

**IN TINY TOWERS AND FRAGMENTED PLANS, ROBIN MILLER**

**CONSTRUCTS POWERFUL MEANINGS FOR BIBLICAL *BABEL***

**--Exhibition Opens following March 14 Sabbath Eve Services--**

Both moral and myth, the tale of Babel's Tower is among the Bible's earliest narratives and, arguably, one of its most engaging. Recounting the ultimate "architectural folly," Babel warns against overweening pride, and explains the spectacular—and sometimes daunting--diversity of languages and nationalities.

Savannah-based artist Robin Miller constructed five *Towers of Babel* between April 2000 and March 2001. From photocopied English-language translations of Genesis 11:1-9, as well as the original Hebrew, Miller cut each letter and punctuation mark, and then glued them one atop the other, like bricks in mortar. Ranging from three and one-half to four inches in height (apropos to Babel's lesson, the translations themselves varied in length), the resulting *Towers* have the breadth and depth of a single letter. Miller observes, "They're kind of tiny, but scale's relative. I think they're huge in a small sort of way."

Also in response to the biblical Babel, the artist produced a series of *Follies*—drawings made upon the backs of old maps (Miller prefers such "found" materials because "they're cheaper and dirtier than 'real' art supplies, and come with their own history"). He then cut apart the map-backed drawings, which he later drew upon again, and reassembled. Though delicate, beautiful, and even whimsical (as only a *Folly* can be), these renderings of fragile monoliths and floating ziggurats also suggest architectural plans made at a time

of upheaval, dispersion, and confusion. They join the equally ephemeral but evocative *Towers* in **Robin Miller: Babel**, an exhibition on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art from April 13 through August 19, 2001.

*Robin Miller: Babel* is organized by Matthew P. Singer, an Assistant Curator, with

Explorations of fragmentation and deconstruction, Miller's ritualistic working methods produce art that somehow evokes the possibility of regeneration. A single letter takes pride of place at the top of each *Tower*, suggesting the ultimate power and primacy of language. This is an apt point for a story central to the "People of the Book"—despite persecution, poverty, and dispersal, Jewish texts persist. Similarly, and despite the disjunctions they represent, Miller's *Follies* are plans reconstructed atop reassembled maps. They are, in short, repaired worlds—what Jewish mystical tradition calls *tikkun olam*.

Edward J. Sozanski, art critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, has said that the value of Miller's drawing is its "ability to give form and character to the smallest and most fleeting thoughts, insights, and inspirations—things that don't have visual counterparts in reality." This characterization is true of what Miller expresses through his work, and what the viewer sees in it.

A widely exhibited MFA graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, Curator of Visual Resources and instructor at Savannah College of Art and Design, and Evangelical Christian, Miller is an individual of religious interests and quiet faith. Of *Babel*, he explains, "language is fallible, and that is the point." He might be bemused, intrigued, or

even appalled by the above interpretations of his work. But he knows that, in a world of differences, Babel speaks to us all.

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**Robin Miller: Babel** is organized by Matthew F. Singer. An Opening Reception, with the artist in attendance, will follow Sabbath Eve services on Friday, April 13, at 8:00 p.m., at Metropolitan. Robin Miller is represented in Philadelphia by Larry Becker Contemporary Art, which will present a complementary exhibition of Miller's work in June 2001.