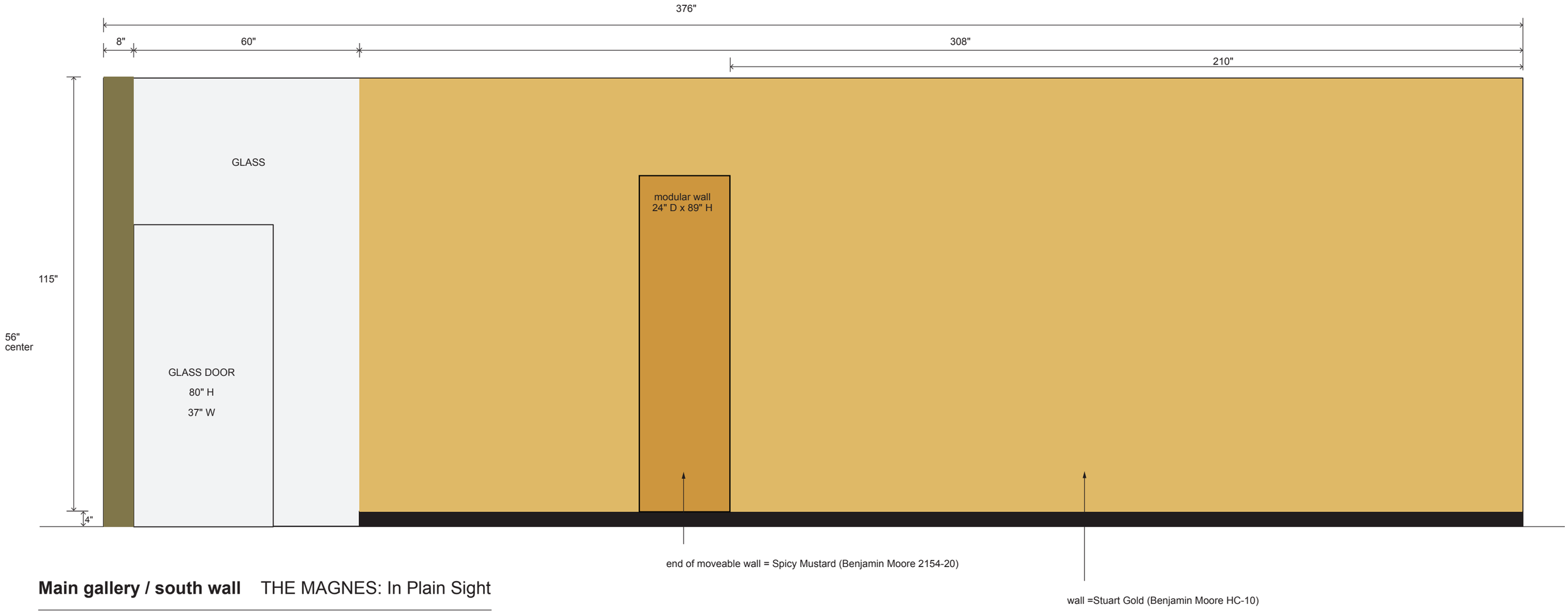


Main gallery / south wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

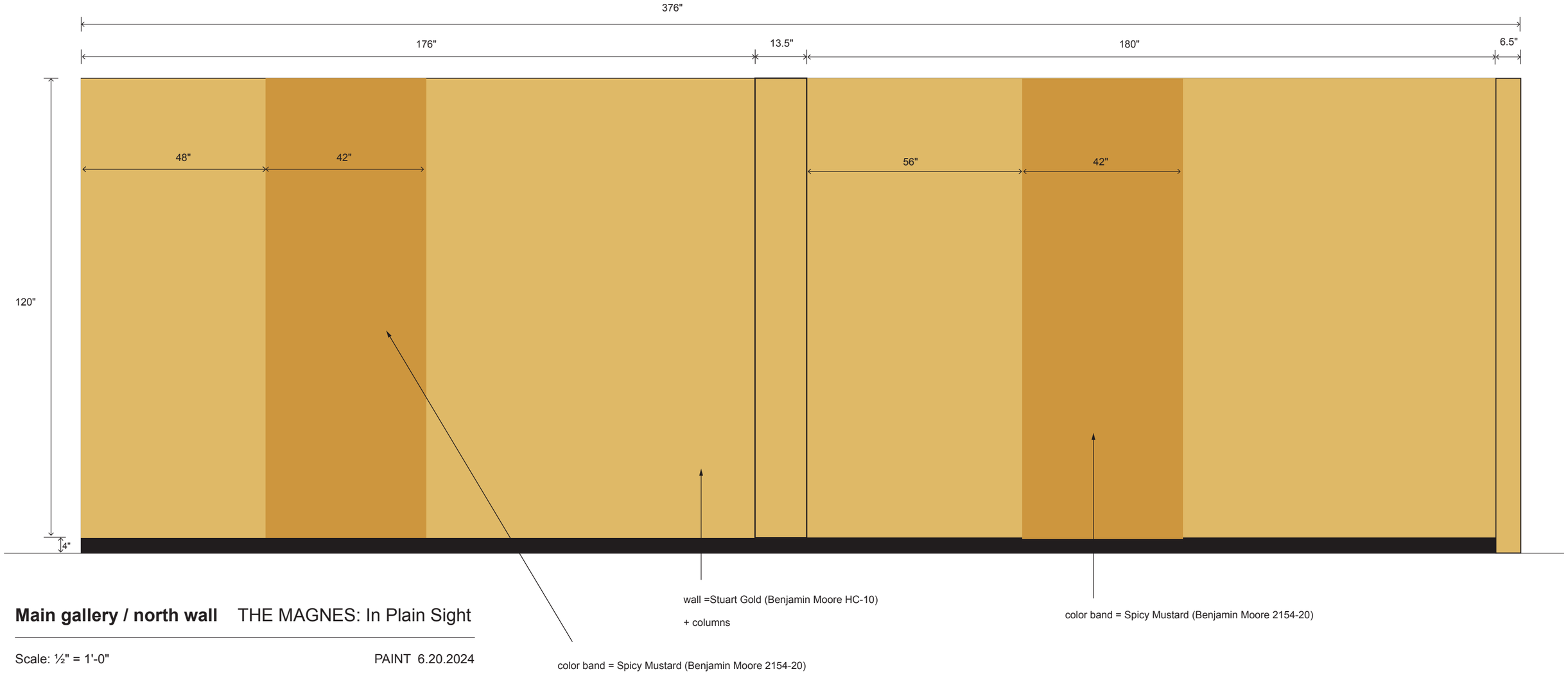
Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

