

Mark Podwal

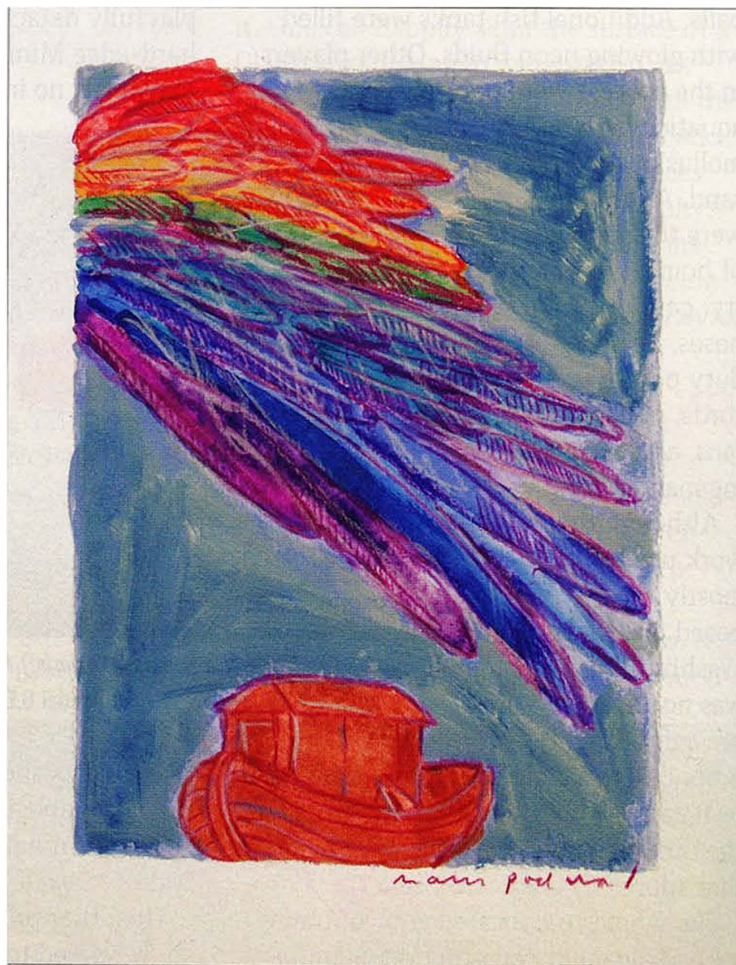
Forum

This show of Podwal's lovely paintings and prints was called "Jewish Magic." Even without the handy explications provided on the exhibition checklist, there was plenty here to

entrance and entertain gentiles as well as Jews. This is perhaps unsurprising given Podwal's admirable history of concerted cross-cultural efforts, but it is also indicative of the sophistication of his art. Podwal, who also has a career as an illustrator, often borrows from traditional or vernacular depictions—of Torah scrolls, say, or temples, or even devils—but he combines them in pictorial schemes that have the density, complexity, and, yes, magic of his religious and mythological sources.

A picture titled *Metatron* (2006), which like most of the pieces here was only 7½ by 5½ inches, depicts Noah's Ark, small and brick red, against a milky blue sky dominated by an outsize wing that is shot through with the seven colored bands of the rainbow. A gallery handout explained that "the rainbow is none other than the angel Metatron," but that verbal explanation provided much less information than did the mysterious image of that vulnerable little boat and the celestial phenomenon—at once protective and awesome—that appears above it.

All the more remarkable is the fact that Podwal achieves this kind of meaning



Mark Podwal, *Metatron*, 2006, acrylic, gouache, and colored pencil on paper, 7½" x 5½". Forum

with such a relaxed style, at such an intimate scale, and with such simple materials—mostly colored pencil, acrylic, and gouache on paper—and a palette that usually ranges from the pastel to the fading primary tones of comic books.

—Robert Ayers