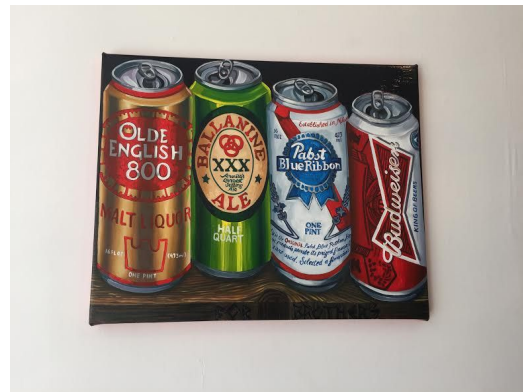


The Four Sons, Reimagined

A gallery in Upper Manhattan is exhibiting works from 11 artists, which resemble interpretations of the story of the Four Sons in the haggadah

By Jordana Narin

In the heart of Hamilton Heights—a neighborhood in West Harlem that’s brimming with history, culture, and personality—is Gitler & _____, an art gallery run by Avi Gitler. Though Gitler’s gallery has hosted 22 exhibitions to date, its current display, called “The 4 Sons,” is its first Jewish-themed one. It’s dedicated, of course, to Passover.



“For Brothers” by Tom Sanford

Rooted in the narrative of the Four Sons—one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who doesn’t yet know how to ask—told during the Passover Seder, the exhibit hosts artwork from 11 artists who were “invited to create his or her own portrait of these tersely described brothers, or in some respect, to transcend their ‘Egypt.’”

“The idea for this exhibit had been percolating in my mind for a long time,” explained Gitler, 36, who is the third of four brothers (or sons, in that respect), and said he has always felt a sort of affinity for that particular part of the haggadah.

So he decided to turn his thoughts into action. But rather than approach artists with deep and long-lasting connections to Judaism, and to Passover specifically, Gitler did the opposite by reaching out to artists who, for the most part, wouldn’t presumably know more about Passover than the average New Yorker. The artists whose works are a part of “The 4 Sons” exhibit are Angélica Muñoz Castaño, Jason Covert, Lori Field, Kristian Glynn, Dennis Kardon, Boy Kong, Erik Olson, Graham Preston, Archie Rand, Team Macho, and Tom Sanford.

“What I told them was: This is Passover, this is what it’s about. This is the Seder, this is what it commemorates. This is the haggadah, and within it there’s this liturgy about four sons,” Gitler said. Then, he told them to do what they wanted.

And the results are wondrous.

The painting by Tom Sanford, titled “For Brothers,” portrays not four men but four cans of beer, each one subtly communicating the characteristics of Passover’s sons. For example, a colorful can of Budweiser, the drink of choice for those not yet fluent in more, perhaps, sophisticated beer, is meant to represent the son who doesn’t know which question to ask—or in this case, which drink to order. A set of five smaller portraits by Lori Field plays on the traditional narrative of the sons by adding in a daughter—and by naming the wicked one, modeled after the likeness of a certain Republican presidential candidate, “Teflon Don.”

The pieces on display in Gitler’s exhibit, made by artists from Colombia, Australia, and Canada, and elsewhere, are united by a thread that’s not so much religious as it is cultural and familial. By commissioning art of all mediums from artists who interpreted his prompt in myriad ways, Gitler succeeds in proving just how relevant the four sons, and Passover as a whole, can be today.



“Teflon Don” by Lori Field

To Gitler, the story of the four sons is a story of asking questions, of not always getting answers. In his gallery, surrounded by colorful and powerful art that doesn’t always make sense to the untrained eye, I felt that same sense of inquiry. And after all, what could be more in the spirit of Passover than an urge to ask questions?

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