PAINT 6.20.2024

Main gallery / west wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

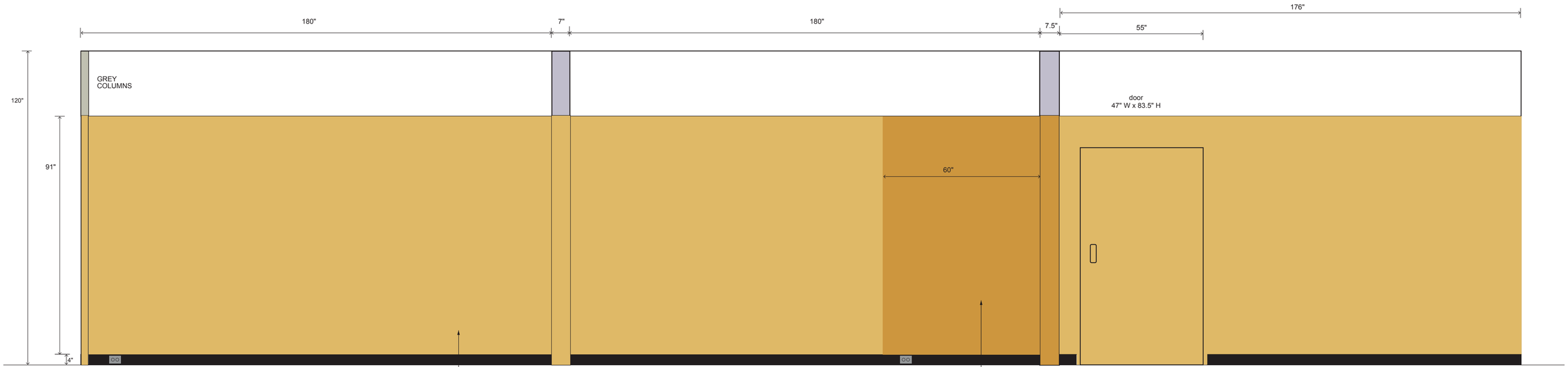
PAINT 6.20.2024



Main gallery / north wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

PAINT 6.20.2024



Main gallery / east wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

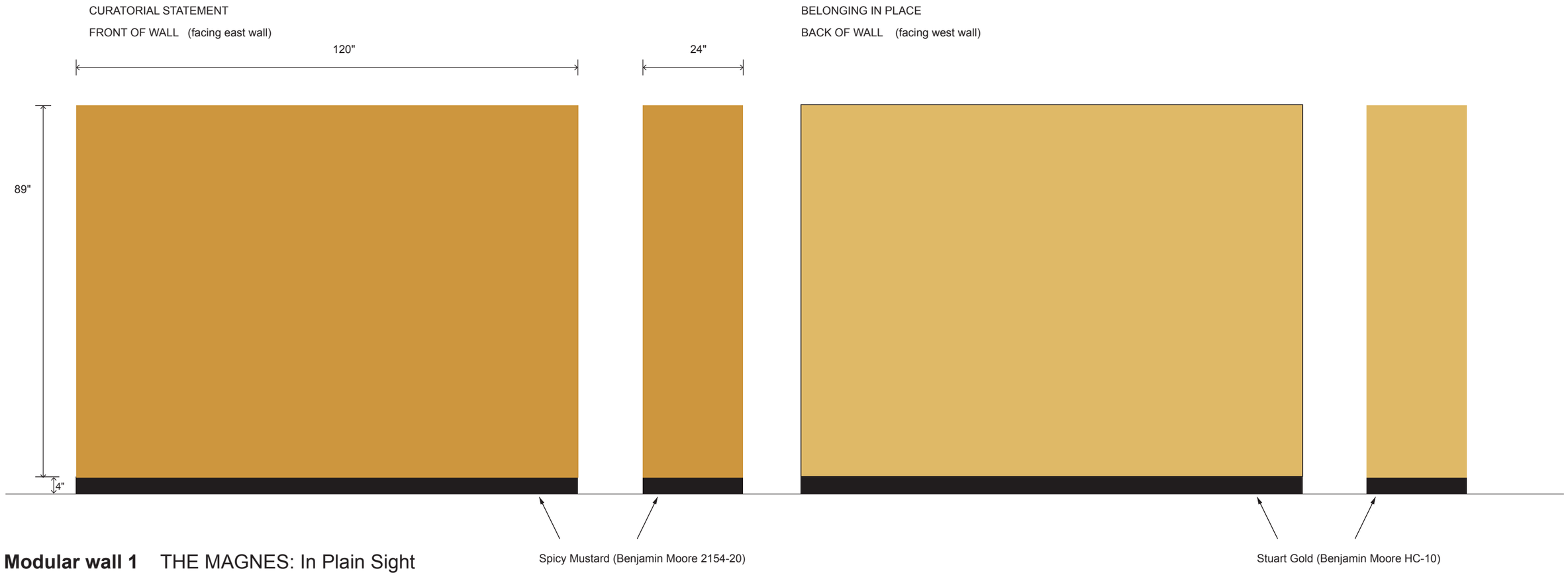
PAINT 6.20.2024

wall =Stuart Gold (Benjamin Moore HC-10)

+ columns

color band = Spicy Mustard (Benjamin Moore 2154-20)

