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LABA: A Laboratory for Jewish Culture at the 14th Street Y Announces 2017-2018 Fellows Celebrates 10th Anniversary of Fellowship

LABA: Laboratory for Jewish Culture announces the 2017-2018 Fellows: a group of ten culture-makers, a mix of visual artists, writers, musicians, playwrights and directors who are brought together to study classic Jewish texts in a non-religious, open-minded setting centered on a chosen theme; this year's theme is WAR + PEACE.

The 2017-2018 Fellows are **Tal Beery, Tal Gur, Amy Handelsman, Jess Honovich, Ishai Shapira Kalter, Zohar Tirosh-Polk, Jacob Siegel, Yael Sloma, Jon Adam Ross, and Brandon Woolf.**

This year marks the 10th Anniversary of the ground-breaking series by LABA: A Laboratory for Jewish Culture, which pushes the boundaries of what Jewish art can be and what Jewish texts can teach.

Liel Leibovitz will replace Ruby Namdar as the lead LABA teacher this year. Leibovitz is a senior writer for *Tablet Magazine*, and one of the hosts of *Unorthodox*, the magazine's popular podcast. He is the author of several books, including, most recently, *A Broken Hallelujah: Rock n' Roll, Redemption*, and the *Life of Leonard Cohen*. LABA staff includes Ronit Muszkatblit, Artistic Director; Liel Leibovitz, Lead Teacher; Ruby Namdar, Resident Scholar; and Hanan Elstein, Editorial Director.

“As so many of us feel such a profound sense of unease with the state of our nation and the world, there are few wiser courses of action than to return to the ancient texts and ponder what they have to teach us,” said Leibovitz. “The issues facing us today -- of violence and peace, of hate and of lust, of despair and of reconciliation -- are all there in the sacred books, waiting for us to open them up and again ask the timely and timeless questions that forever haunt us.”

“In our 10th year, this theme seemed to be the perfect combination of times and themes aligning,” said Ronit Muszkatblit, Artistic Director of Arts + Culture, the 14th Street Y. “After ten years of study, we are mature enough in our process to handle a gravitas topic and depth of investigation. Our track record shows that we can push boundaries and our community responds. It is exciting that the 14th Street Y and Educational Alliance have been supporting this experiment and giving it the time to thrive. It is inspiring to see what happens when we put artists at the core of a community center.”

Highlights for this season's LABAlive events include:

- **Amy Handelsman's** memoir, *LOVE BY TKO: Life Lessons from the Ring*, is about her obsession with boxing, as both a participant and observer, and her simultaneous return to my Jewish spiritual roots, as ignited by her trainers, the women competing for the New York Golden Gloves, her colleagues from the Mark Taper Forum and a (failed) romance with an unlikely contender.
- Playwright **Zohar Tirosh-Polk** will explore perpetual cultural/national and individual trauma at the heart of many conflicts, and specifically PTSD in the struggle to lead to healing and peace.
- Artist **Tal Beery** will produce a series of prints and performative responses to a manuscript hand-written in Hebrew, Polish and Yiddish by his grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, before

her death.

- **Yael Sloma** creates a video installation *Cardinal Directions* that observes Israeli settlements in Palestinian Territories through the myth of the American Old West. The video combines documentation of the current day-to-day occurrences in settlements in the West Bank with the contemporary incarnations of the Old-West myth.
- Writer **Jess Honovich**'s piece will investigate the intersections of play, commercialized war and inherent values of good and evil through discussions with three year olds, specifically considering superheroes and how the archetypes of war are internalized through play.
- Israeli-American composer, multi-instrumentalist and music therapist **Tal Gur** will work to complete a piece called *Mind Crossing*, a multi-disciplinary performance fusing music, dance, video, and documentary based on a collection of letters written by his grandfather after World War II.

Each year, **The Theater at the 14th Street Y** presents the residency program of LABA: A Laboratory for Jewish Culture. The goal is to provide a big picture narrative focused on social awareness and change that transcends cultures and borders. The Theater supports the creation of new art and culture by providing the space, time, and resources needed to create new work. Inspired by the 14 study sessions of the fellowship, the Fellows will share their new works with the public in the LABAlive Series at the 14th Street Y.

DRUNK / LABA: A Laboratory for Jewish Culture

November 18, 2017

The 2017-18 LABA Fellows kick off the season with DRUNK. This evening includes a five course wine tasting led by renowned sommeliers. The evening will be imbued with revelry and new work inspired by ancient Jewish text in a cabaret setting.

LABAlive Series

January 18, 2018; March 22, 2018; May 31, 2018

Every LABAlive event will present three new works in process reflecting on the theme WAR + PEACE. Each artist's unique contemplation presented on stage weaves into a multidisciplinary evening shared with the public. LABA encourages artists to test boundaries, take risks, and discover ways in which Classical Jewish text can inspire new, deep and meaningful works, which are then coupled with a theatrical teaching of text to enhance and widen the context of each piece. At each LABAlive, Fellows intrigue and inspire, leaving audiences with a curiosity to see more. Many of the Fellow's works go on to second stage productions, with many premiering at the 14th Street Y the following year.

