

by this master of the Art Nouveau style. They were originally made in 1926 to advertise a nighttime celebration along the Vltava. All shows end Sunday, April 30. Týnská 6, Prague 1—Old Town. Open Tues.—Sun. 10 a.m.—6 p.m.

**Galerie Jelení-Nadace a centrum pro současné umění (Foundation and Center for Contemporary Art)**—**Jiří Valoch: Project Ends Friday, April 28.** Dřtinova 15, Prague 5—Smíchov. Open Thurs.—Fri. 3–6 p.m.

**Galerie La Femme—Homework IV: Expulsion From Paradise** In the gallery's ongoing series of "homework assignments," it has challenged some 50 artists to respond to the given assignment. Ends Friday, April 28. Bilkova 2, Prague 1—Old Town. Open daily 11 a.m.—7 p.m.

**Galerie Litera—Viktor Karlík** Recent sculptures and reliefs in bronze, iron and plaster whose themes are predominantly urban, with several of the pieces having the motif of the light cast by street lamps. Ends Friday, April 28. Karlínské nám. 13, Prague 8—Karlín. Open Mon.—Fri. noon—6 p.m.

**Galerie Miro at Church of St. Roch—A.R. Penck** A show of selected works by this German artist. Ends Sunday, April 30. Strahovské nádv. 1, Prague 1—Strahov. Open daily 10 a.m.—5 p.m.

**Galerie Navrátil—Hana Purkrabková: It Won't Get Any Better** Figural drawings and fired-clay sculptures. Ends Friday, April 28. Tomášská 10, Prague 1—Malá Strana. Open Tues.—Sun. noon—6 p.m.

**Galerie Rudolfinum—Václav Jirásek: Industry** For this exhibition Jirásek created a series of large-format color photographs of interiors of "dying" factories and portraits of workers. During the run of this show a film by Chen Chieh-jen, *Factory*, will be playing in the Rudolfinum's Small Gallery. Ends Sunday, April 30. Alšovo nábř. 12, Prague 1—Old Town. Open Tues.—Sun. 10 a.m.—6 p.m.

**Galerie Václava Špály—Alois Mikulka** A retrospective of this multifaceted artist whose interests include painting, sculpture, graphic art and writing. Ends Saturday, April 29. Národní 30, Prague 1—New Town. Open Tues.—Sun. 10 a.m.—noon, 12:30–6 p.m.

**Galerie VSUP (Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová/Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design)—KunstLandSchaff(t)** Curated by Kurt Gebauer, this show presents the artworks resulting from a several-day residency in Krems involving Czech and Austrian artists. Ends Friday, April 28. Nám. Jana Palacha 80, Prague 1—Old Town. Open Mon.—Sat. 10 a.m.—6 p.m.

**hunt kastner artworks—Michaela Thelenová: About Freedom** New photographic series. Ends Tuesday, May 2. Kamenická 22, Prague 7—Letná. Open Thurs.—Fri. noon–5 p.m. or by appointment; call 603 525 294 or 777 571 306.

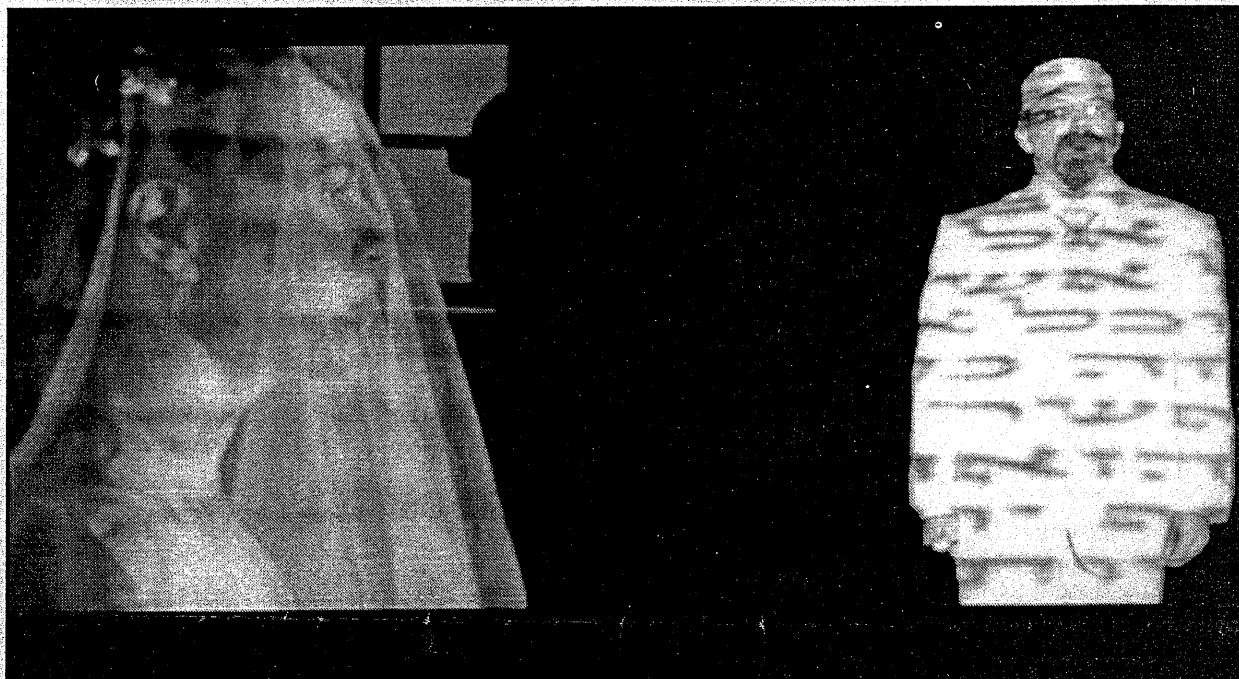
## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

An artist-organized exhibition of digital works is being planned for August, 2006 in Prague. Live videos, animation and all forms of interactive or web-based work will be considered.

