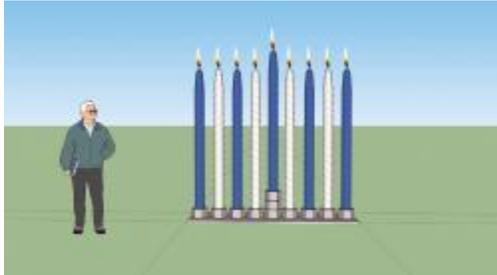


# The festival of lights is now an MFA tradition

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“Menorah 1” – part of the MFA exhibition The Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston, will officially launch its second annual Hanukkah Celebration at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 9 with the lighting of Boston artist Hilary Zelson’s unique 8-foot tall menorah in the Shapiro Family Courtyard.

Last year, during the first such event, some 2,300 people came to the museum, according to estimates by Linda Apple, MFA Director of Volunteers. “We expect and hope to exceed last year’s attendance numbers,” Apple said. She has been working for weeks with dozens of volunteers and museum staff to prepare. “This is a wonderful time to celebrate the holiday together, a wonderful way to combine art and culture.”

Before the menorah lighting, a community candle lighting will be led by Rabbi Elaine Zecher of Temple Israel; Yehuda Yaakov, Consul General of Israel to New England; Barry Shrage, president, CJP; Liz Tarlow, Chair, MFA Board of Trustees; Laura Conrad Mandel, Executive Director, New Center. The menorah will be lit, with a candle added each night, through the end of the Hanukkah holiday. “Large menorahs are nothing new,” said the artist. “There’s one in Copley Square and several synagogues have them on the bimah or out in front of their building.” When the museum asked Zelson to design a giant menorah, she said, “I began to play around with the idea. I wanted to create something different.” She specializes in public art and may be best known for her sheep sculptures in the wool district of Boston Harbor at the Children’s Museum.



Yehia Yemini, Hanukkah lamp, 1920s, from the MFA's Charles and Lynn Schusterman Collection. Looking for inspiration for the giant menorah, she recalled the happy memories of her childhood and family Chanukah celebrations. "When I was in Hebrew School at Westchester Jewish Community Center," said the New York native, "every year we made mini-menorahs, usually of construction paper, but one year we had small triangleshaped pieces of plexiglass." The candles for the maxi-menorah she designed are eight feet high and six inches in diameter. At first, she planned to make the candles blue. But when she learned that the menorah would be placed against a white wall, it suggested other options. Now she's contemplating colors. Guests will have to wait and be surprised, she said, as she busily works out the details of the project's construction and lighting.

"Between Lands," a special audio/visual art installation based on themes related to the menorah, allows visitors to interact with one another using virtual reality and illuminating beacons of light to form a giant, abstract menorah. It is scheduled for the Trustees Room, Art of the Americas Wing, Level 3, every 30 minutes between 5 and 9 p.m. Tickets are required and limited free VR tickets are available on a first come first served basis at the New Center table in the Shapiro Family Courtyard starting at 4:30 p.m.

The Remis Auditorium will be screening "The Light in Darkness," a selection of short films from the Boston Jewish film festival about finding humor in dark moments. Space is limited and free tickets are available one hours before show time on a first come, first served basis. Shows begin at 5, 6:30, and 8:30 p.m.

Also joining in the festivities is The Boston Jewish Music Festival, which will present several musical ensembles throughout the galleries, including the Klezwoods, Peri Smilow, and Two-Shekel Swing. From 6-8:30 p.m., Israeli violinist Yoni Battat and guitarist Adam Shapiro present Hanukkah tunes, re-imagined with their own gypsy flavor. In addition, Cantor Peter Halpern of Temple Shalom, Newton, will share some of his favorite Hebrew, Yiddish, and Ladino songs.

There will also be the opportunity to explore the museum's regular collection of Judaica. The museum will hold several Spotlight Talks, focusing on the museum's Judaica, featuring works from the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Collection, one of the largest and most varied Judaica collections in a major American museum. Also, four 15-minute talks in the American and European galleries will examine a selection of these decorative and ritual objects which demonstrate the continuity of Jewish traditions over hundreds of years. Marietta Cambareri, the Jetskalina H. Phillips Curator of Judaica and Curator of Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Art of Europe, will lecture on the collection. Limited free tickets are available on a first come, first served basis at the Alford Auditorium ticket office.

This year's celebration is presented in partnership with the New Center for Arts and Culture (NCAC) and Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston (CJP), and in collaboration with the Boston Jewish Music Festival (BJMF) and the Boston Jewish Film Festival (BJFF). Support is provided by the Consulate General of Israel to New England.

*Starting from 5 p.m. visitors may drop in on film screenings, musical performances, dreidel and menorah-making art activities, and gallery tours of the Judaica collections. The MFA does not charge admission after 4 p.m. on Wednesdays. All events are free.*