

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MY NAME IS BLUE REINHARD. I'm a 22 year old student at Occidental College living in Los Angeles. I use they/them pronouns and identify as a gender queer lesbian. I was born and raised in Orange County, California by two Jewish professors, keeping kosher and celebrating Shabbat every week. Judaism is a vital part of my rituals, ideals, and most formative memories-- as is my queerness.

EMBARKING ON THIS PROJECT, I wanted to give queer Jews a chance to share about this intersection of identity while allowing other queer Jews to hear stories told by people like them. I did not grow up with a queer Jewish role model, and I hope these stories will provide young Jews with strong, insightful voices. Every queer, Jewish experience is unique, and this zine seeks to share 4 distinct stories that in no way attempt to embody the entire experience of being queer and Jewish.

TO START, I reached out to my Jewish friends to see if anyone wanted to, or had friends who'd want to, participate in a collaborative zine. Turns out gay jews love talking about being gay and Jewish. This zine is constructed around 4 conversations I had with 4 different queer Jewish peers. You will also find paintings, photos, and short stories submitted by each participant.

IF YOU ARE NOT QUEER AND JEWISH, I hope you feel connected to the universal ideas of love, light, rituals, family and traditions explored throughout these conversations.

THE TEXT IN THIS ZINE is all made up of quotes chosen by each participant, directly from each participant's interview transcript.

THANK YOU AND ENJOY.

A hand-drawn heart with a comma to its right, followed by the word "Blue" written in a cursive, handwritten style.

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FIONA BALER
they/them, 21 years old

The only real early Jewish memory I have was from when I was four or five. My grandparents visited from Argentina on my dad's side, my Jewish grandparents, because I'm only half Jewish. And we celebrated Passover. My dad, he would hide the Matzah and whoever found it would get a macaroon. And that's the only thing we ever did.

My dad is very anti establishment, anti religion in a big way, but grew up super, super Jewish and he celebrated everything. I think he just doesn't really like organized religion. So culturally, I had some traditions that we followed. But I didn't have a bat mitzvah.

He thinks that religion only functions as a way to control people and to minimize people. I understand that, and I believe it on some level, but religion also works as a way to unify and comfort. That's how I feel about Judaism. Also, growing into my queerness, it's a scholarly religion where you just question everything. I'm really glad that I'm Jewish and I have an avenue to explore that.

I think I experience euphoria in my queerness when I'm with other queer people, and that happens a lot in Jewish moments. I remember I literally cooked Rosh Hashanah dinner in a teeny tiny pink bikini because it was like 97 degrees that day. I was very much sexy housewife that day. I don't really know if gender euphoria is a word that even applies to my gender experience. But I just remember feeling so funny and cool that I was doing that.

Rosh Hashanah was the first time I helped host a Jewish event in a more real way, because it was right after intense COVID. So we were finally able to do stuff. And I remember, Ariella led the prayers, and Noa came and led the prayers also. Most of the people there weren't Jewish, there were a lot of Jews, but also a lot of people who weren't Jewish. I remember I woke up the next day, and I still remember feeling so rejuvenated and so happy because it was also the second week of school. I was feeling anxious about coming back and seeing my ex around, and like, I wouldn't have any friends because our friends were intertwined, but I was like, this is such a beautiful thing we did and we just ate so much food and just hung out. And that's yeah, that's what I love about Judaism.

It feels very performative also in a way to say all these prayers with our friends. I celebrated Shabbat in New York two weeks ago, and that was so fun. Because we made so much food and no one really remembered the prayers. We were just mumbling it. And it was really fun.

Shabbat is another chance during the week to cook for your friends and hang out and drink wine and smoke weed and chill out. It's not really different than any other night that we have people over for dinner, but it's just a little bit more special because we light the candles.



film photo taken by Fiona Baler, featured in their zine titled *Playing House* (2021)

FIONA BALER

What I identify with about Judaism is that it's not about following these rules and believing in God. I feel like in Judaism, this idea of God as a metaphor is so true. At least that's how I think. I don't really think I believe in God necessarily. But when something good happens, I always say 'That's God'. Because God is not an entity that exists above us or whatever. God is just sick shit that happens.