+ column

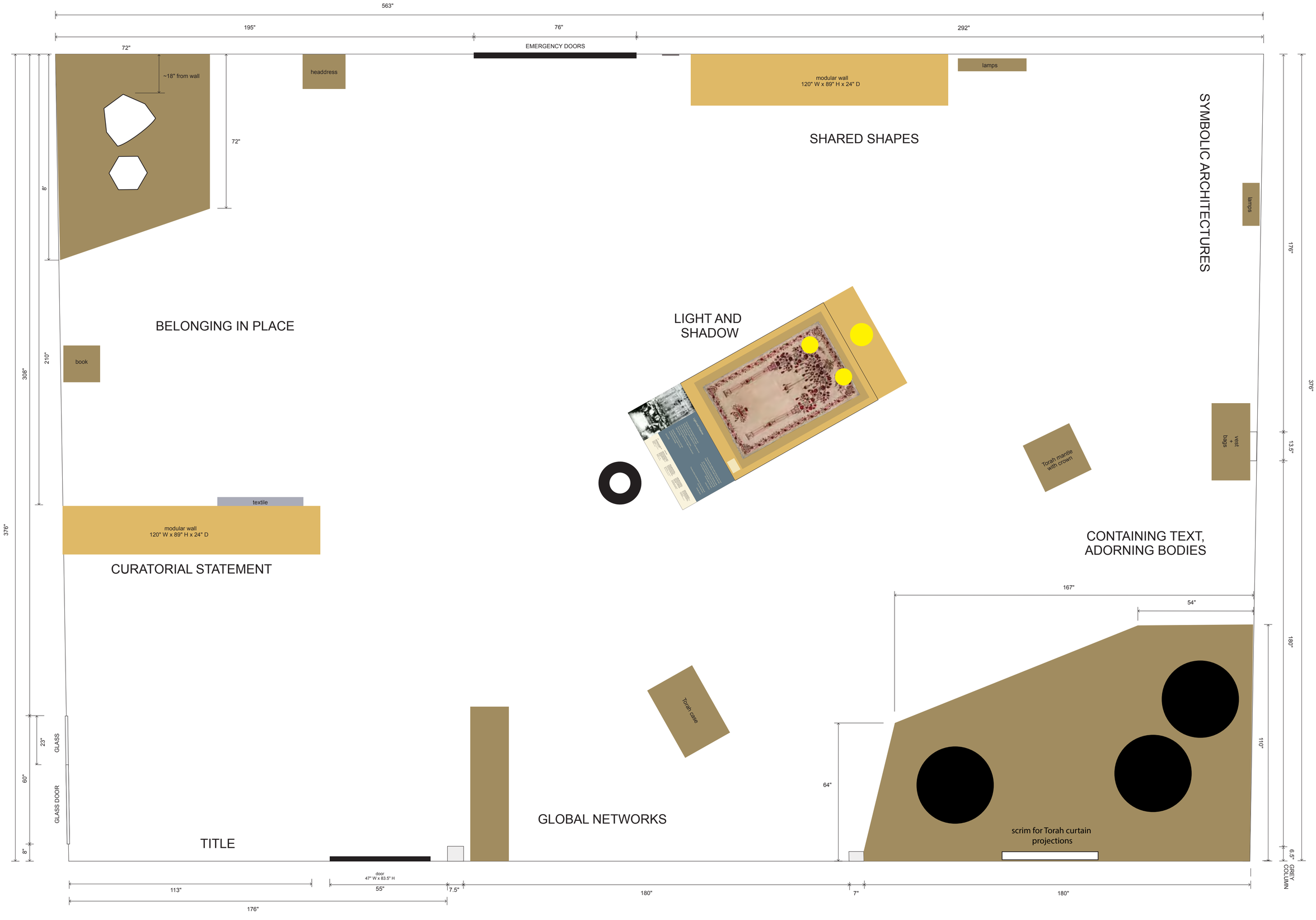


Modular wall 1 THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

PAINT 6.20.2024

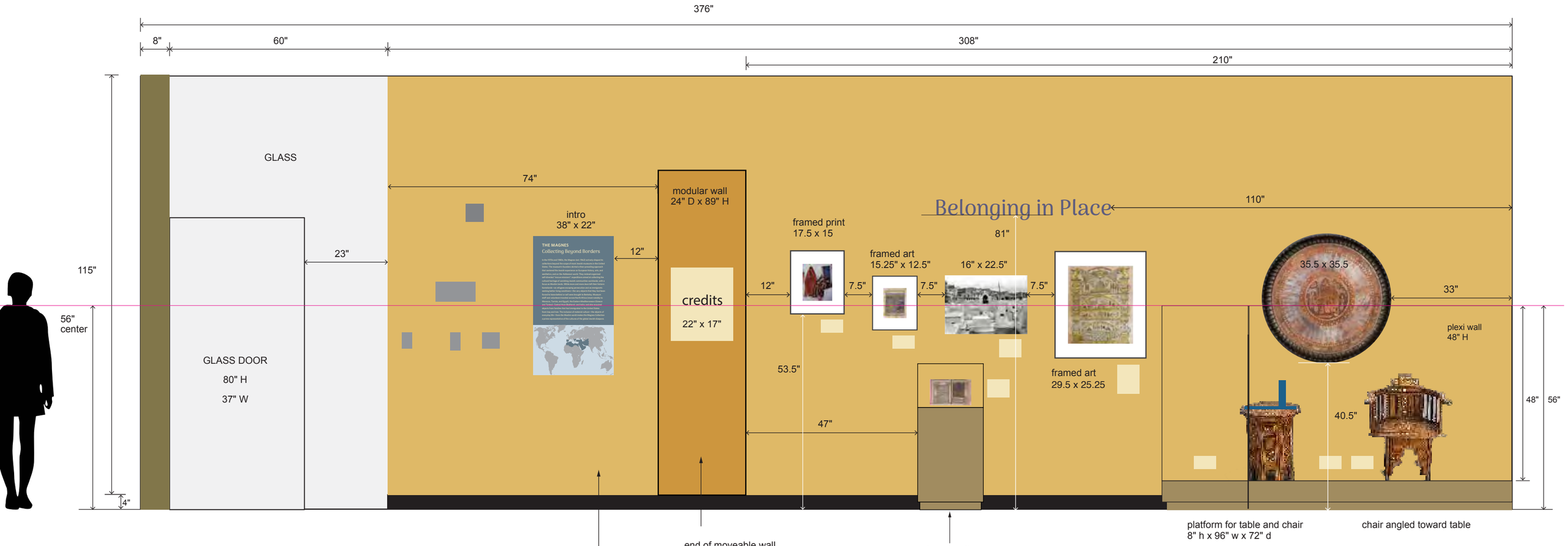
modular wall = 89" H x 120" W x 24" D



Main gallery / south wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

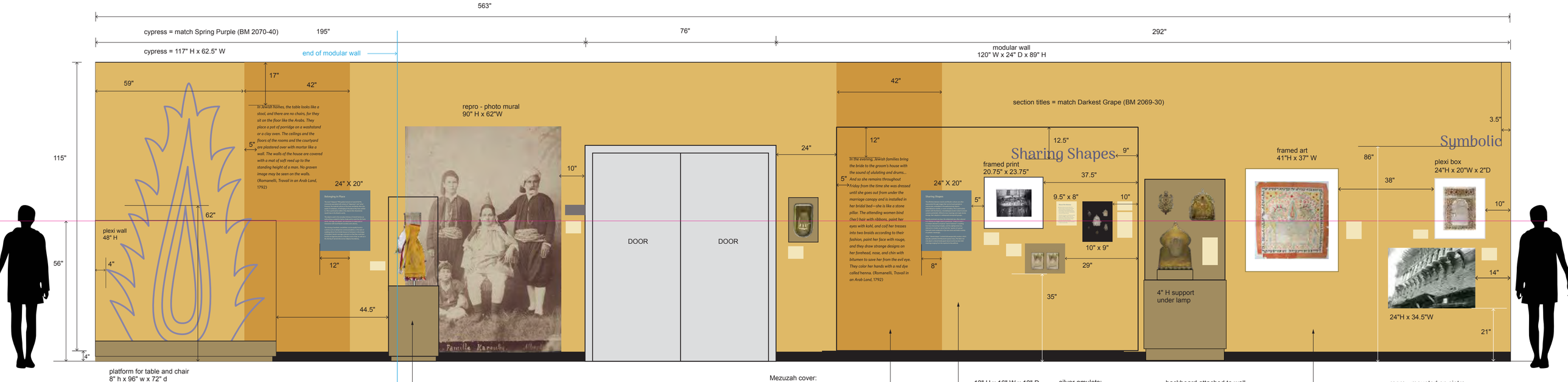
v5 6.19.2024



Main gallery / south wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

v11 7.02.2024



platform for table and chair
8" h x 96" w x 72" d

freestanding
ped + 5-sided vitrine
headress in profile
(not twisted, as in photo)

vitrine 20"W x 36"H x 12"D
pedestal 30"H

Mezuzah cover:
3/4" backboard (painted)
+ 5-sided vitrine

vitrine 18"H x 12"W x 2"D

color band
Spicy Mustard (Benjamin Moore 2154-20)

moveable wall
Stuart Gold (Benjamin Moore HC-10)

