

Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs

Monday at Museum Series

Rhona Trauvitch

Judaic Mythology and Speculative Fiction: The Animating Aleph-Bet

Monday, April 2, 2018 7:00pm

Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU / 301 Washington Avenue / Miami Beach



Image by artist Mitchell Nolte www.mitchellnolte.com

Speculative fiction, a genre that encompasses science fiction and fantasy narratives, abounds with depictions of artificially-created beings. Stories about AI, clones, robots and automata, and genetically modified or synthetic creatures foreground central speculative fiction themes, such as what it means to be human, and to what extent a being's components and creator determine the being's fate.

This talk focuses on the Judaic origins of artificially-created beings and the stuff that animates them: golems and the Hebrew alphabet. Beginning with an overview of the aleph-bet's creative and mystical powers, we will trace depictions of their force from Judaic mythology to postmodern literature, from moving images to popular culture. We'll see how the letters, as graphemes, function like other elemental units such as genes that form organisms, notes that form melodies, and instructions that form computer programs, and consider the ways in which building blocks of each type are shuffled to create different structures. In particular, we will focus on Ted Chiang's "Seventy-Two Letters," a tale in which letters go beyond animating the golem, and, when recombined to form specific names, affect robots and homunculi as well. Through this exploration, we will address speculative fiction themes from the resonant perspective of Judaic mythology.

Program free for FIU Students, Staff & Faculty, \$5 for JMOF-FIU members and \$10 non-museum members
For information , please call 786-972-3175