

TIMES CHRONICLE

August 27 - September 2, 2008

SERVING JENKINTOWN, ABINGTON AND CHELTENHAM SINCE 1894

Volume CXV No. 22

TheTimesChronicle.com

World-renowned mixed-media artist Michele Brody erecting 'Memory' installation at Temple Judea Museum

By Paul Nasella
Staff Writer

If you happen to pass by a Merriam-Webster dictionary, look up the word "original," and you'll see the face of world-renowned artist Michele Brody staring back at you. Known for her creative and innovative photography, public art, sculpture, mixed media and installation pieces, Brody is currently working in Elkins Park at the synagogue of Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel on her latest creation, "Entering from the Inside: The Art of Memory."

Funded by the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, the 5-County Arts Fund, the Mandell Foundation, the Temple Judea Museum and private donors, Brody has been working with a group of eight Temple University Tyler School of Art students since early July to construct an installation consisting of two pieces, one inside the museum within the synagogue and the other on its grounds.

Within the museum gallery, Brody will build a to-scale version of the original interior of the Temple Judea sanctuary out of handmade paper "walls." Temple Judea, originally located on the 6900 block of North Broad Street in North Philadelphia, was the former site congregation Keneseth Israel descended from more than 20 years ago. It is the current site of Ivy Leaf Middle School.

Special paper will be stretched over a copper

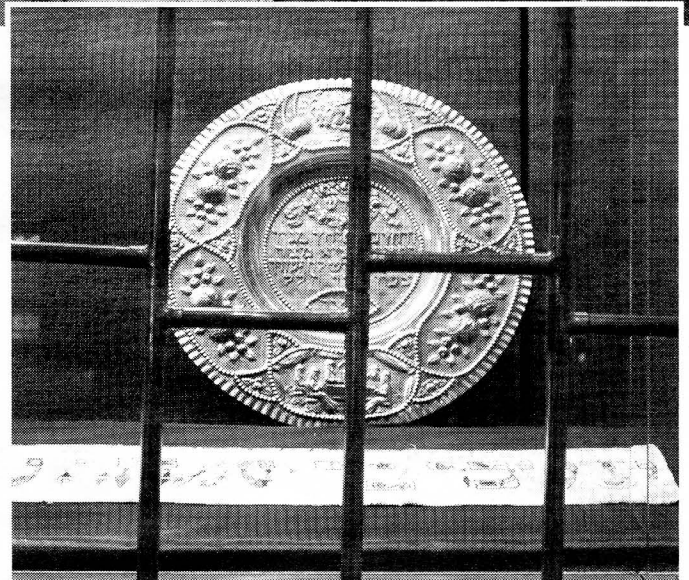


Photos for Ticket by REGINA RAHILL

support structure and embedded with planted seeds in which a steady trickle of water will run down the seeded paper walls. When activated, a series of tiny speakers attached to motion sensors within this structure will play audio recordings illustrating the saying, "if these walls could talk, the stories they would tell."

There will also be a video documentary accompanying the exhibit that will depict the construction of the piece, her visits with community members and students at Keneseth Israel and Ivy Leaf Middle School as well as the finished structure itself.

"I'm the kind of artist that



At top, artist Michele Brody poses for a portrait with her copper pipe construction inside the Temple Judea Museum at KI. Once the paper disintegrates and the grass takes root around the copper piping, relics from Temple Judea like this Passover Seder Plate will come into view.

ART

IF YOU GO

**"Entering from the Inside:
The Art of Memory"**

will be on view
at Temple Judea Museum
at Reform Congregation
Keneseth Israel,
8339 Old York Road,
Elkins Park, PA 19027,
Sept. 19 - Nov. 15
Info: 217-887-8700 or
www.kenesethisrael.org.

New York mixed-media artist Michele Brody takes a break from the copper pipe construction she is working on to talk with curator Rita Rosen Poley on her cell phone at Temple Judea Museum in Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel.

