



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGE STREET PRESENTS NEW EXHIBITION: HARBIN, CHINA | PAST/PRESENT



ONCE-THRIVING COMMUNITY PARALLELS LOWER EAST SIDE

New York, New York – An exhibition detailing a little-known immigration story debuts at the Museum at Eldridge Street on April 30, 2019. *Harbin, China | Past/Present* chronicles the unlikely Jewish community that flourished in a remote Chinese fishing village at the turn of the 20th century. Personal family stories, historic photographs and contemporary art merge in this exhibition to tell the story of a town shaped by industry, immigration, and rediscovery.

In the remote city of Harbin in northeastern China, a grand synagogue has endured for over 100 years. Like the Eldridge Street Synagogue on Manhattan's Lower East Side, it stands today as a symbol of another time. But, at the turn of the 20th century, it was the center of a thriving Jewish community in China. Attracted to work on the new Trans-Siberian Railway, immigrants travelled to this small fishing village in the 1890s. For Jewish emigres, Harbin offered a chance to live without the restrictions imposed on them in the

Russian Empire. In short order, industry and the prospect of new freedoms transformed Harbin into a thriving city. It became home to many Jews as well as non-Jewish Russians, Chinese, and other groups – all living in one city but maintaining their own culture and customs.

For Jewish residents, Harbin was a hospitable home until world events intruded. By the early 1960s, the last Jewish families had relocated, and their synagogues, schools, and other landmarks languished in disuse. Today, a new appreciation for Harbin's Jewish history has emerged. The grand synagogues have been restored and many sites of Jewish community are commemorated with plaques and other memorials. It has become a treasured element of Harbin's own story.

The exhibition is presented in two parts. The first uses historic photographs and the stories of three American families with Harbin roots to construct a timeline of the rise, fall, and reemergence of Harbin's Jewish culture.



The historic exploration is paired with a section of contemporary art by Steven Lane. Lane is a New York artist with family connections to Harbin and he has been making art alternately in Beijing and Harbin since 1985. Lane's art in this exhibition focuses on his painting over and reusing of originals and copies of Chinese newspapers, posters and books from the 1960s, which he purchases from markets in Beijing and Harbin. In Harbin, he often uses the former synagogues as temporary studio spaces. These two portions together consider the development of a large Jewish community in China, its dispersal, and the far-reaching effects for its inhabitants, their descendants and a contemporary American artist.

The Museum at Eldridge Street feels a particular kinship with Harbin and its restored Jewish community buildings, as a site that has also been preserved in commemoration of Jewish history. The Museum itself is a landmark synagogue located in what is now Manhattan's Chinatown, and is keen on exploring how immigration patterns can dramatically influence a place. We celebrate the cultural conversations that often emerge from these intersections.

ABOUT MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGE STREET EXHIBITIONS

In 2016, the Museum at Eldridge Street opened the Michael Weinstein Gallery in the historic synagogue's renovated lower level. This versatile exhibition space has allowed the Museum to expand its scope, exploring the history of Jewish New York, immigrant culture and architectural history not only through the physical space of its landmark building but also through diverse exhibitions of photography, ephemera,

historic objects and more. Through exhibitions on lost synagogues of Eastern Europe, intricate papercut art, and the evocative work of contemporary artist Kiki Smith, the Museum at Eldridge Street seeks to redefine and reimagine the historic museum's place in contemporary New York.

ABOUT STEVEN LANE

Steven Lane, a New York artist, has been making art in Beijing and Harbin since 1985. In Harbin, he often uses the former synagogues as temporary studio spaces. Lane's art in this exhibition focuses on his painting over and reusing of originals and copies of Chinese newspapers, posters and books from the 1960s, which he purchases from markets in Beijing and Harbin. His work has appeared in Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo; Coohaus Gallery, New York; Earth+Gallery, Tokyo; E Water, Cube Gallery, Beijing Olympic Park; China Central Academy of Fine Arts; and many more.

ABOUT MUSEUM AT ELDRIDGE STREET

The Museum at Eldridge Street is housed in the historic Eldridge Street Synagogue, a magnificent National Historic Landmark and New York City landmark. The building was nearly lost to neglect before a 20-year, \$20 million project restored the National Historic Landmark to grandeur. The Eldridge Street Synagogue is our nation's first great house of worship built by Eastern European Jews, and stood, even then, as a proud symbol of immigrant ambition and success. Today it is one of the few remaining marker of the great wave of Jewish migration to the Lower East Side.

Upon restoration, the Museum received nearly every major preservation honor, including the prestigious National Trust for Historic Preservation 2008 Preservation Award and the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America's Restoration Award. In the words of New Yorker architectural critic Paul Goldberger, the project was conducted with a "combination of rigor and affection." And in 2010, the stunning modern addition of a stained-glass window by artist Kiki Smith and architect Deborah Gans ushered the historic space into the 21st century.

Today the Museum is reimagining how a historic sacred space can foster community and culture. Since its re-opening, more than 300,000 people from around the world have visited art exhibitions, tours, cultural festivals and educational programs. The historic space has become a one-of-a-kind art gallery, a place of cultural collaboration, and a laboratory for new thought on immigration and cultural preservation. The Museum's signature event is June's Egg Rolls, Egg Creams and Empanadas Festival, celebrating the diverse communities of the Lower East Side through food, music, folk art, and cultural customs.

The Museum at Eldridge Street is located at 12 Eldridge Street, between Canal and Division Streets. The Museum is open Sunday – Thursday from 10AM to 5PM and Friday from 10AM to 3PM. Admission is \$14 for adults, \$10 for students and seniors, and \$8 for children. Admission is 'pay what you wish' every Monday. A guided tour is included the price of admission but not mandatory. All exhibitions are included in the price of admission. For more information, visit eldridgestreet.org or contact 212-219-0302 or contact@eldridgestreet.org.

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