For tickets, visit www.14streety.org/tickets or call 646-395-4310. For details, visit www.labajournal.com.

ABOUT THE FELLOWS

Tal Beery (b. 1984) is an artist and educator. Beery is co-founder of Arts and Ecology, a multidisciplinary institute committed to research, art, and education on radical environmental themes. He is founding faculty at School of Apocalypse, examining the connections between creative practice and notions of survival. Beery is also a core member of Occupy Museums, opposing the economic and social injustices propagated by institutions of art and culture. His written work and interviews have appeared in numerous publications and his personal and collaborative works have been exhibited in museums and galleries in the US and Europe, including the Whitney Museum, The Brooklyn Museum, El Museo Del Barrio, and Momenta Art.

Tal Gur is an Israeli-American composer, multi-instrumentalist and a music therapist. He was born in Israel and grew up in an Air Force base in the valley of Jezreel, where the sounds of combat aircrafts taking off the ground and the sights of fertile plains have influenced his curiosity to humankind and nature. The curiosity developed to an evolving force of expression that found its way mainly through music. He studied for a B.mus at the Jerusalem Academy for Music, majored in saxophone jazz performance. Over time Tal developed an identity as a soloist that fluidly plays different styles of jazz, folk, rock and balkan music and have performed, recorded and collaborated with various bands in Israel, Europe and the United States. Tal's curiosity for music, human beings, relationships and psychology have brought him to pursue an M.A in music therapy from Bar-Ilan University and a post graduate training from NYU. He lives in Brooklyn with his partner and with his daughter and works in a school in Manhattan for children with autism. He released three albums as a composer; *Air Portrait* (2008), *Basar Ve'Dam*, (*Flesh and Blood*, 2011) and *Under Contractions* (2014).

Amy Handelsman is a producer, writer and story executive, working in theater, film and television in Los Angeles and New York. She has developed and produced plays, movies, and cable and network films and series for Center Theatre Group, Showtime, Warner Bros., ABC, CBS, PBS, and Tri-Star. Handelsman has also served as a theater consultant for HBO's U.S. Comedy Arts Festival in Aspen and the Hip-Hop Theater Festival in New York, and as a media consultant for the Foundation for Jewish Culture and Women in Film. She has worked with such diverse artists as August Wilson, Culture Clash, Don Cheadle, Patricia Marx, Erin Cressida Wilson, and Danny Hoch. A lifelong sports fan, Handelsman wrote about her boxing experiences for *Playboy* and is working on a documentary on baseball umpires. She served as the Executive Director of the United States Poker Federation and the United States Mind Sports Association and contributes to various boxing and poker sites. Handelsman teaches *The Literature of Games and Forms of Drama* at Stony Brook University and New York University, respectively (Fall 2017). She is a cum laude graduate of Harvard University.

Jess Honovich is a playwright, screenwriter and educator from Southern New Jersey. Her work has been produced and workshopped by DeZart Performs, Longwood University, New York University, the Paw Paw Village Players, Festival51, Project Y, and the Pittsburgh Opera. She is a 2017 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference Finalist for her play *Giant Slalom*, a 2017 Heideman Award finalist for her play *Hardware*, a recipient of the Mary Marlin Fisher Award for Excellence in Playwriting, and a 2016 Theatre Masters winner for her short play *No More Monsters*, which had productions in Aspen and New York City and is published by Samuel French. She holds a B.S. from New York University in Educational Theatre and a minor in Dramatic Literature and an MFA in Dramatic Writing from Carnegie Mellon University.

Ishai Shapira Kalter (1986, Israel) received his MFA Hunter College, New York (2017) and his BFA from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem (2013), from which he also studied at The Slade School of Fine Arts, London (2011). His first exhibitions and projects were hosted by venues such as YARAT Studios, AZ (2016), West Space, AU (2015), RawArt Gallery, IL (2015), The Helena Rubinstein Pavilion for Contemporary Art, IL (2014), MoBY Bat Yam Museums, IL (2013) among others. He has received several fellowships, grants and scholarships such as The Jean and Albert Nerken Scholarship Fund, The Rabinovich Foundation Grant and the Israel Lottery Council for Culture and Arts Grant.

Jon Adam Ross has performed his solo plays in over 90 cities around the globe. His newest endeavor is the ambitious *In[heir]itance Project*, a national series of devised plays inspired by sacred texts. Jon has performed at the Guthrie Theater (MN), Playhouse on the Square (TN), and in NYC where his stage credits include: a dog, a 2,000 year old bird, an elderly orthodox Jew, a spurned housewife, a horse, a British naval officer in 1700's Jamaica, a goat, Jesus Christ, a lawyer, a hapless police chief, and a cyclops. Jon holds a BFA in Acting from NYU/Tisch.

