up, but opening June 29 is an impression selection of sculpture, paintings and photography by Argentine artists including Felisa Federman, Andrea Paipa and Graciela Bidolegui.

The best-kept secret, though, is on the second floor. It's a visual paradise of sculptures by Phillip Ratner, who interprets Bible stories and Jewish mysticism in a delightfully free-form style. Treats include Solomon's Wisdom, David and Goliath, Jonah in the jaws of the whale, a contortionist Miriam dancing with joy, the Burning Bush, Exodus, Abraham and the Three Angels, and Eve and the Serpent. You may be moved to peruse the Good Book when you get home.

MUSEUMS » NEW EXHIBIT

Venetian treats

New exhibition looks beneath the surface

By Robin Tierney
Special to The Examiner

As war, plague and fire ravaged early 16th-century Venice, its Renaissance men turned to Classical art and poetry for inspiration. The resulting explosion of creativity brought the world timeless masterworks as well as innovations in painting, such as the switch from tempera to oil, from panel to canvas, and the use of natural additives to achieve the luminous colors so distinctive to the art of Venice.

A new exhibition at the National Gallery of Art presents 50 masterworks that celebrate "Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting."

Several pivotal themes revolutionized Venetian art, notes curator David Alan Brown, the Gallery's curator of Italian paintings. These include pastoral landscapes where nymphs, satyrs, shepherds and religious figures carry on before backdrops of sunlit hillsides, shaded groves and placid blue water. Then and today, the paintings offer a close-to-home respite for stressed urban dwellers.

In "Saint Jerome Reading" (1505), Bellini, well into his senior years, experimented with illuminated bridges, waterways and a bunny. He moved the subject to a lower corner to reveal more landscape and to suggest Jerome's withdrawal from the world to study the Bible.

Friendly rivalry was not uncommon. Bellini and Titian both painted pastoral landscapes for a duke's palace. Bellini completed "Feast of the Gods" in 1514; younger Titian depicted "Bacchanal of the Andrians" in 1522, presenting drunken revelers celebrating by a river flowing with wine. Seemingly in competition with the ghost of his past teacher, Titian in 1529 altered a hillside in Feast of the Gods to harmonize Bellini's composition with his own — with the duke's blessing.

In "Pastoral Concert," a 1510 composition of glorious color on loan from the Louvre, Titian covered

an additional theme of the times: eroticism. For gentlemen who appreciate variety, Palma Vecchio offers an artful voyeur's view of 13 zaffig "Bathing Nymphs" (1525).

A third theme centers on courtly male portraiture. Nobility is no longer conveyed by ornamentation but through expression of innate qualities captured in pigment. Check out the astonishing detail of Titian's "Man with a Glove" (1523), in which the artist chooses basic black over foppish, fussy garb and forgoes poetic in favor of realistic.

A fascinating aspect of this exhibition is a gallery displaying masters' secrets, in both technique and content, exposed by conservators' tools. X-radiography, infrared reflectography and microscopy allow viewers to spy on the creative process and glimpse "pentimenti" — changes of mind. Most paints are transparent to infrared radiation, permitting peeks at underdrawings. The tools also reveal how artists intensified and muted tones, changed



posture and positioning of subjects and rearranged elements.

Giorgione adapted pigments used in Italian manuscript illumination to endow robes with glow-

ing orange and yellow tones in "Adoration of the Shepherds" (1500). To heighten luminosity, the Venetians mixed pulverized glass and ground quartz into their paints.

BELLINI, GIORGIONE, TITIAN, AND THE RENAISSANCE OF VENETIAN PAINTING

On view through Sept. 17
» **Venue:** National Gallery of Art, West Building, 7th and Constitution Avenue NW
» **Info:** 202-737-4215; nga.gov

They applied oil glazes to soften far-off scenes in haze and layered colors of translucent paint to modulate tones and create new hues.

Sebastiano Del Piombo's "Woman as a Wise Virgin" (1510) casts a quizzical sideways glance at passers-by. But the side-gallery reveals a seductive alter ego beneath the surface of the smart, chaste model.

Visual storytellers include Cima da Conegliano, whose 1506 oil on panel "Judgement of Midas" engagingly presents a Greek myth. As told by Ovid in "Metamorphosis," Midas was asked to judge a musical contest between Apollo and Pan. His punishment for choosing the satyr's music over that of a god? Sprouting the ears of an ass.

You have until Sept. 17 for this bucolic escape before the show travels overseas.

ECHOES OF ILLUMINATION

On view through July 25
» **Venue:** Bodzin Art Gallery, JCC of Northern Virginia, 8900 Little River Turnpike, Fairfax
» **Info:** 703-537-3063; nahumhalevi.com

ARGENTINEAN ARTISTS

On view June 29 to July 27
» **Venue:** Dennis and Phillip Ratner Museum, 10001 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda
» **Info:** 301-897-1518; ratnermuseum.com