For more information, write poppingpixels@gmail.com. Deadline for entries is

# Revisiting ritual

The Jewish wedding, past, present and postmodern



COURTESY PHOTOS

Traditional artifacts, like the ring below, provide a dramatic contrast to Schiff's contemporary wedding ceremony.

BY TONY OZUNA  
FOR THE POST

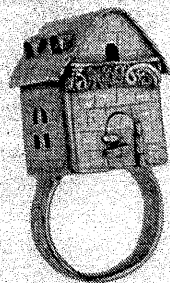
Two shows currently at the Jewish Museum examine the traditional Jewish wedding, one from a social-historical perspective focusing on its unique manifestation in Central Europe, and the other as a critical feminist response.

*Mazel Tov* is the Hebrew phrase for "congratulations," as well as the title of a historical exhibition in the Robert Guttman Gallery that examines the Jewish religious wedding ceremony through photographs, garments, contracts, rings, glasses and many other items used in the wedding ritual, particularly by Jews from Central and Eastern Europe.

The Ashkenazim, or Central European Jews, maintained rites and rituals distinct from those of the other major Jewish group, Sephardim, who are mainly from Spain and the Mediterranean region. The two groups had distinct languages, and though they coexisted in many areas of Europe, it was usually in separate communities with their own synagogues and schools. The liturgies and religious ceremonies of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia were predominantly in the tradition of the Ashkenazim.

Among the exhibit's most interesting artifacts from the 19th century are a *chuppah* (a traditional Jewish wedding canopy), wedding hats, veils, face covers, chalices, plates for breaking during the ceremony and wedding gifts such as Shabbat candelabra, prayer books and pewter plates. There are also wedding rings dating back to the 14th century.

The most fascinating objects in this exhibit are leather shoes, with a characteristic three loops and a long strap, related to the levirate custom, a stipulation in the traditional Jewish wedding contract requiring that a man's widow marry his surviving brother. This custom was based on Jewish marital law (the Deuteronomy code), which also provides a ritual to be followed in the event that the brother-in-law does not



## Mazel Tov: Jewish Wedding Ceremonies: Past and Present

at Robert Guttman Gallery  
U staré školy 3, Prague 1—Old Town.  
**Melissa Schiff: Reframing Ritual: Postmodern Jewish Wedding** at the Spanish Synagogue Vězeňská 1, Prague 1—Old Town.  
Both shows end June 4, and both venues are open Sun.—Fri. 9 a.m.—6 p.m.; closed on Jewish holidays.

In such a case, the elders would hold the ceremony of *halizah* (Hebrew for "removing the shoe"), which releases the woman and the man from the levirate bond. In this ritual, the widow kneels to the ground to loosen the shoe from the brother-in-law, then spits before him and makes a speech according to scripture. The shoe's removal in the presence of the elders symbolizes the dissolution of the wedding contract.

It is Jewish traditions such as the levirate bond that emboldened Canadian performance artist Melissa Schiff to rebel. Her large-screen video projection *Reframing Ritual: Postmodern Jewish Wedding* is a bold gesture, especially in its placement at the altar of the Spanish Synagogue, one of the most heavily visited tourist sites in Prague.

wedding to Louis Kaplan as a performance piece, both honoring and rebuking elements of traditional Jewish wedding ritual.

She incorporated digital and electronic visual media in her ceremony rather than just using them as tools to document the event. The *chuppah*, for example, was tilted to serve as a screen, and a stream of images — old footage of Jewish weddings, or vintage photographs of the couple's parents — were projected above the couple throughout the ceremony.

With a hip-hop klezmer band serving up the soundtrack, the atmosphere of the Schiff-Kaplan wedding is a foot-tapping, celebratory affair, yet there is also a startling and somber beauty to some of the scenes. During the bride and groom's procession, as they walk down the aisle toward the altar, text from the Torah and the Bible is projected onto their bodies. In the darkened room, with a sole spotlight on the bride's veil, she becomes a glowing white spirit wrapped in floating, mystical text.

Shiff's redressing of text from the Torah is perhaps the strongest segment of this performance.

According to a passage in Deuteronomy, if a groom discovers that his bride is not a virgin, "then they shall lead out the damsel to the door of her father's house, and men of her city shall stone her with stones that she die." For Schiff's wedding, this verdict is read out in its entirety, then rearranged so as to delete certain words unacceptable to modern women and society. Then the words are screened back onto the *chuppah* in a new, recombined order, creating Dadaist poetry.

Shiff's 25-minute video has screened at major Jewish film festivals and academic symposiums. But projecting it at the altar of the Spanish Synagogue before an unsuspecting audience is a radical move by curator Michaela Hajková, and a real coup for gender politics.