I thought that in order to feel healthier, there has to be this monumental shift in your life. Now being 21, and having healed in such a massive way in the last year, all of my healing I can attribute to tiny little tasks that I do every day, like making my bed. And going on a walk. Stuff like that accumulates and that's why I like Shabbat so much, because it feels like a ritual. I love rituals now because I really never had a space as a kid to explore rituals. And it feels really exciting to see your life as a series of rituals that you do every day. Because that's kind of what I do now. I get so excited to light my little candles and do my guasha and put lotion on and cook and make my tea in the morning. And sit outside. These are small things that three years ago, if you told me that I would be doing this with such joy, I'd be like, no, because I thought that everything I did had to be so important and big and serious. But nothing I do is big or important or serious. And that's how I hope everything is forever because I'm not really into things being serious.

When I shaved my head, I was like, Oh, shit, I did not think it would affect me as much as it did. When I buzzed my head, I just kind of did it. I was like, oh, yeah, let me buzz my head. I had been thinking about it. And then I did it. And I was like, oh, I've never felt this me ever. I look at photos of myself now. And I'm like, yeah, that's me.'



film photo taken by Fiona Baler, featured in their zine titled *Playing House* (2021)

TAAVI KIRSHENBAUM
they/them, 21 years old

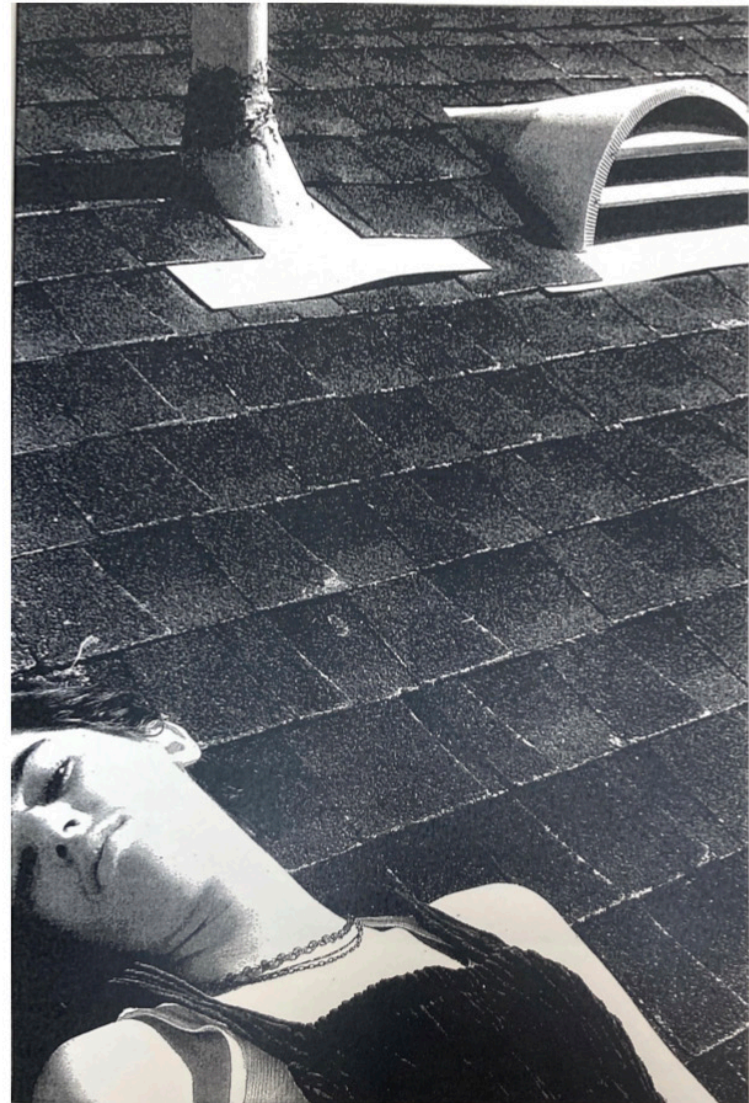
My grandparents on both of my parents sides were Holocaust refugees. Then mostly on my mom's side, our great grandparents and other extended family members were in concentration camps. I think that it was very much part of both of my parents' and our family's identity that we were Jewish, but not so much about observance. I think being Jewish in New York, you don't even really have to be observant, and it feels like you're being Jewish, right?