Born in Brazil to Israeli parents, **Zohar Tirosh-Polk** continues to explore the idea of home and the possibility of peace in her work. Her plays: *Pieces*, *Land/Holy*, *Home/Front*, *The Zionists*, *Theo's Dream*, *Waltz*, and *Six* have been produced and developed at the The New Group, Magic Theatre, The Lincoln Center Theater's Director's Lab, New Repertory Theatre, The Cape Cod Theatre Project, The Jewish Plays Project, Rising Phoenix Rep, Silk Road Rising, the Lark Play Development Center, The Brick and HERE. Her English translation of Hanoch Levin's play, *Those Who Walk in the Dark* is published in *Wanderers and Other Israeli Plays* by Seagull Books and her play, *The Zionists* will be published in the upcoming *Semitic Commonwealth* anthology. In 2012, she won the Jewish Plays Project's new play competition for *Six*. She's a recipient of the Foundation for Jewish Culture's theatre grant and a commission from Highbrow Productions. Zohar has a B.A. in Literature and Writing from Columbia University and a Playwriting MFA from Brooklyn College under Mac Wellman and Erin Courtney. She lives in Brooklyn with her actor/producer husband and their two young children.

Jacob Siegel, a writer and Army veteran living in the same Brooklyn neighborhood where he grew up, though it's now known by a new name, co-edited *Fire and Forget: Short Stories from the Long War*, published by Da Capo in 2012, a critically praised anthology of fiction by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans for which he contributed the lead story. After returning from Afghanistan in 2012 he joined *The Daily Beast* as a reporter covering war, national security, and digital culture. While there he was nominated for a national magazine award and reported from Baghdad the month after the initial ISIS assault on Mosul. In 2015 he left *The Beast* to work as a freelancer and has since published widely read essays in *Tablet magazine*, *Politico*, and elsewhere. Also in 2015 he was a co-instructor along with Kara Krauze for the inaugural semester of *Voices from War*, a free writing workshop for veterans held at the 14th St. Y. My journalism, essays and reviews have been published in *The New York Times*, *Tablet*, the magazine for the National Endowment for the Humanities, *The Daily News*, *Politico*, and numerous other publications.

Born in Tel Aviv suburbs in 1987, **Yael Sloma** is a video installation artist, who explores human narratives, identities and social structures. Sloma, now lives and works in New York and Baltimore, is an MFA candidate of Maryland Institute College of Art as a Fulbright fellow. Sloma graduated with honors the art department of Bezalel Academy of Art (Jerusalem) and exhibited in Museum Quartier (Vienna), Städelschule (Frankfurt), Rencontre d'Arles (Arles, France), Manofim (Jerusalem), and many more.

Brandon Woolf is a theater maker and a scholar of contemporary performance. Recently, he has worked at the Fulton Center, Uncanny Valley, NYUAD Arts Center, Barrow Group Theater, Dixon Place, the Connelly Theater, and the Kennedy Center. He is also the co-founder of two public performance ensembles – Shakespeare in Park Berlin and the UC Movement for Efficient Privatization [UCMeP]. Currently, Brandon is developing projects that continue to probe theater's possibilities as a social and civic practice, including: a devised investigation of the five pages in the Talmud that tackle the "Messiah" (at LABA); a biographical reimagining of Brecht's *Mother Courage* as a site of the destruction of the American "home"; and an existential exploration and racial deconstruction of our "Golden Age" of television. Brandon received his Ph.D. in Performance Studies from UC Berkeley in 2014. He was a Fall Directing Fellow at the New York Drama League in 2015 as well as a "Next Stage" Artist-in-Residence there in 2017. In 2016, Brandon joined the English Department at NYU as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Theater and currently serves as the Director of their Program in Dramatic Literature.

About The Theater at the 14th Street Y

The Theater at the 14th Street Y focuses on social awareness and change through big picture narrative. Inspired by works that welcome artists of all backgrounds, we place artists at the heart of our community and seek to create an inclusive and open cultural experience for all. Art is incubated here.

About LABA: Laboratory for Jewish Culture

At the core of LABA's mission is the belief that classical Jewish text study can and should be a source of inspiration and creativity for contemporary culture-makers and thinkers. All of the public art created through LABA aims to transcend cultural and social borders by bringing to light the universal themes and questions our artists encounter through their engagement with Jewish thought.

About the 14th Street Y

The 14th Street Y's philosophy is grounded in the belief that contemporary Jewish sensibilities can be a source of inspiration, connection and learning. No matter what your background, we aim to inspire you to live your best life. We're committed to the development of the whole person, to strengthening family connections and to building inclusive and sustainable communities. The 14th Street Y serves more than 20,000 people annually with a variety of community programs and is proud to be a part of Educational Alliance, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a 128-year history of serving New Yorkers downtown.

Full Season Tickets and detailed information on shows available at: www.14streety.org/tickets.

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