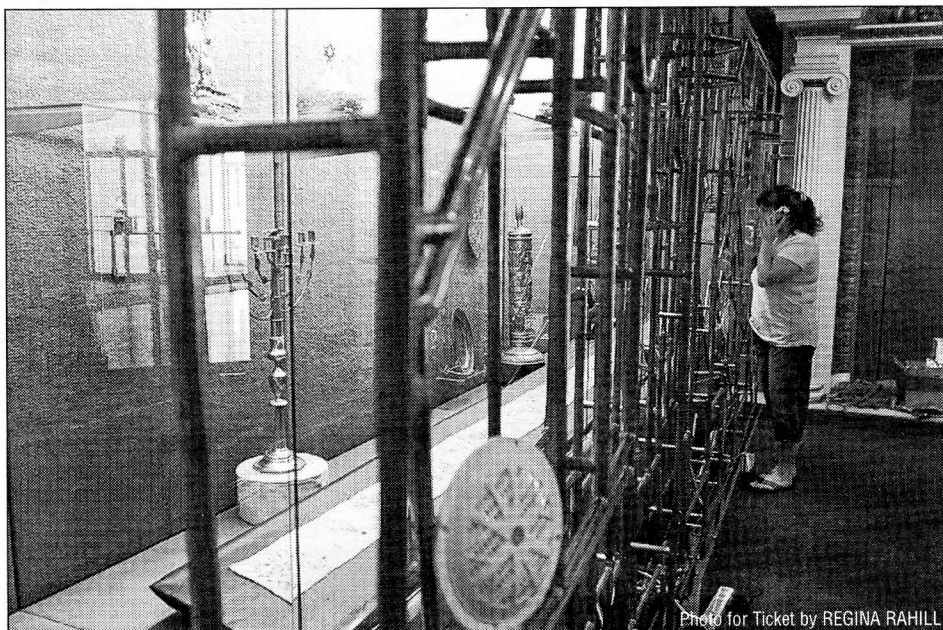


Photo for Ticket by REGINA RAHILL

Mixed-media magic at Temple Judea

works in response to places,” said Brody, who has composed pieces across North and Central America and in Europe. “When I came here, I saw the arc of Temple Judea and became intrigued — ‘Why it was called that?’ — I even went to the original site.

“This is the most mixed-media installation that I’ve done. It involves sound, the video documentation, the construction, and it’s the largest scale in terms of physical work. It’s been a two-year process coming up with the idea, raising the money, implementing it and the educational element.”

Over the course of the three-month-long exhibition, which runs from Sept. 19 to Nov. 15, the walls will slowly disintegrate, exposing the inner workings of the plumbing system, the speakers and showcased artifacts. As the walls break down, the installation will communicate a sense of archaeological discovery and rebirth through the gradual amplification of the recordings, the sprouting of the embedded seeds and the revealing of the artifacts.

The outside installation will be

a sculptural interpretation of a Sukkah, a ritual dwelling, in the form of a lace-covered walkway that will support a hanging garden of sprouting grass.

“With most of my work, the work changes over time,” said Brody, who came to Keneseth Israel when a friend and fellow artist

recommended her to Temple Judea Curator/Director Rita Rosen Poley.

“I want people to come back. ‘It’s not the kind of exhibit you go to once.’”

Brody said she views the project as a metaphor for the larger issues the building’s history symbolically represents, and one of her goals is to use art to engage the Jewish and African-American communities that geographically encompass the museum and the Ivy Leaf School, which also owned the building.

“There’s several goals for community,” Brody said. “For Keneseth Israel, I want them to feel proud and reminisce of when Temple Judea existed. For younger members of the synagogue, I want to help them learn more about the namesake of Keneseth Israel and how the museum was formed.

“Also, a goal is how history is related to larger history of growing and evolving populations in Philadelphia and Montgomery County and to see how their history is a reflection of them. It’s been about building bridges with the many faiths and ethnic groups that exist in the area.”

In light of the project’s being based on remembering the past, Brody recently worked with fourth- and fifth-grade students at Ivy Leaf Middle School and with fifth-graders at Keneseth Israel on three separate projects that focused on documenting their immediate and extended communities and concluded with a tour of each others school. Brody said the children will finally meet during the community celebration of her exhibit Oct. 19, an event she hopes no one will forget.

“What I hope from people is that they hold a memory of the exhibit,” Brody said. “That memory to have and hold is the most important part.”

ART