My brother and I both slept a lot in high school and challah french toast was the only thing that we would get out of bed for on the weekends. My mom used to get really mad that we slept so much. She was like, 'I never see you because you're at school during the week, and then you just sleep the entire weekend.' So she would make challah french toast on Saturday mornings, and we had a small apartment so you could smell it in the whole apartment. And we would wake up because we got hungry when we smelled it.

There's at least six different genders that are mentioned in the Torah and the Talmud. One of them is *ay'lonit* which is described to mean 'Little Ram'. It's someone who is assigned female at birth and then becomes masculine around the age of 18 or 20. So it literally means trans masculine. And that was used as an intersex sort of term, where maybe some people were categorized that way because their development at puberty wasn't normal or something, but I saw that and I was like, that's so epic.

I think a lot of how people talk about queerness and transness now is as if this just happened all of a sudden, that people weren't trans in biblical times. If more people knew that there was more evidence uncovered that trans people, and people who were not easily sorted into a gender binary, existed, and that everything was fine. There was a functioning society that didn't erase the existence of trans and intersex people. If more people knew that, especially if more Jews knew that, I think it would really change the conversation, because it would be less like, 'you're trying to change what Judaism is,' and more like, no, we're not trying to change anything.

I really believe we all have queer ancestors, we just do. How many queer people do you know, whose family members talk about them without acknowledging that they're queer, that they're trans? Not even necessarily family, but whoever is living to tell stories about you? after you're gone, or when you're not around? Those are the people that are erasing those kinds of stories, because you think that it's a small thing to just ignore something when you're retelling someone's life, because it was tricky, or it was a cause of tension in your family, but over generations, that's how people's identities get destroyed.



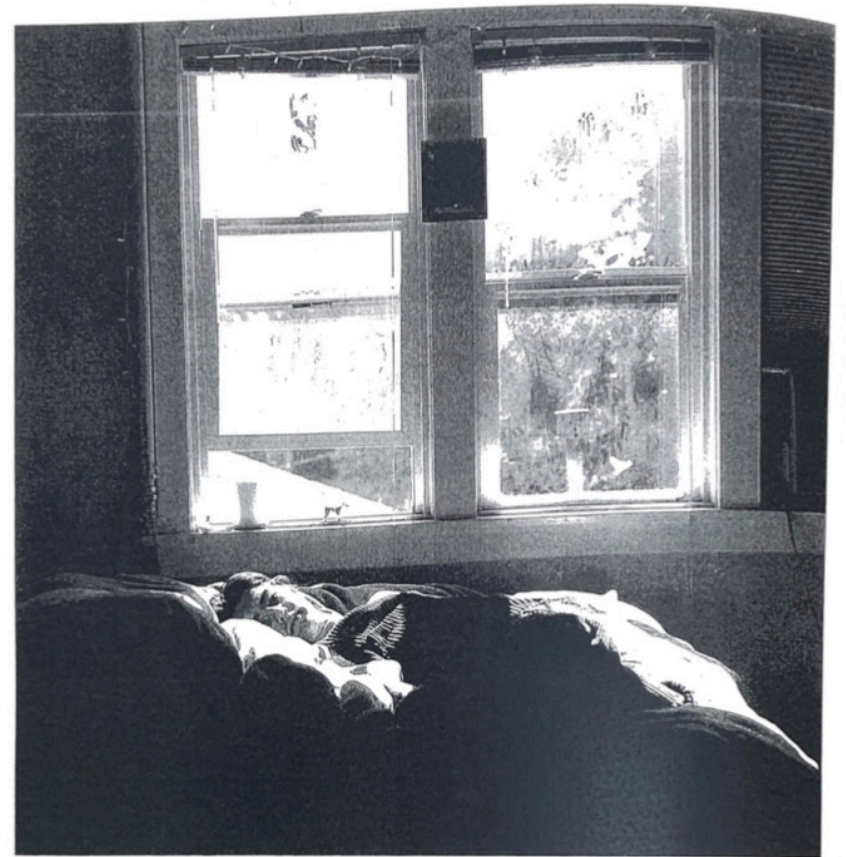
film photo of Taavi Kirshenbaum taken by Fiona Baler

