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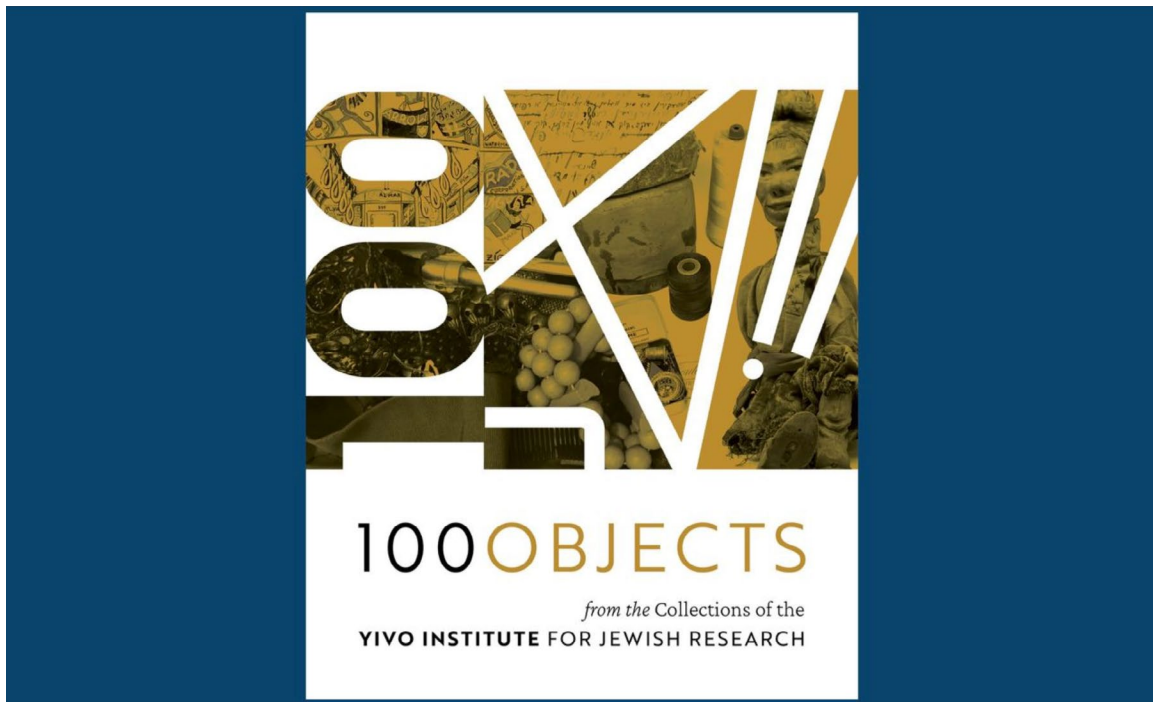
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Book Club

Reviews and recommendations from critic Ron Charles.



By [Ron Charles](#)



(YIVO Institute for Jewish Research)

The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research — a New York institution dedicated to preserving the history and culture of East European Jewry — is celebrating its 100th anniversary. To mark that occasion, YIVO has just released “100 Objects,” a photobook edited by Stefanie Halpern that highlights artifacts from its collection of more than 24 million items gathered from the past seven centuries.

For a people often on the move and oppressed by state authorities, records of familial, cultural and political life were crucial to survival. In her introduction, Halpern notes that YIVO has always understood “the value and the power of small details to tell a bigger story.”

The objects — grouped in categories such as “History,” “Performing Arts,” “Youth” — serve as fascinating windows, all the more tantalizing for the ordinary roles they once

played in people's lives. Each one is helpfully described in a short note that places it in context.

A 1922 letter from a Hudson Valley resort curtly informs two Jewish job seekers that Lake Mohonk Mountain House does "not employ people of your race." The high-heeled red shoes of Mae Simon (1886-1948), "a popular star of the Yiddish stage and screen," have lost none of their fabulousness. A trio of puppets from the first Yiddish puppet theater in New York look ready to spring to life. A Remington typewriter once owned by Chaim Grade still holds a page in its roller.

A chapter on the Holocaust is chilling. Otto Frank's National Refugee Service Case File contains letters recording the family's futile appeals to America for permission to immigrate. In 1942, Herman Kruk, founder of the library in Poland's Vilna ghetto, created a report on library usage, complete with hand-drawn diagrams. He noted that "borrowing noticeably increased" after exterminations "since reading provided a temporary relief from horror."

"100 Objects" is a book to dip in and out of repeatedly, humbled each time by the weight of history. It's also an invitation. "This book is meant to be an opening up of the YIVO collections," Halpern writes, "a small act of demystifying what is contained inside the tens of thousands of boxes." Anyone with an interest in learning more, she says, is welcome ([details](#)). ♦

Details link:

https://yivo-institute.myshopify.com/products/100-objects-from-the-collections-of-the-yivo-institute-for-jewish-research?utm_campaign=wp_book_club&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter