



**From:**

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*Press Release*

**EXHIBITION, *TRACES OF SEPHARAD*,  
TO OPEN AT  
CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY**

*Exhibit and Book Opens a Unique Window into the World of  
Medieval Sephardic Wisdom and Culture*

*“Marc Shanker... has turned them (proverbs) into images...that look like fairy tale  
illustrations at times and, at others, like scenes glimpsed in a child’s nightmare...”*

**-- Antonio Muñoz Molina**

*“Marc Shanker’s haunted art conjures the spirits of Spain and Salonica, via  
Brooklyn...” -- Peter Cole*

*“... Shanker does with art what readers do through interpretation, combining memory  
with imagination...”*

**-- T.A.Perry**

Language is the first element of a culture to be lost under pressure of assimilation. Lost with it are the patterns of thought and ways of seeing and interpreting the world. Judeo-Spanish (Ladino), a form of medieval Spanish spoken even today by descendants of the Sephardic Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492, is endangered. Proverbs are an oral tradition used to pass knowledge and wisdom gleaned from the experiences of preceding generations. The new exhibition and book, *Traces of Sepharad*, by Marc Shanker, features more than 40 interpretive etchings of Judeo-Spanish proverbs, offering a unique window into Sephardic culture and thinking. A recording of the proverbs by a native Ladino speaker will give viewers a sense of the sound and meter of the language.

The exhibition, *Traces of Sepharad*, will open **Monday, November 10, 2008** (6 to 8pm) and **continue through February 2009**, at the **Center for Jewish History, NYC**. The

exhibition is hosted by **American Sephardi Federation**, and co-sponsored by the **Consulate General of Spain** in New York, the **Turkish Consulate General** in New York, and the **Instituto Cervantes**, New York. The Jewish expulsion and the Diaspora that followed, with many of the exiled Jews settling in the Ottoman Empire, is the central focus that ties these institutions together; Spain is in the process of reinterpreting its history and reassessing the contribution of its Jewish and Muslim communities; the Ottoman Turks welcomed the exiled Sephardic Jews, and for over 400 years was a principal repository of Judeo-Spanish language and culture; the American Sephardi Federation's mission is the preservation of Sephardic culture, and the fostering of fraternal links to other religions and nationalities.

A program is scheduled for **Thursday, December 11, 2008** (6pm Exhibit viewing; 7pm Program). Mr. Shanker will speak about his work and book. Joining him will be Spanish novelist, **Antonio Muñoz Molina**, and Sephardic and Biblical scholar, **Professor T.A. Perry**. They will discuss the origins and meanings of the proverbs, their relationship to Sephardic and Spanish culture, and the making of the book. A book signing follows.

### **The Etchings:**

Mr. Shanker is the first artist to tap the rich source of Judeo-Spanish proverbs as the basis of a large body of fine art. The sheer breadth and number of interpretive etchings --line etchings and aquatints --with their many faceted levels of meaning, appeal to a broad audience, even those unfamiliar with Sephardic culture.

Proverbs are the wisdom of the common people. Mr. Shanker's naïve style of drawing and his rich visual imagination mirror the spirit of the proverbs, transforming them into simple images without sacrificing their complex meanings. Mr. Shanker's etchings reflect the proverbs' appealing mix of common sense, timeless wisdom, pithy humor, and irreverence.

1.



2.



1. Del loco y del niño se sabe la verdad.  
The truth is known from fools and children.

2. Madre que parió culevros, se apiadó de ellos.  
The mother who bore snakes felt pity for them.

**Book:**

Accompanying the exhibition is the release of the newly published book, with translations in Spanish, *Traces of Sepharad (Huellas de Sefarad)*.

*Traces of Sepharad*, is the first book to use Ladino proverbs as the basis of a large body of serious visual art. Mr. Shanker's etchings are accompanied by essays by the artist, Mr. Antonio Muñoz Molina, an internationally known novelist and critic, and by Professor T.A. Perry, a respected Sephardic and Biblical scholar. Together the book forges a unique synthesis of fine art, and literary and scholarly essays that touch on salient aspects of the Sephardic experience: language, meaning, humor, religion, cultural and personal identity, family, exile, assimilation, as well as connections to contemporary Spain.

**Artist & Author:**

Marc Shanker is a self-taught artist and a Sephardic Jew. He has been painting, drawing and writing for more than 30 years. His narrative style of art mirrors qualities intrinsic to the Sephardic proverbs: irony, humor, and contradiction while illuminating and interpreting their meanings. Mr. Shanker has exhibited widely, and has published his art in small press magazines.

**Contributors:**

Antonio Muñoz Molina is the author of several novels including: *Sepharad* (Harcourt, 2003); *In Her Absence* (Other Press, 2007); *A Manuscript of Ashes* (Harcourt, 2008). He has been awarded the Premio Nacional de Literatura in Spain, and the Prix Femina in France. He lives in Madrid and New York City.

T. A. Perry is a Professor of Modern and Classical Languages at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. He is author of several books including: *The Moral Proverbs of Santob de Carrión* (Princeton, 1987); *Wisdom Literature and the Structure of Proverbs* (Penn State, 1993); *Dialogues with Kohelet* (Penn State, 1993). His most recent books are: *The Honeymoon is Over: Jonah's Argument with God* (Hendrickson, 2006), and *God's Twilight Zone: Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible* (Hendrickson, 2008).

**Opening Reception: November 10, 2008, 6 to 8pm / Free Admission  
Exhibition continues through February 2009**

American Sephardi Federation  
Center for Jewish History  
15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street (between 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues)  
New York, NY 10011  
[www.americansephardifederation.org](http://www.americansephardifederation.org)

**Reservations are required. To RSVP: Please call 212.294.8350 x.0**

For more information about the exhibit, book, Marc Shanker, American Sephardi Federation and/or to set up an interview, please contact David Dorfman at Pop Media 201.280.6182 or [david@popmediamarketing.com](mailto:david@popmediamarketing.com)