12" H x 16" W x 12" D
cutout in wall

silver amulets:
blk velvet covered backboard
+ 5-sided vitrine

use existing vitrine
16" H x 12" W x 4" D

backboard attached to wall
+ ped + 4-sided vitrine

vitrine 40" H x 32" W x 6" D
pedestal 32" H

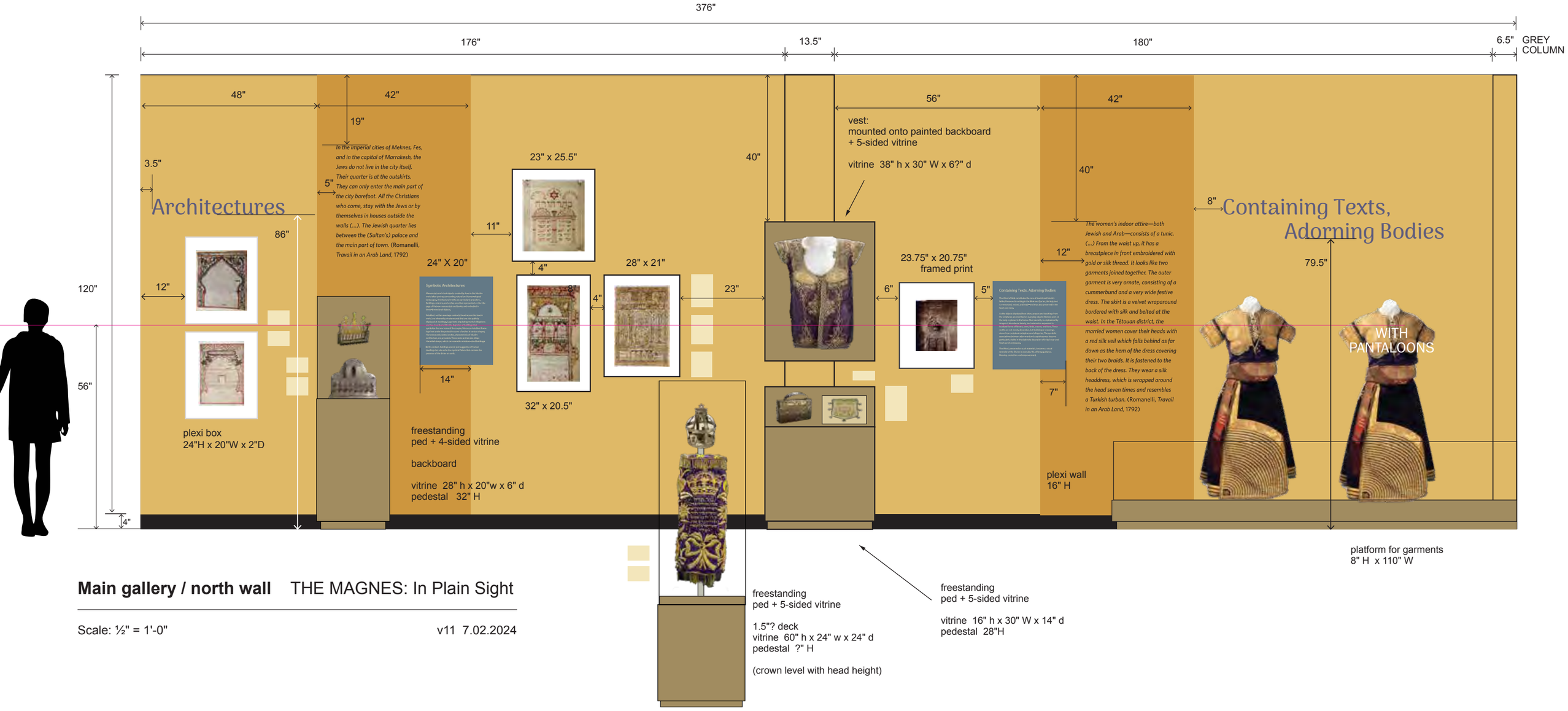
wall = Stuart Gold (Benjamin Moore HC-10)

repro - mounted on sintra
with backframe + cleat
24"H x 34.5"W

Main gallery / west wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

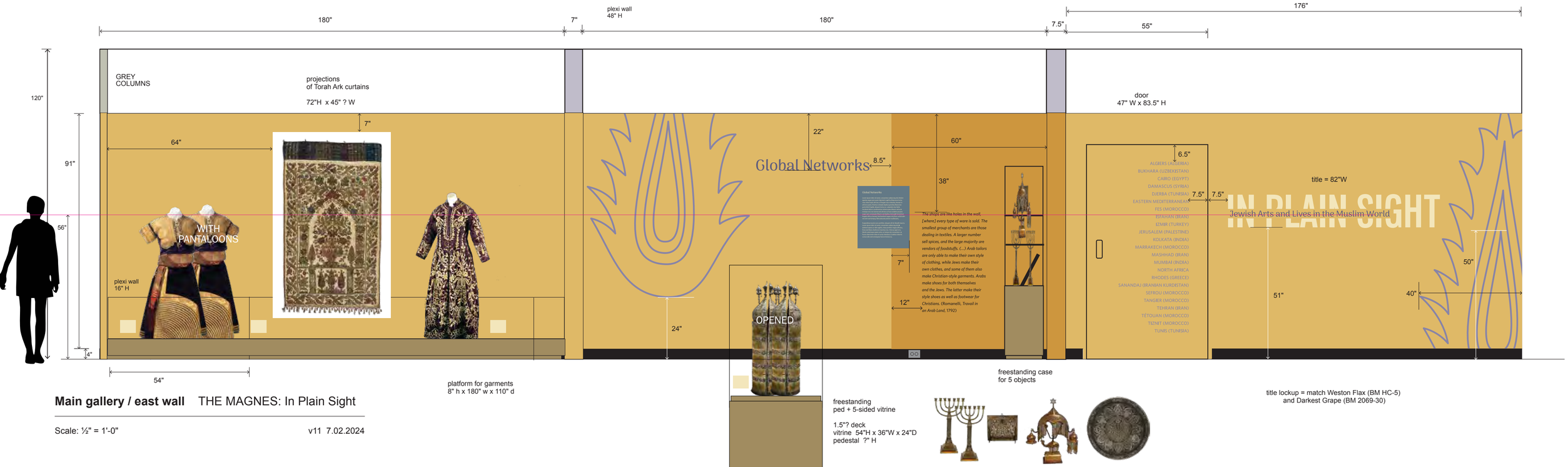
v11 7.02.2024



Main gallery / north wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

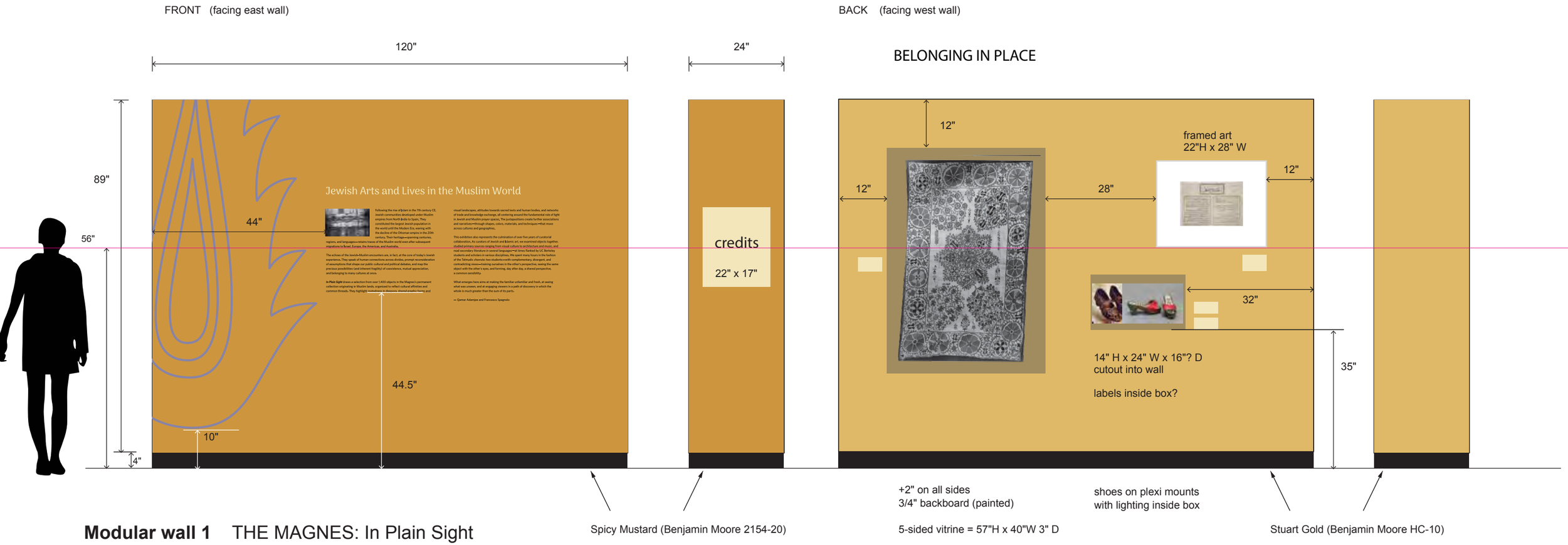
Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

v11 7.02.2024



Main gallery / east wall THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0" v11 7.02.2024

