

October 29, 2014

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to endorse in the strongest possible terms the application of Florence Soulam and Michèle Fingher for support from the Fondation pour la Mémorial de la Shoah. Their multi-volume series, "Le Voyage de Betsalel," is an outstanding and one-of-a-kind project that promises to disseminate knowledge about Jewish art and Judaism to Francophone audiences around the world. The authors have already completed four marvelous books—three from the collection entitled "L'Art en fête," and one from the collection entitled "A la recherche de la Ménorah." They represent some of the very first efforts to bring an awareness of Jewish art to children. It is high time that young audiences have the opportunity to learn about the long and diverse history of Jewish art. This history is too often neglected, even among adults, but this is all the more true for children. In this sense Soulam and Fingher's path-breaking project fills a major lacuna and offers a means to teach a variety of readers—both Jews and non-Jews—about Jews' rich and evolving relationship to art over the past two millenia. Their work is designed to awaken young readers' curiosity about the subject and will, no doubt, help instill in them an appreciation of Jewish art that they will take with them for the rest of their lives.

The authors are now applying for the support for the fourth book in the "L'Art en fête" series. This book deals with Jewish observance of Shabbat and Rosh Hodesh and is masterfully conceived. I was thoroughly impressed by the draft version that the authors showed me. In this new book bring their astute artistic eye and thoughtful pedagogical awareness just as they have done in previous volumes. This volume, entitled simply "Chabbat et Rosh 'Hodech," takes a simple but brilliant approach: it explains each phase of Shabbat (and later in the book, Rosh Hodesh) through different objects and forms of art. Each page not only teaches us about the everyday objects that Jews have historically used and decorated as part of their ritual celebrations, it also places these objects in their proper social, religious, and historical context. What kind of artistic forms accompany the lighting of the candles? How are the scrolls of the Torah adorned? What does a Jewish family do after coming home from the synagogue on a Saturday? All of these questions and more are answered in this book through carefully selected images and brief accompanying discussions. This approach gives readers an experiential approach to the Jewish holidays that is both visually and intellectually engaging, creative and unique.

In order to give readers a sense of the vast range of Jewish artistic expressions that have evolved over the centuries, the authors have been careful to include examples from different artistic genres (including images of ritual objects, paintings, photographs, and movie stills), different Jewish traditions (from North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, the United States, and India), and

time periods (antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern era). The books are also interactive and include numerous questions, games, and quizzes that can engage young and adult readers alike, testing their knowledge and offering new, thoughtful approaches to the material.

I cannot express strongly enough my support for this project. Indeed, as someone teaching Jewish history in the United States, I can only hope that one day we will be lucky enough to have the collection translated into English as well. It is a true gift to any community that receives it and will no doubt be broadly used in schools, museums, and family settings all across France and the French-speaking world.

Sincerely,



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