

CALL FOR PAPERS

Yiddish and the Visual: Material Culture and the Life of Objects

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE | GOLDRICH INSTITUTE FOR YIDDISH

TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY | MAY 16–19 2027

This four-day international conference will explore the rich and under-theorized intersections of Yiddish culture and the arts, with particular attention to material culture, visibility, and the life of objects.

Yiddish studies has developed a strong literary and linguistic canon. Yet the material and visual dimensions of Yiddish culture, including books as designed objects, illustrated print, ritual artifacts, archives, built environments, and contemporary artistic practices, remain unevenly studied and only partially integrated into the field. This conference treats these domains not as ancillary to Yiddish culture but as central to its creation, circulation, and interpretation.

We invite scholars, curators, artists, and practitioners to consider:

- How has Yiddish culture been materialized in print, image, space, and object?
- What are the visual languages of Yiddish modernity and of Yiddish traditional life?
- How do objects, including books, amulets, illustrations, recordings, textiles, theatrical materials, and architecture, carry, transform, or obscure the meanings of Yiddish in their historical and cultural contexts?
- What methodological tools allow us to understand Yiddish culture as a material and visual practice, rather than only as a textual tradition?
- How might attention to material form and visual experience alter established narratives within Yiddish studies?

The conference will take place at Tel Aviv University, with additional sessions hosted by leading academic and cultural institutions and optional excursions to archives, museums, and collections.

Themes and Areas of Interest

We especially welcome proposals engaging with the following areas:

Yiddish Art History and Visual Modernism

- Yiddish avant-garde movements, including the Kultur-Lige and Soviet Yiddish art
- Artists such as Marc Chagall, Issachar Ber Ryback, and El Lissitzky
- Primitivism, modernism, and Jewish visual identity
- Yiddish little magazines as visual and artistic platforms

Graphic Design, Typography, and the Book as Object

- Yiddish typography, lettering, layout, and mise-en-page
- Illustrated Yiddish books, including children's literature
- Journals, newspapers, posters, advertisements, and ephemera
- Woodcut, engraving, lithography, and other printmaking traditions

Manuscripts, Genizas, and Textual Materiality

- Illuminated manuscripts and early Yiddish book culture
- Geniza materials as visual and material archives
- Scribal practices, marginalia, correction, and the aesthetics of transmission
- Conservation, digitization, and changing forms of scholarly access

Folklore, Amulets, and Everyday Objects

- Segulot, shemot, amulets, and magical texts
- Folk art and vernacular visual culture
- Domestic, occupational, and ritual objects
- Material culture and the transmission of custom

Museums, Archives, and the Politics of Display

- Curating Yiddish culture through exhibitions, catalogues, and collections
- The institutional histories of archives, libraries, and museums
- Provenance, displacement, restitution, and contested ownership
- Digital humanities and the visualization of Yiddish materials
- The ethics of preservation, access, classification, and representation
- The place of absence, loss, and reconstruction in museum display

Space, Architecture, and the Built Environment

- Yiddish in urban space, including signage, neighborhoods, and storefronts, theaters, schools, synagogues, print shops, cafés, and other sites of Yiddish life
- Domestic interiors and everyday spatial practices
- Migration, urban transformation, and the material shaping of Yiddish culture
- Memorial landscapes and the reconstruction of vanished spaces

Theater, Performance, and Material Remains

- Scenography, costume, props, posters, playbills, and theatrical photography
- The visual and material history of Yiddish theater
- Performance archives and the preservation of ephemeral forms
- Revivals, adaptations, and contemporary approaches to the Yiddish theatrical repertoire

Contemporary Yiddish Visual and Artistic Practice

- Contemporary illustrators, designers, filmmakers, and performers working in or with Yiddish
- Yiddish in film, comics, animation, digital art, installation, and performance media
- Artistic engagements with archives, inherited objects, and material memory
- Reimagining Yiddish visual culture in the present
- New relationships among artistic practice, scholarship, and cultural transmission

The subjects listed above are suggestive rather than exhaustive. We welcome proposals that expand the conference's geographic, chronological, disciplinary, or methodological scope.

Special Themed Panels

The conference committee particularly welcomes proposals for the following themed panels. Contributors may submit an individual paper for consideration as part of one of these panels, or propose a complete panel of three or four speakers.

Goldfaden, Yiddish Theater, and Its Material Afterlives

This panel will revisit Abraham Goldfaden and the cultural worlds created around his work through their visual and material remains. Possible subjects include theatrical posters and programs, sheet music, scripts and editions, costumes and scenography, photographs, caricature, recordings, commemorative publications, personal objects, museum collections, and the visual reinvention of Goldfaden's repertoire across different periods and locations. We are especially interested in work that uses material evidence to reconsider Goldfaden's place in the history and cultural memory of Yiddish theater.

Seventy-Five Years After the Night of the Murdered Poets

Marking seventy-five years since the execution of leading Soviet Yiddish writers and intellectuals on August 12, 1952, this panel will examine the material, visual, and archival histories through which the event has been documented, remembered, and interpreted. Possible subjects include photographs, manuscripts, letters, prison and state archives, books and journals, memorial objects, monuments, exhibitions, digital projects, artistic responses, and the material traces of Soviet Yiddish cultural institutions. The panel invites reflection on both the cultural worlds destroyed by Stalinist repression and the forms through which their memory has subsequently been constructed.

Propose a Themed Panel

We warmly encourage participants to propose their own themed panels. Panels may bring together papers around a shared object, archive, artistic movement, geographic setting, historical problem, or methodological question. We particularly welcome panels that create conversations across disciplines or between scholars, curators, conservators, artists, and other practitioners.

A panel proposal should include:

- A panel title
- A 250–300-word description of the panel's subject and intellectual rationale
- Three or four individual paper abstracts of 250–300 words each
- A short biography of approximately 100 words for each participant
- The name and contact information of the panel organizer
- The name of a chair or respondent, if already identified

The conference committee may suggest changes to the composition of proposed panels or place individual submissions in panels organized by the committee.

Submission Guidelines

For individual papers and presentations, please submit:

- An abstract of 250–300 words
- A short biography of approximately 100 words
- Your preferred presentation format
- An indication of whether you would like the proposal to be considered for one of the special themed panels

For complete panel proposals, please follow the guidelines under “Propose a Themed Panel” above.

Submission deadline: Friday, December 18, 2026

Notification of acceptance: Friday, February 12, 2027

Email submissions to: goldrichyiddish27@gmail.com

Please include “**Yiddish and the Visual**” and the applicant’s name in the subject line.

Selected papers will be considered for inclusion in an edited volume on Yiddish material and visual culture bringing together contributions developed through the conference.

Organizing Committee

Dr. Rachel Wamsley, Tel Aviv University, Dr. Yaakov Herskovitz, Tel Aviv University,
Prof. Nathan Cohen, Bar-Ilan University, Dr. Yael Levi, Hebrew University of Jerusalem