

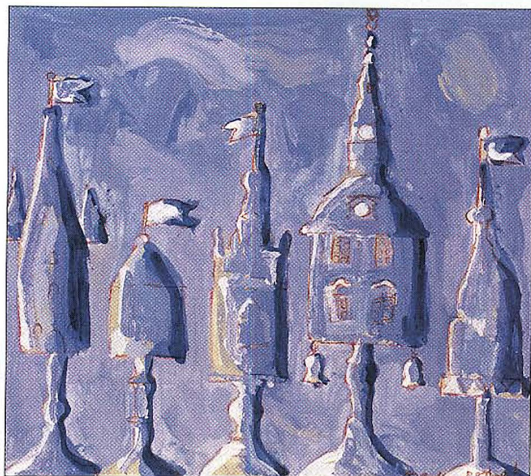
ARTnews

Reviews: New York

Mark Podwal

Yeshiva University Museum

Mark Podwal has made works on Jewish subjects for more than 30 years, collaborating with such writers as Elie Wiesel and Cynthia Ozick and, since 1972, con-



Mark Podwal, *Spice Boxes*, 2001, acrylic, gouache, and colored pencil, 7" x 8." Yeshiva University Museum.

tributing his drawings to the Op-Ed pages of the *New York Times*.

The most compelling pieces in this retrospective were the ones that made use of Kabbalistic symbolism. In the gouache *Rabbi Nachman's Chair* (2003), a rooster struts in front of an empty chair, and Hebrew letters float on a blue background. Even without an explanation of its imagery, the piece—titled after the rabbi in Safed, Israel, whose grave is considered a shrine by Kabbalists—achieved a mystical tone. In the pen-and-ink drawing *Dream of R. Loew* (1980), tiny letters stream out of a window to form the figure of a man. Named for the rabbi in 16th-century Prague who supposedly gave life to a golem, or river monster, by inscribing a word on its forehead, the work could be interpreted as a collective portrait of those whose lives are spent in the study of sacred texts.

Podwal's watercolors were similarly

mysterious. In *Before the New Year* (1997) a man holding a Torah wears a prayer shawl covering his head. Dark blues and purples bleed into each other, blending the forms of man and scroll. Most successful, however, are Podwal's etchings, such as *Israeli Tank* (1998), a sketchy rendering of an oversize menorah protruding from a tank's gun barrel. The work ran alongside a 1998 *Times* op-ed on Israeli self-defense and effectively communicated some of the complexities of tensions in the Middle East.

—Rachel Somerstein



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