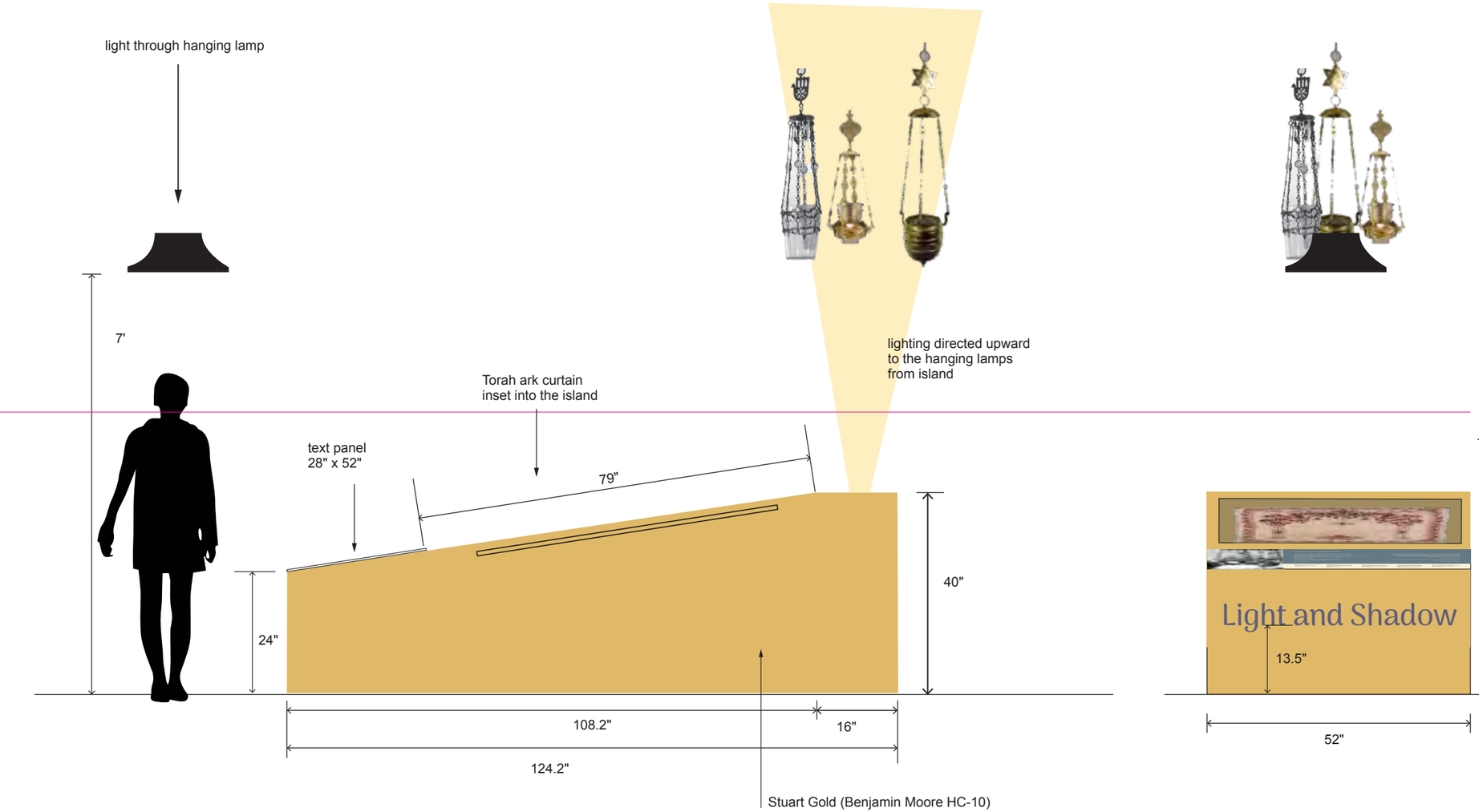


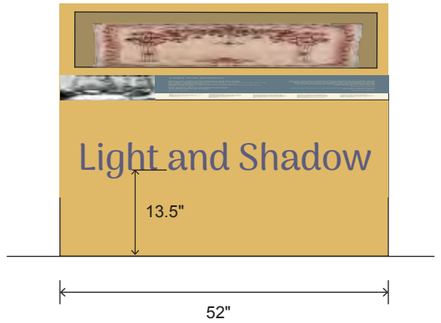
Modular wall 1 THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

v11 7.02.2024

modular wall = 89" H x 120" W x 24" D





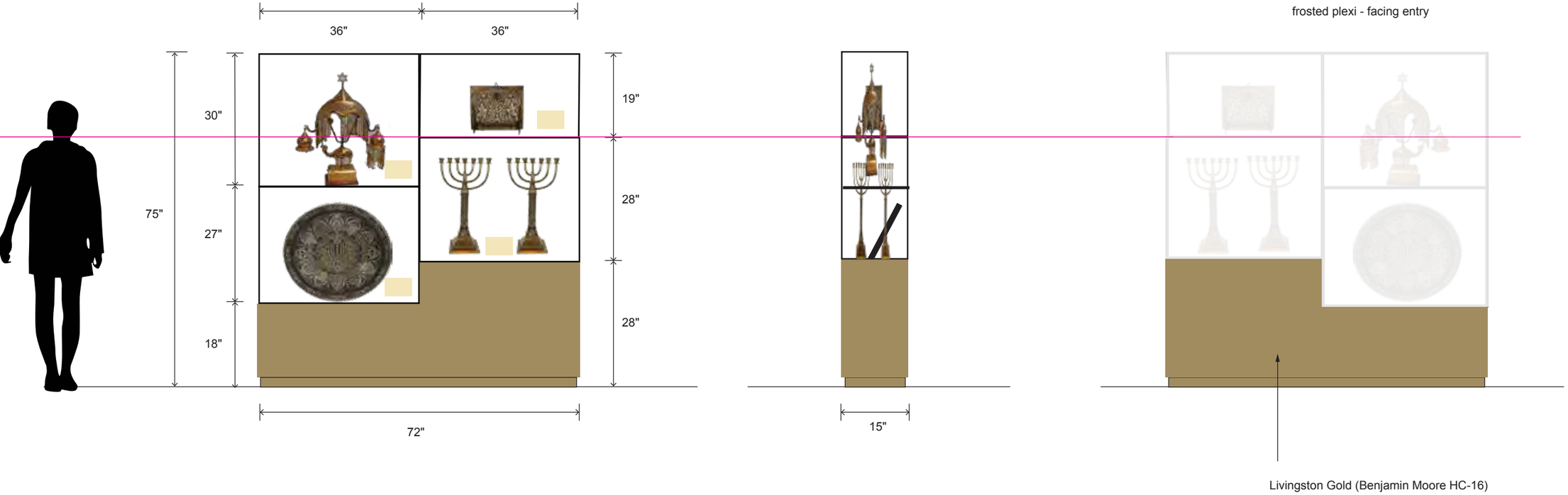
+3" on all sides of curtain

28" x 52" panel

Light and Shadow THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

v11 7.02.2024



Networks - case THE MAGNES: In Plain Sight

Scale: ½" = 1'-0"

v11 7.02.2024

In Plain Sight

Jewish Arts and Lives in the Muslim World

Francesco Spagnolo, Curator

Qamar Adamjee, Visiting Curator

Paris Grae Bailey, Undergraduate Curatorial Assistant (URAP)

Julie Franklin, Registrar

Andrea Calderon, Assistant Registrar

David Sullivan, Head Preparator

Jennifer Cole, Preparator

Carole Jeung, Designer

Abe Jellinek, Walker Laughlin, Kayla Cohen, Philopathear Iweda, Felix Rosen, Cynthia Rahman, Undergraduate Research Assistants (URAP)

The curators wish to thank Karen Barkey, Emily Gottreich, and Ethan Katz (UC Berkeley); Noam Sienna (University of Toronto); Filiz Çakır Phillip (Aga Khan Museum); Deena Aranoff and Carole Bier (Graduate Theological Union).