TAAVI KIRSHENBAUM

I have struggled with how to reconcile the fact that I thought that Judaism, like Christianity, took binary gender as a given, because that's what you see a lot of the time in Jewish institutions. You go to the Western Wall, and there's literally a wall between the genders. I thought that was Jewish canon, but it's just how it's been interpreted over and over again. So it becomes a more complicated question, because is binary gender a grievance that I have with Judaism itself? Or just the Jewish spaces that I've been in? And also, Who do you even hold responsible for that? Because, yeah, there are the people who are making decisions about specific institutions, and I think they're partially responsible. But also how do you trace back? I would love to know the history of how so many ethnicities and traditions, not just Judaism, got reworked in this way that makes it seem like it was always gendered that way.

I actually asked my grandma maybe six months before she died. It was her 91st birthday and she wanted all of her grandkids to gather around and ask her questions about her life. And so I asked her to tell me what it meant to her to be Jewish, what that has meant in her life. And she basically said, 'to me, being Jewish just means you're the one who's always gonna get kicked.' That's really how she thought of it. It wasn't anything positive to her, really. I think she was proud of what her family had been through and what she had been through and survived. But it really felt like she associated Judaism with being targeted. And she never really got past that. I don't think she ever really found any positive association with it that outweighed that.

When I was a camper at Camp Tawonga, we used to do mikvahs. It's a cleansing ritual. We used to go to the river, and we would all get naked, and we would dunk three times. For the first dunk, you think about something that you want the river to take from you. For the second, something that you want to take from the river. And the last dunk was something that you're grateful for. We would all stand in a circle. We were all there, witnessing each other do this. And I think that has become a lot of how I understand my gender as a relational thing. I understand myself and my own gender in relation to other people who make me feel seen, or the way that certain people interact with me, the way that I can act when I'm around them. You know, it's a very relational thing. It wouldn't even exist in a vacuum, because gender wouldn't exist in a vacuum, you know?



film photo of Taavi Kirshenbaum taken by Fiona Baler

I'm tethered to Judaism with my paternal grandparents and my mom is Southern Baptist. There was a lot of anti-semitism I grew up with within the family.

I wrote a story about this, but my grandmother, I remember so vividly: she turns around, I'm in the backseat, and she's like, thick southern accent, 'Are you gonna get baptized? If you're not, you're gonna go to hell because you're a Jew.' That was the vibe.

And the Jewish cousins we did have, my Dad's cousin Debbie, she's fabulous. She's smart. She worked at the Broad, she loved art, and I was always told to not be like Debbie, by my mom. Specifically, she and I would go into synagogue and she'd be like, 'you don't wanna be like those women. Like Jewish women. And so I looked at myself and I hated myself. You know, I don't have blond hair and blue eyes like my fucking mom. That's why as an adult, I'm trying to reconnect to those roots. I'm trying to reconnect with people who have those experiences.

My grandfather passed away, and it was my first traditional Jewish funeral. I was with my dad and his family and cousins and just, you know, the Mourner's Kaddish? I have it sitting in my room, and there was something so healing about that because I hadn't felt a communal thing in my family ever. I have a very fractured family, at least our internal family within the bigger family system. At the funeral, we all just hugged. My dad, my brother and their girlfriends, we all just hugged. I'd never felt that before. Ever.

I sat Shiva because I lost three people. People couldn't bring over food because it was during the pandemic so we just ordered Postmates and I wouldn't look at myself. I was gross the whole time. Sitting Shiva was really important.

