

News Release

Press Office

T 212.423.3271

F 212.423.3232

The New York Public Library and the Jewish Museum Announce Joint Acquisition of Maira Kalman's Original Paintings for "The Elements of Style"

Jewish Museum

New York, NY, October 16, 2018 – The Jewish Museum and The New York Public Library (NYPL) have jointly acquired the complete series of 57 gouaches on paper created by designer, author, illustrator, and artist Maira Kalman for the 2005 edition of *The Elements of Style*.

In *The Elements of Style* Maira Kalman adapts the well-known reference book of the same name by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White (originally published by Strunk in 1918, and revised by White in 1959), pairing her irreverent illustrations with its grammatical rules. Known to generations of aspiring writers and English students, Kalman discovered the book at a used bookstore around 2002. She found it so amusing and subject to visual interpretation that it became her most beloved project to date.

Claudia Gould, Helen Goldsmith Menschel Director, The Jewish Museum, said, "Even before participating in the organization of Maira Kalman's 2011 retrospective, I greatly admired her perceptive, irreverent work. This is the first time that the Jewish Museum has collaborated with another institution on a major acquisition. The joint acquisition with The New York Public Library of Kalman's paintings for *The Elements of Style* allows us to significantly expand our holdings of Kalman's work with this witty, incisive series by a unique illustrator, artist, and author."

"Maira Kalman's whimsical interpretation of *The Elements of Style* breathed new life into an important book, making it increasingly attainable while capturing the playful spirit of the original authors," said New York Public Library President Tony Marx. "We are so proud to partner with The Jewish Museum to acquire the 50-plus paintings from this significant contemporary work, which exemplifies the very nature of what happens in our research libraries every day: primary sources being used to create new works. We look forward to seeing how researchers utilize the Kalman pieces, perhaps to make their own interpretations."

Maira Kalman observed, "Since I am Jewish and since I adore libraries, isn't it thrilling that these two glorious institutions share the work. I make books. And I make art. The works are the intersection of these, mixed with a great dollop of curiosity. In a kind of Talmudic manner, I think E.B. White would be pleased. Doesn't it all make complete wonderful sense!"

Of Kalman's paintings for *The Elements of Style*, there are various complex and almost always humorous relationships to the text. In one painting, Kalman depicts a romantic couple seated outdoors with the female looking longingly away from her man to illustrate the text about comparative pronouns, "Polly loves cake more than she loves me." In another, a guilty expression accompanies a basset hound in the caption of parenthetical phrases, "Well, Susan, this is a fine mess you are in."

In 2017, the Julie Saul Gallery showed the entire series of illustrations for the first time. Although the artist has sold other works from previous collections to individual collectors, Kalman chose to keep the illustrations for *The Elements of Style* as one body of work. At the time of publication it also became an original opera written by the young prodigy Nico Muhly in collaboration with Kalman, commissioned by the Library. It was performed in the Rose Main Reading Room at the iconic branch on 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue in October 2005 and subsequently at Lincoln Center and the Dia Foundation in Beacon, NY.

In 2011, the Jewish Museum exhibited *Maira Kalman: Various Illuminations (of a Crazy World)*, a retrospective of Kalman's work organized by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia. In addition to *The Elements of Style* series, the Jewish Museum's collection includes six works on paper by Kalman and in 2014, the Museum commissioned Kalman to create a mural, *In This Life, There Was Very Much* (2015), for its restaurant, Russ & Daughters at the Jewish Museum.

The Jewish Museum
1109 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10128
TheJewishMuseum.org

Under the auspices of
The Jewish Theological Seminary

The Library named Kalman a Library Lion in 2015, awarded for her contributions to New York City and the creative community at large. In honor of the event celebrating her accomplishments and those of her fellow honorees, Kalman selected an illustration from *The Elements of Style* series for a public display. She is also currently working on illustrations for a book about libraries to be published in partnership with Macmillan and the Library.

About Maira Kalman

Maira Kalman (Israeli, b. 1949) was born in Tel Aviv and moved to New York with her family at the age of four. She was raised in bucolic Riverdale, the Bronx, and now lives in Manhattan. Kalman has written and illustrated 18 children's books, including *Ooh-la-la-Max in Love*; *What Pete Ate*; *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey*; *13 WORDS*, a collaboration with Lemony Snicket; *Why We Broke Up*, with Daniel Handler; *Looking at Lincoln*; and *Thomas Jefferson Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Everything*. She is a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker*, and is well known for her collaboration with Rick Meyerowitz on the New Yorkistan cover published in 2001 and The New York City Sub-Culinary Map. Kalman is currently creating an illustrated column for *The New Yorker* based on travels to museums and libraries. Maira Kalman is represented by Julie Saul Gallery in New York City.

About The New York Public Library

The New York Public Library is a free provider of education and information for the people of New York and beyond. With 92 locations—including research and branch libraries—throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, the Library offers free materials, computer access, classes, exhibitions, programming, and more to everyone from toddlers to scholars, and has seen record numbers of attendance and circulation in recent years. The New York Public Library serves more than 18 million patrons who come through its doors annually and millions more around the globe who use its resources at www.nypl.org. To offer this wide array of free programming, The New York Public Library relies on both public and private funding. Learn more about how to support the Library at nypl.org/support.

About the Jewish Museum

Located on New York City's famed Museum Mile, the Jewish Museum is a distinctive hub for art and Jewish culture for people of all backgrounds. Founded in 1904, the Museum was the first institution of its kind in the United States and is one of the oldest Jewish museums in the world. Devoted to exploring art and Jewish culture from ancient to contemporary, the Museum offers diverse exhibitions and programs, and maintains a unique collection of nearly 30,000 works of art, ceremonial objects, and media reflecting the global Jewish experience over more than 4,000 years.

The public may call 212.423.3200 or visit TheJewishMuseum.org for more information.

#

Press contacts:

For the Jewish Museum:

Anne Scher, 212.423.3271 or ascher@thejm.org
Daniela Stigh, 212.423.3330 or dstigh@thejm.org
General inquiries: pressoffice@thejm.org

For The New York Public Library:

Angela Montefinise, 212.592.7506 or angelamontefinise@nypl.org
Amy Geduldig, 212.592.7177 or amygeduldig@nypl.org