Research for this exhibition project was made possible, in part, with assistance from UC Berkeley's Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program (URAP).

Excerpts from Shemuel Aron Romanelli's travelogue, *Travail in an Arab Land* (originally published in Hebrew in 1792, English translation by Yedida Kalfon Stillman and Norman A. Stillman, University of Alabama Press, 1989), appear throughout the exhibition. Musical selections include recordings from the National Sound Archives of the National Library of Israel and the Library of Congress.

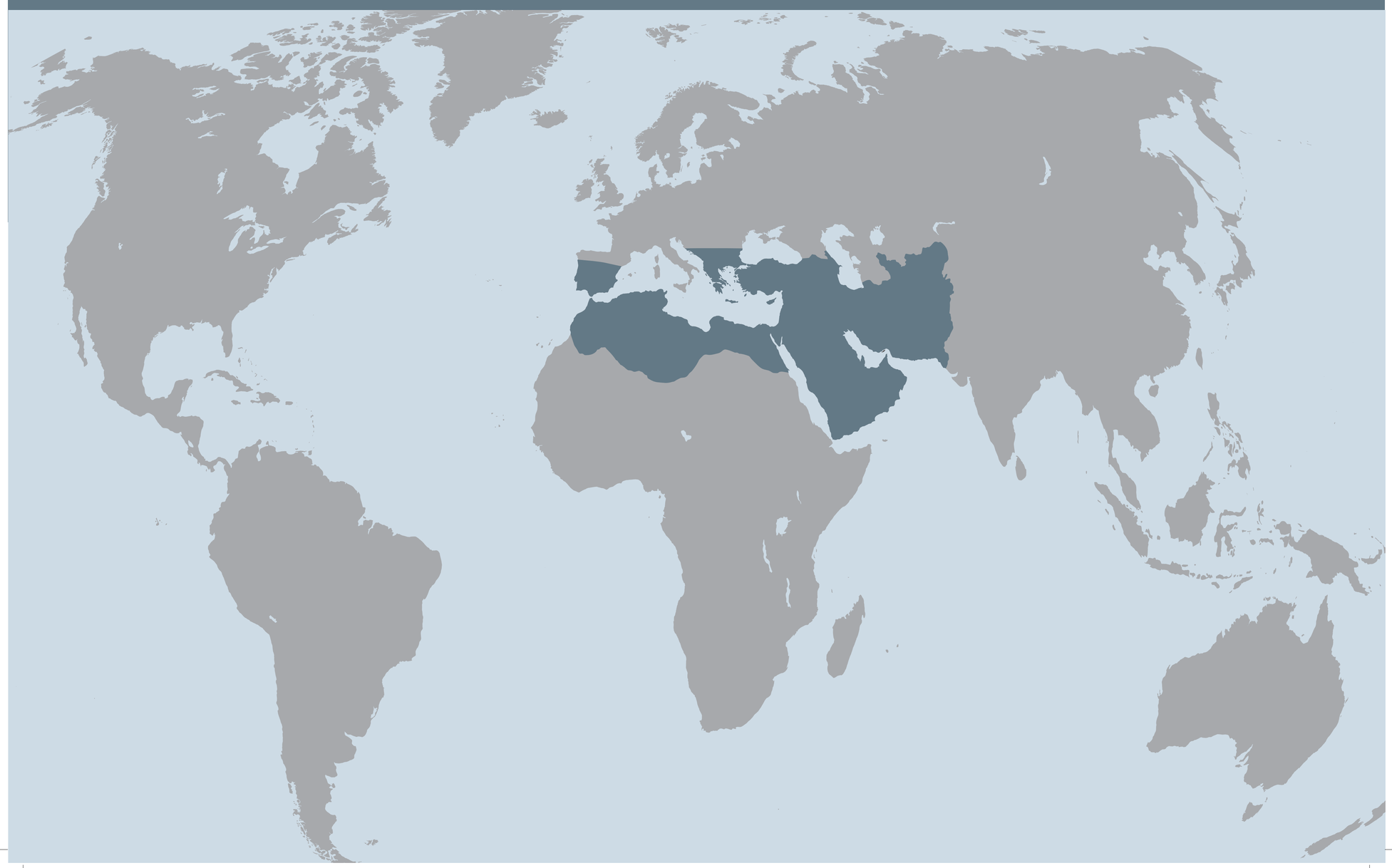
***In Plain Sight* is generously supported by:**

WALTER & ELISE HAAS FUND THE **DAVID BERG** FOUNDATION

Kenneth Kofman and Andrea King, and an anonymous donor

THE MAGNES
Collecting Beyond Borders

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Magnes (est. 1962) actively shaped its collections beyond the scope of most Jewish museums in the United States. The museum's founders skirted a then-prevailing approach that centered the Jewish experience on European history, arts, and aesthetics, and on the Ashkenazi world. They instead organized self-directed "rescue missions": expeditions aimed at collecting the cultural heritage of vanishing Jewish communities worldwide, with a focus on Muslim lands. While more and more Jews left their historic homelands—as refugees escaping persecution and as immigrants seeking better living conditions—the very objects that they had been forced to leave behind or sell were brought to Berkeley. Museum staff and volunteers traveled across North Africa (most notably to Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt), the Eastern Mediterranean (Greece and Turkey), Central Asia (Bukhara), and India, and also acquired objects from families that had immigrated to the United States from Iraq and Iran. The inclusion of material culture—the objects of everyday life—from the Muslim world makes the Magnes Collection a prime representative of the cultures of the global Jewish diaspora.



About the *khamsa*

In Muslim lands, the ancient motif of the protective hand is referred to by the popular Arabic term *khamsa*, meaning five, or the "Hand of Fatima" after Prophet Muhammad's favorite daughter, Fatima Zahra (ca. 606–632), a holy and exemplary figure.

The belief in the power of the *khamsa* prevailed among Jews in Islamic regions, where the hand became a primary symbol of protection from the evil eye, devils and spirits, danger, fear, illness, and natural disasters.

— Adapted from Shalom Sabar, "Khamsa," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*.

Belonging in Place

The word "diaspora"—the global network of Jewish life—is commonly associated with notions of dispersion and exile. However, the material cultures of Jews worldwide often also speak of rootedness, of belonging in the places they have settled in. This is particularly visible in the Muslim world, where Jews lived for many centuries.

The objects used in the everyday intimacy of Jewish homes, created for festive rituals, and marking the Life Cycle (birth, adulthood, and death), are indicative of a deep level of interaction with local Muslim societies and cultures.

Shared aesthetic sensibilities can be equally found in customs such as eating from communal platters, in the style of wedding attires (from bridal dresses to footwear), in the design of *ketubbot* (Jewish marriage contracts) so that they can also have standing in Muslim courts of law, as well as in the depictions of sacred sites that are central to both religions.

Sharing Shapes

Affinities between Jewish and Muslim cultures find visual expression in images painted on manuscripts, embedded in three-dimensional objects, embroidered on textiles, or worn on bodies. The *khamsa*, a hand-shaped amulet rooted in ancient customs and beliefs, is remarkably widespread among both groups.

Equally prominent are stars. The six-pointed star, resulting from two intersecting triangles, is often referred to in Hebrew as *magen david*, a protective "shield of David," or *chotam shlomoh*, a mystical "seal of Solomon." The eight-pointed star, based on two intersecting squares, is referred to in Arabic as *rub el hizb*, the "quarter of a group" that both marks endpoints in Qur'anic texts and holds a variety of symbolic connotations.

Other mutually meaningful visual motifs include the *nazar* (an "eye bead" believed to protect from the evil eye), birds—especially roosters, a symbol of fertility—and, prominently, cypress trees. The latter depict a shared natural world and convey meanings ranging from the mystical to the political.