There was this moment where my dad was like, 'We have to wash our hands before going inside' because you have to wash the death off your hands. And I just said something crazy like 'wash the death off your hands' in this almost Lord of the Rings fucking voice and he was dying laughing and he couldn't handle it, it was totally not appropriate. And I was just doing this shit because I was like, 'Oh that's it. It's laughing.' And doing these traditions but making them feel appropriate for us. Because we can't take each other super seriously. Learning how to grieve people with this Jewish element, that helps so much.

When losing someone it's like, well they're not here, where does that love go? You have these traditions in place almost to funnel it somewhere, and be held with it, and I feel connected to the people who have passed when I say the Mourner's Kaddish or make jokes about washing the death off your hands.

During the pandemic, I was like, I am missing something spiritually. And then I started looking into Jewish mysticism. So I think where I am now is finding the intersections of what does it mean to be Jewish? What does it mean to participate in witchcraft? What is sacred? I'm thinking about my ancestors, like Didi. My grandmother's mom was psychic and I think that's so fucking cool. The psychic Jewish woman. I think that's what I want to be. I want to be a psychic Jew gay lady.

I identify as cis, but lesbian is it. I don't know how else to explain it. My gender is dyke, my gender is lesbian. And when I look at womanhood through that lens it makes sense to me. Womanhood from how I was raised does not make sense to me. Womanhood, when I'm performing for men, does not make sense to me. When I was coming out, everyday I would go to the mirror and be like, 'I'm a lesbian.' It felt like a forbidden word I was saying. Like I shouldn't be saying this, but I just keep saying it and saying it.

Leading passover is something I got to do with my dad. The best thing was, I put on one of his suits. And I was like, I want to feel this for the rest of my life. I don't know, maybe it was the power. The way I felt in it. When I got to do holidays that weren't as gendered, that weren't a thing where I would just sit and watch, it was messy and weird. It was just us; me, my dad and my brother. There was something special about that. It was kind of the opposite of being this Jewish witch lady, there was a playful brother energy I felt during the holidays. When I got to feel like I had an active place in it, there was something inside of me that was broken open.

There was a year where my brother and I lit our cigarettes off the fucking menorah. It was just such a fun energy, you know, shooting the shit, smoking cigarettes, eating latkes, there was something so cool about that. That was not a behavior I could be as a woman growing up.

What is my Judaism if it's not perceived by someone else? Just as what is my sexuality if it's not perceived by someone else? What is my gender if it's not perceived by someone else?

I was taught this core shame. And that extended to all the facets and so once I started undoing it, unlearning it, talking about it, and being quiet also... When I process things I talk for probably 20 hours straight. And then I just sit quietly. When I got really quiet and silent with myself, those are the moments that I hear God or I hear, High Priestess, or I hear you know, those traditions or my ancestors and I don't know there was suddenly just a moment where I was like, It's okay, this is okay. It's totally fine to be this way.

My spirituality, my Judaism, it's just so intimate. And so that's how it has changed where it's like, I'll do these things for the sake of the ritual. It's connecting, it's communal, it's sacred. I feel connected to the people before me when I do these rituals. And then I also can participate in Judaism when it's just me. And that is really the biggest change just as I participate in my lesbianism when it's just me, like I don't have to have a girlfriend to be a lesbian. She's fabulous. I love her so much. But I get to just be a fucking lesbian, you know?

Meeting Jewish lesbians has changed my fucking life for the better. I had friends who are Jewish lesbians before I was out and I was just like, This is fucking epic. This is fucking awesome. That made it so cool to me to see that like meeting more Jewish gay people. That was its own fuckin spiritual process.

UNTITLED PRINCESS STORY

By Charlie Kanter

5: My mother walked past my doorway and I swore she had the head of a werewolf. When Dad tucked me in I told him that I was convinced she was taken away and made into a monster. He explained that sometimes our minds play tricks on us and it's not actually all that scary.

8: "Your nose isn't that bad. And hey, we can fix it when you're a teenager". I noticed the bump with a sharper eye in the mirror.

12: Sleeping beauty didn't fall in a shower and I did. Sleeping beauty had a dry head where water pooled around mine. When Sleeping Beauty was sleeping did she too visit the place before we're born? Silly puddy. I counted over 8 numbers out of order. For the first time I felt how nice it could be to start holding my breath.

