

## TWIN CITIES LIVING

## A room with a view

*The Sabes JCC's Tychman Shapiro Gallery helps artists connect and builds community*

By DAVID JORDAN HARRIS

Most of us have a favorite room in our home. It might be a sun porch flooded with natural light and the best view of a long-limbed oak tree in the backyard. Maybe it's the room on the second floor with a sloped ceiling, a comfortable red velvet chair, and a great corner for reading a book and dreaming new thoughts. Or perhaps it's the kitchen, where creativity is on a high boil every time you walk into the space. These favorite rooms give us a place to see deeper into our lives and to stretch beyond the ordinary.

The Tychman Shapiro Gallery is many people's favorite room at the Sabes JCC. The brainchild of Al Tychman, it was created 10 years ago to offer artists a secure, dedicated space to exhibit artwork that stems from an artist's Jewish background or that creates ties to Jewish culture.

According to Al's son David, "Al believed the cultural arts were one of the key components in the JCC, along with sports and fitness and support for the very young and the very old. It couldn't be a strong JCC without the cultural arts."

The visual arts were hardly a new concern. RuthAnn Weiss, who had been hired at the JCC in 1970 as the director of art education and later served as its cultural arts director, brought her own passion for the visual arts and her experience as an art teacher to the job.

Gallery C, which was located on the JCC's mezzanine, was the predecessor to the Tychman Shapiro Gallery.

"Gallery C provided the community

## ART MAVEN



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an opportunity to hear the voices of Jewish artists who had important things to say," Weiss reminisced. "They broadened the perception of Jewish thought. You don't just have to go to a synagogue to encounter a Jewish feeling or Jewish thought." Work by significant locally based artists, such as Harriet Bart and Stuart Klipper, was displayed as well as art brought in from other American cities and Israel.

The space that became the Tychman Shapiro Gallery had been an adult lounge. Weiss had hung photographs and small prints in the room, but it was a multi-use facility. When the Tychman and Shapiro families made their gift that brought the new gallery into existence, there was still a missing component.

Urged on by the JCC's cultural arts committee, artist Robyn Stoller Awend was hired as a full-time curator of the space with a budget to accommodate a full schedule of shows in every season. An arts committee, led by Awend, selects five or six exhibits per year.

"Celebrating local artists is important to us, including emerging artists," Awend says. "We try to have a diversity of media and content — with at least



Courtesy of the Tychman Shapiro Gallery

**Photographer David Sherman (back, facing camera) speaks during the opening reception for his exhibit *Transfer of Memory* at the Sabes JCC's Tychman Shapiro Gallery.**

one Holocaust-related exhibit a year. I find that the more ways we can expose people to the Holocaust and through different lenses, the more opportunity we have to carry on its many stories."

The appetite for displaying art has burst beyond the gallery's walls into the adjacent corridors. Awend now also curates a second exhibition space called the Shared Walls Exhibition area. One of the most popular shows, a recent display of dazzling photographs from the State of Israel's early years by Rudi Weissenstein, was made possible with the support of Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council, an initiative of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation.

Awend has found that much of the most interesting work that she has

been able to display has grown out of these kinds of collaborations with the larger community. As for the gallery's outstanding relationship with Rimon, Awend comments, "We're holding the handle of the same umbrella — helping artists connect, seeing things through a Jewish lens, building community."

The gallery has been a hit with the public.

"Many of the people who come into this building are coming for other reasons," Awend says. "The gallery gives them a chance to experience artwork that they may not otherwise get a chance to experience... and to be in a room where they're surrounded by art. For the kids who are in this building, if they're not frequenting museums, they get their own museum

right here."

Everyone associated with the Tychman Shapiro Gallery recognizes that it offers a crucial way for both audiences and artists to connect with Jewish life.

Regarding *Transfer of Memory*, the recent exhibit of Holocaust survivors by photographer David Sherman, Awend recalls, "Every time I'd walk by the gallery, I'd see all generations in there, just standing, frozen in front of an image. I knew they were experiencing in that moment something very personal."

It's a room with something to offer every visitor to the JCC — Jewish or not, young or old.

"Artists are problem solvers, historians, observers of life," Weiss has concluded. "The artwork that artists come up with is a testament to their important investigations."

The Tychman Shapiro Gallery has become an indispensable meeting place for our community — truly a room with a view.

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***Hassidic Courts: A Photographic Look Inside Israel's Ultra-Orthodox Communities* by Israeli photojournalist Gil Cohen-Magen is on display through July 25 in the Tychman Shapiro Gallery at the Sabes JCC, 4330 Cedar Lake Rd. S., St. Louis Park. For information, visit: [www.sabesjcc.org](http://www.sabesjcc.org).**

**Rimon: The Minnesota Jewish Arts Council is an initiative of the Minneapolis Jewish Federation.**

## Works from Jewish Artists' Laboratory to be displayed

The Jewish Artists' Laboratory, an arts initiative through the Sabes JCC that features 17 local artists, will exhibit *Text/Context/Subtext* Aug. 8–Sept. 22 in the Tychman Shapiro Gallery at the JCC, 4330 Cedar Lake Rd. S., St. Louis Park. An artists reception will take place 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 22.

In preparation for the exhibit, artists explored the theme of text/context/subtext through unconventional study and art making sessions. Together with the artists, the lab

explored how the theme is relevant to Jewish tradition and redefines how and where Judaism and art intersect.

Participating artists are Susan Armington, Carolyn Light Bell, Hanna Bloomfield, Joel Carter, Suzanne Fenton, Rani Halpern, Bonnie Heller, Sylvia Horwitz, Alison Morse, Diane Pecoraro, Paula Leiter Pergament, Kris Prince, Louise Ribnick, Phil Rosenbloom and Susan Weinberg.

Additionally, artists-in-residence Shana Cohen and Jordyn Feiger have the opportunity to create a work of

art that can speak to the community at large, with particular focus on the Jewish community.

The laboratory meets twice monthly to engage in ongoing dialogue, and provide a platform for artwork and its process. It is alternately led by facilitators Rabbi Alexander Davis, Meryll Page, Anat Szendro and Robyn Awend.

For information, visit: [www.sabesjcc.org](http://www.sabesjcc.org).

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## Moranis releases album of Jewish music

Rick Moranis, the retired actor known for his roles in *Spaceballs*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Ghostbusters* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, has released a new comic album of original music. With *My Mother's Brisket and Other Love Songs*, Moranis celebrates his family heritage.

In a review, David Jeffries notes that the album "is the joyful and loving sound of Moranis returning to his Jewish-American roots, with klezmer, jazz, folk and nostalgic pop music supporting witty songs about tradition, family and food."

Among the original songs included in the album are "Live Blogging the Himel Family Bris," "Kiss My Mezuzah" and "I'm Old Enough to Be Your Zaide." And the musi-



**Rick Moranis has released *My Mother's Brisket and Other Love Songs*, a new comic album celebrating his Jewish heritage.**

cal styles range from rumba to tango, as well as incorporating the

sound of '60s novelty song artist Alan Sherman, who Jeffries says is the album's main influence.

"In the past if I were to have come up with stuff like this, this filter would have been on it," Moranis told the New York Times, referring back to his days writing for the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. "We would come up with something, and one of us would say, 'No, no, no, it's too Jewish. Can't do it; it's too Jewish.' This time, because I was essentially going to make this record on my own, I could just say, 'The hell with it.'"

Moranis' previous comic album, *The Agoraphobic Cowboy*, was nominated for a Grammy Award.

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