Symbolic Architectures

Manuscripts and ritual objects created by Jews in the Muslim world frequently portray surrounding natural and human-shaped landscapes. Architectural motifs are particularly prevalent: buildings, columns, and arches are drawn on the title page of Hebrew manuscripts and books, and embodied in three-dimensional objects.

Ketubbot, written marriage contracts, are common across the Jewish world. They are inherently private records—but are also publicly displayed at wedding ceremonies, with illustrations that embellish the text of the contract. Images of buildings featured on these documents symbolize the couple's new home. Moroccan *ketubbot* frame the legal text under the protective cover of arches in various shapes. Horseshoe and pointed arches, characteristic of local Muslim architectural styles, appear frequently. Similar arches are also found on Hanukkah lamps, which can resemble miniature-sized buildings.

In this context, architecture is not just suggestive of human dwellings but also echoes mystical notions of the Palace as a container of the presence of the divine on earth.

Containing Texts, Adorning Bodies

The Word of God constitutes the core of Jewish and Muslim faiths. Preserved in writing in the Bible and Qur'an, the holy text is memorized, recited, and read—and thus also preserved in the heart and mind.

Prayers and teachings from the Scriptures are inscribed on everyday objects that are worn on the body or placed in the home. Their sacrality is emphasized by images of abundance, beauty, and celebration expressed in localized forms of flowers, trees, birds, crowns, and lions. These motifs are not merely decorative but hold deeper meanings, drawn from scriptural metaphors and allegories. The symbolic associations between adornment and auspiciousness become particularly visible in the elaborate decoration of bridal wear and Torah scroll enclosures.

The Word, preserved on such materials, becomes a visual reminder of the Divine in everyday life—offering guidance, blessing, protection, and empowerment.

Global Networks

The growing numbers of American and European travelers to the Near East onwards from the late 19th century created new markets for collecting local objects, including glass, ceramics, metalwork, and textiles, which became available in the bazaars of Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem.

While modernization, industrialization, and changing local tastes had greatly diminished the production of fine traditional crafts, tourism prompted their revival. As a result, inlaid metalware of the types renowned in Egypt and Syria under the Mamluk (1250–1517) and Ayyubid (ca. 1171–1260) dynasties, became popular once again.

Local craftsmen, including the famed Jewish metalworkers of Damascus, revived old techniques and vessel shapes through the study of historical examples on view in the newly established museums in Cairo and Damascus. They freely mixed and adapted motifs to suit the ritual or decorative uses of the objects, in styles that appealed to their new clientele.

Light and Shadow

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.
His light is like a niche within which is a lamp,
The lamp enclosed in glass, the glass as if it were a pearly star,
Lit from a blessed tree,
An olive neither of the East nor of the West,
Whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though no fire touched it:
Light upon Light.

God guides whom He wills to His light.
And God presents examples for men,
and God knows all things.

Qur'an 24:35

Command the Israelite people to bring
you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting,
to kindle a lamp perpetually.

Aaron shall set it up in the Tent of Meeting
outside the curtain of the Covenant [to burn]
from evening to morning before God regularly;
it is a law for all time throughout the ages.

Leviticus 24:2-3

The lamp of God is the life-breath of man,
searching all innermost parts.

Proverbs 20:27

Untitled (Morning prayers under hanging lamps at Em ha-banim synagogue)

Fes, Morocco, Studio ABC, 20th century
Silver gelatin print (reproduction)
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with funds provided by Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 78.4.46.31

HANGING ABOVE

Lampshade with arboreal, floral, and bird motifs, inscribed in Hebrew with biblical amuletic texts (after Genesis 9), and in Arabic after the 99 Beautiful Names of Muhammad within the talismanic image of Prophet Muhammad's sandal

Egypt or Morocco, ca. 1920
Copper alloy
Gift of Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 76.302

Hanging synagogue memorial lamp surmounted by a rooster-shaped *khamsa*, decorated with horseshoe arches, and floral and *khamsa* motifs on the chains. Glass bowl painted in Hebrew in memory of a man named Itzchaq Barukhel

Morocco, 19th century
Brass with gold wash, glass insert with gold metallic paint
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 71.1a–b

Hanging synagogue memorial lamp surmounted by a crown, decorated with six-pointed star and vine motifs, with glass bowl painted in Hebrew in memory of a man named Mosheh ben Chayyim, deceased on 29 Adar II, 5698 (April 1, 1938)

Tiznit, Morocco, 20th century (inscribed in 1938)
Brass; gold enamel paint on glass oil well
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 74.58 a–b

Hanging synagogue memorial lamp surmounted by a six-pointed-star engraved in Hebrew *magen david* (Shield of David), with base inscribed in Hebrew in memory of a man named Meir Mor Yosef

Morocco, 20th century
Brass with copper rivets
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 74.59

Jewish Arts and Lives in the Muslim World

Following the rise of Islam in the 7th century CE, Jewish communities developed under Muslim empires from North India to Spain. They constituted the largest Jewish population in the world until the Modern Era, waning with the decline of the Ottoman empire in the 20th century. Their heritage—spanning centuries, regions, and languages—retains traces of the Muslim world even after subsequent migrations to Israel, Europe, the Americas, and Australia.

The echoes of the Jewish-Muslim encounters are, in fact, at the core of today's Jewish experience. They speak of human connections across divides, prompt reconsideration of assumptions that shape our public cultural and political debates, and map the precious possibilities (and inherent fragility) of coexistence, mutual appreciation, and belonging to many cultures at once.

In Plain Sight draws a selection from over 1,400 objects in the Magnes's permanent collection originating in Muslim lands, organized to reflect cultural affinities and common threads. They highlight rootedness in diaspora, shared graphic forms and visual landscapes, attitudes towards sacred texts and human bodies, and networks of trade and knowledge exchange, all centering around the fundamental role of light in Jewish and Muslim prayer spaces. The juxtapositions create further associations and narratives—through shapes, colors, materials, and techniques—that move across cultures and geographies.

This exhibition also represents the culmination of over five years of curatorial collaboration. As curators of Jewish and Islamic art, we examined objects together, studied primary sources ranging from visual culture to architecture and music, and read secondary literature in several languages—at times flanked by UC Berkeley students and scholars in various disciplines. We spent many hours in the fashion of the Talmudic *chavruta*: two students—with complementary, divergent, and contradicting views—training ourselves in the other's perspective, seeing the same object with the other's eyes, and forming, day after day, a shared perspective, a common sensibility.

What emerges here aims at making the familiar unfamiliar and fresh, at seeing what was unseen, and at engaging viewers in a path of discovery in which the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts.