Early burial occurs when the water makes your mouth a door and your large nose permits extended nostrils to bounce above the water bathing your immobilized body, while I- the child- was being unborn accidentally.

My mother played Aurora in the local community theater's "Sleeping Beauty" and therefore, I could never identify with her (I'm a brunette). But I liked the whole part where Aurora got to sleep. I could identify with sleeping.

The cast was all women, and I asked my mom if she was a lesbian when she kissed the woman portraying Prince charming, "Don't say that" she hushed. "That's a dirty word".

In the line at McDonald's after the show, a stranger knocked on the window of her SUV, on the passenger side where I sat. She was an unhoused woman and she looked hungry. Before I could respond, Aurora awoke angrily, furiously, and audibly screamed "Shoo! Shoo!!"

I'd always imagined the cartoon Sleeping Beauty cascading to her resting place tenderly. My mother was a light sleeper too.

12: Was there a thud? Did you hear it?

Unimportant details unimportant clarity:

1. I don't faint lightly
2. I could at least dye my hair blonde.

OLIVE DIAMOND
she/her, 23 years old

I grew up doing Shabbat with my family every Friday. I'm a reformed Jew. And my grandparents are Israeli, but not by birth. Kind of like the Holocaust mix, of all the different Eastern European countries. Other than still doing Shabbat with my family every Friday, because they still live here and then usually doing a second Shabbat with Hannah later in the night,

I became really focused more into Kabbalah. Kabbalah means literally 'to receive'. This, to me, is what ties into kind of my modern Jewish identity as a woman and a queer person. Religion in general, and often Judaism, can sometimes feel very authoritative. Kabbalah is specifically something that you are not supposed to be necessarily taught at firsthand. You are supposed to seek it out. It's not something that would ever be pushed onto you. It's something that you find and come to yourself. It's really the more esoteric and spiritual side of Judaism. There's also a lot of feminist rhetoric about it, now, recontextualizing, a lot of Kabbalistic tenants and Jewish tenants--recontextualizing it in a way that's vague because a lot of the roots of Kabbalah are not physical things. They're very abstract.

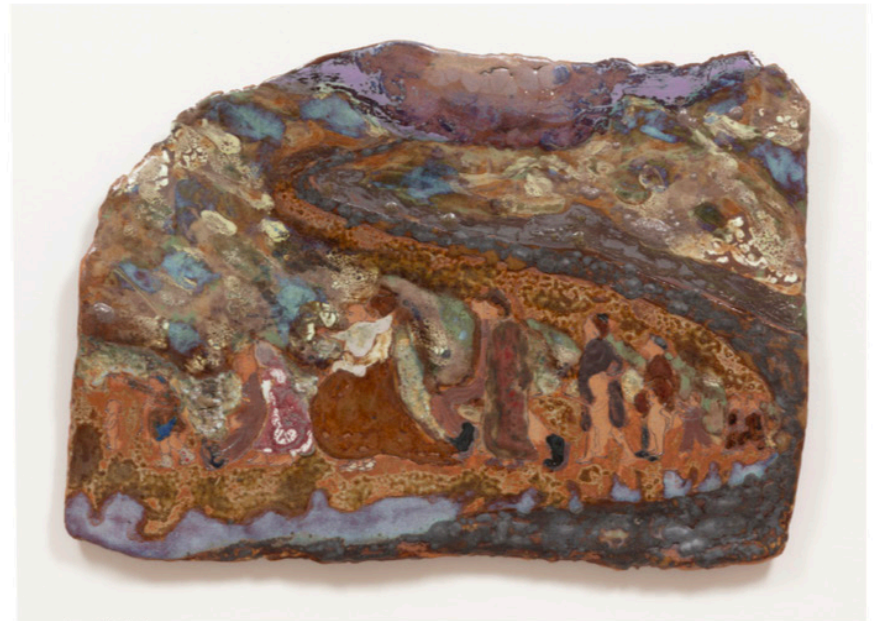
When I was first making work about Judaism, it was a lot more literal, about the coded nature of Hollywood and tying Judaism into LA because I'm a Los Angeles Jew and those are the things that interest me. Then, all of a sudden it felt like there was a spiritual essence in the paintings that was coming out that I wasn't fully aware of in a conceptual way. And I just started to think about my relationship with Judaism in a more spiritual manner, and found Kabbalah as my way into it.

Aisof means 'the light'. One of the main tenets of Kabbalah that ties into my work is *aisof* and the light of God. To me, I always think about it as God in quotation marks. Even though I'm Jewish, I don't necessarily believe in 'God'. To me, 'God' is more of a spiritual essence and the spiritual power of the world. Essentially, the world was a vessel and God's light came into the vessel and shattered it, and therefore imbued everything in the world with God's light. Every part of the shattered vessel has been imbued with the light of God. To me that means looking at the world with the utmost spiritual power and recognizing the beauty in every tiny thing. Even though a lot of my work does center around darker Jewish themes like migration and Exodus, where the Kabbalah comes in is when I think about moments of respite. Almost like walking through a landscape and squinting your eyes, and seeing like a glimmer of hope in the landscape, how beautiful it is, and taking a moment to appreciate it.

And then that's tied into traditional Judaism like the *Modeh Ani*, you know, the prayer that thanks God for making you wake up and giving you good knees. You know, paying respect to really small things in life.



tempest
30x40, oil paint on canvas, 2021, by Olive Diamond



you lead, follow me
16"x22", custom glaze on stoneware, 2021, by Olive Diamond

OLIVE DIAMOND

In Rhode Island, my friend Hannah and I would go to Friday Night Jews at Brown University, and it was the liberal, college educated, very Ivy League Jew club and there were a ton of not only queer Jews, but Ethiopian Jews and Sephardic, Ashkenazi—a very eclectic group of Jews, which is always so nice to see coming from a very Ashkenazi, Los Angeles Jewish surrounding.

Growing up, if I wanted to have plans on Friday night, that was fine, but it had to be after Shabbat. And when I went to college, I was kind of lacking that and finding my footing in a new space. I was not focused on trying to carve out my own religious practice, my main goal was assimilating into college life. Until I made one Jewish friend, Hannah, who also wanted to do Shabbat. And we decided that that's what made us feel like we were at home and we decided to start doing it. At first it was just me and her and her sister. It would be a very small group who did the blessings over the candles, the bread and the wine, and then go about our nights. But as we kept doing it, more and more people got curious and wanted to come, Jewish and non Jewish. Anytime I met a fellow Jew, I would extend the invite. Slowly it started to become quite an anticipated weekly event where eventually it would be upwards of 50 people, majority non Jewish who, after weeks of coming, knew the beginning words, knew the 'Baruch Atah Adonai' part to each prayer and really got excited about Judaism, people who had a range of exposure coming together to bless the candles, bread and wine on Friday nights, and just celebrate being together. That is what warmed my heart the most. Of course, it was incredible to have other Jews there and to make a space on Friday nights for Jews to celebrate Shabbat, but what really made me so happy was to see non Jewish people getting so excited about Shabbat as a way to be together.

I think of being a Jew before I think of being queer. Being queer to me is just the nature of who I am and who I love. But who I love doesn't quite affect my day to day life. It's very specific situations where I think Judaism and queerness coexist in my head and it's when they conflict more than when they coexist together.

When women are referred to in Jewish texts it's a lot about birth giving ability, and things like that. And just the traditional sexism. When I see more of the misogynist sides of Jewish texts it conflicts with my queerness, the parts that dictate what it means to be a woman.

I said something to my grandma once, that she loves to talk about, because she thinks it's funny. When I was younger, I said that Tu Bishvat was my favorite holiday because no one's killing the Jews. Passover, the Jews are getting run out. Yom Kippur, war, you're repenting. Every holiday, you know, purim: Shit happens to the Jews. Every major holiday some shit goes down with the Jews and on Tu Bishvat, you just thank God for the trees and nature and it's very happy. Maybe it makes sense why I like Kabbalah so much if that's my favorite holiday.



momentary lapse
36" x 48", oil paint on canvas, by Olive Diamond