— Qamar Adamjee and Francesco Spagnolo

In Jewish homes, the table looks like a stool, and there are no chairs, for they sit on the floor like the Arabs. They place a pot of porridge on a washstand or a clay oven. The ceilings and the floors of the rooms and the courtyard are plastered over with mortar like a wall. The walls of the house are covered with a mat of soft reed up to the standing height of a man. No graven image may be seen on the walls. (Romanelli, *Travail in an Arab Land*, 1792)

In the evening, Jewish families bring the bride to the groom's house with the sound of ululating and drums... And so she remains throughout Friday from the time she was dressed until she goes out from under the marriage canopy and is installed in her bridal bed—she is like a stone pillar. The attending women bind [her] hair with ribbons, paint her eyes with kohl, and coif her tresses into two braids according to their fashion, paint her face with rouge, and they draw strange designs on her forehead, nose, and chin with bitumen to save her from the evil eye. They color her hands with a red dye called henna. (Romanelli, *Travail in an Arab Land*, 1792)

In the imperial cities of Meknes, Fes, and in the capital of Marrakesh, the Jews do not live in the city itself. Their quarter is at the outskirts. They can only enter the main part of the city barefoot. All the Christians who come, stay with the Jews or by themselves in houses outside the walls... The Jewish quarter lies between the [Sultan's] palace and the main part of town. (Romanelli, *Travail in an Arab Land*, 1792)

The women's indoor attire—both Jewish and Arab—consists of a tunic... From the waist up, it has a breastpiece in front embroidered with gold or silk thread. It looks like two garments joined together. The outer garment is very ornate, consisting of a cummerbund and a very wide festive dress. The skirt is a velvet wraparound bordered with silk and belted at the waist. In the Tétouan district, the married women cover their heads with a red silk veil which falls behind as far down as the hem of the dress covering their two braids. It is fastened to the back of the dress. They wear a silk headdress, which is wrapped around the head seven times and resembles a Turkish turban. (Romanelli, *Travail in an Arab Land*, 1792)

The shops are like holes in the wall, [where] every type of ware is sold. The smallest group of merchants are those dealing in textiles. A larger number sell spices, and the large majority are vendors of foodstuffs... Arab tailors are only able to make their own style of clothing, while Jews make their own clothes, and some of them also make Christian-style garments. Arabs make shoes for both themselves and the Jews. The latter make their style shoes as well as footwear for Christians. (Romanelli, *Travail in an Arab Land*, 1792)

ALGIERS (ALGERIA)

BUKHARA (UZBEKISTAN)

CAIRO (EGYPT)

DAMASCUS (SYRIA)

DJERBA (TUNISIA)

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

FES (MOROCCO)

ISFAHAN (IRAN)

IZMIR (TURKEY)

JERUSALEM (PALESTINE)

KOLKATA (INDIA)

MARRAKECH (MOROCCO)

MASHHAD (IRAN)

MUMBAI (INDIA)

NORTH AFRICA

RHODES (GREECE)

SANANDAJ (IRANIAN KURDISTAN)

SEFROU (MOROCCO)

TANGIER (MOROCCO)

TEHRAN (IRAN)

TÉTOUAN (MOROCCO)

TIZNIT (MOROCCO)

TUNIS (TUNISIA)

LIGHT AND SHADOW

Torah Ark curtain embroidered with architectural, floral, and pomegranate motifs, depicting a canopy holding synagogue hanging lamps

Turkey, late 18th century
Felted wool, red wool, and metallic embroidery with linen backing
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 75.183.120

3 x 6.5

BELONGING IN PLACE

Suzani (embroidered textile) for dowry gift, decorated with floral and arboreal motifs including irises, poppies, foxgloves, and cypress trees

3.5 x 6

Bukhara, Uzbekistan, n.d.
Cotton ground, cotton binding, silk embroidery, and ink under-drawing
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Roth, 85.25.1

LEFT

Bridal shoes

6.5 x 6

Morocco, 19th century
Leather, cotton velvet, and goldwork
Gift of Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 80.37.2 a–b

RIGHT

Mikveh (ritual bath) shoes

Worn by brides on their way to and from the communal Ritual Bath (Heb. mikveh) ahead of their wedding. The style is common across the communities of the Eastern Mediterranean, from Egypt to Turkey.

Egypt, ca. 1900
Wood with mother-of-pearl inlay, leather, and brass cobbler tacks
Gift of Estelle & Daniel Milber (Mizrahi), 96.22.5 a–b

Ketubbah (marriage contract) for the wedding of David ben Yoav ha-Cohen and Miriam bat Solomon

The aesthetics of this ketubbah—compiled as a booklet with a richly decorated title page and Hebrew text enclosed within gold-ornamented borders—are typical of luxury Persian manuscripts. Accordingly, the headpiece here also shares the predominantly blue and gold color palette, a title enclosed within a frame, and tiny floral motifs arranged in architectural form.

5 x 6

Hebrew and Aramaic
Mashhad, Iran, 30 Cheshvan 5665 (November 8, 1904)
Black and metallic gold ink and watercolor on laid paper
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 94.28.1

Ketubbah (marriage contract) for the wedding of Zaki ben Baruch Cohen and Natalie bat Vita[l] Josef al-Tawi, pre-printed in Arabic by the Karaite Jewish community of Cairo for the local Muslim authorities

4 x 6

Arabic and Hebrew
Cairo, Egypt, 25 Shevat 5703 (January 31, 1943)
Lithograph with hand-scribed names on paper
Gift of Karaite Community of Cairo, 74.45.2

Keren Tzionah Friedman (b. 1943)

Jewish Bride and Mother (Jews of Djerba)

Djerba, Tunisia, 1980
Kodachrome photograph
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with partial gift of
Keren Tzionan Friedman, 97.20.3

3.5 x 6

Illustrated manuscript depicting Moses and Aaron standing before Pharaoh (after Exodus 7:8-10), made for an Iranian Jewish patron

Judeo-Persian (Hebrew script)
Isfahan, Iran, 19th–20th century
Ink and gouache on paper
Gift of Chimon Mayeri and family, 85.46.1

3.5 x 6

Untitled (Jewish cemetery with the city of Fes in the background)

Similarities between Jewish and Muslim funerary customs—which include ritual bathing, burial within 24 hours, and interment in a simple white shroud—are also visible in the appearance of Jewish cemeteries. Both communities mark burial spots with low, stepped cenotaphs and inscribed headstones, typically using stucco or marble (white in color) as building materials.

5 x 6

Fes, Morocco, Studio ABC, 20th century
Silver gelatin print (reproduction)
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with funds provided by Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 78.4.46.1

Moshe Shah Mizrahi (aka Moshe ben Yitzhak Mizrahi and Moshe Sofer Tehrani, Tehran, Iran, ca. 1870–Jerusalem, Palestine, 1935 or 1940)

Maqom Miqdash (The Place of the Holy Temple)

Print illustrating the biblical and architectural history of the "Temple Mount" (Heb. har ha-bayit) or "Noble Sanctuary" (Arab. haram al-sharif; the al-Aqsa Mosque compound) in Jerusalem, the most important sacred site shared by Jews and Muslims. Inscribed in Hebrew with Biblical quotations and descriptive captions. Depicting: a) scenes from the "Binding of Isaac" after Gen. 22 (center); b) the Dome of the Rock (top); c) the Western Wall (bottom); and d), Jewish and Muslim sacred sites on two flanking columns surmounted by rampant lions holding Zionist flags. Landscapes are punctuated throughout by palm and cypress trees.

8 x 6

The artist, Moshe Mizrachi, was born in Tehran before 1870. He immigrated to Palestine around 1890 and settled in the Old City of Jerusalem, where he opened a workshop for religious and applied artwork.

Jerusalem, Palestine, 1925–1926
Lithograph on paper
70.19

BELONGING IN PLACE

Albert Samama (1872–1934)

Famille Karouby (Karouby Family)

Members of the Karouby (or Karoubi) family were photographed in the late 19th century wearing traditional Tunisian attires. Subsequent generations left Tunisia for France in the 1950s and 1960s, as part of the mass exodus of Tunisian Jews after waves of unrest and persecution. Born in Tunis to a Jewish family, Albert Samama Chikly was a photographer and filmmaker, considered a pioneer in African cinema.

5 x 6

Tunis, Tunisia, Albert Photographie, 19th century
Sepia photograph on paper (reproduction)
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 76.241.2b

INSIDE VITRINE

Bridal headdress embroidered with auspicious images of birds, fish, and cypress trees

Djerba, Tunisia, 19th century
Cotton, silk, and metallic embroidery thread with metal sequins
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with funds provided by Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 78.4.36

3.5 x 6

Mezuzah cover depicting a khamsa and a six-pointed star, engraved in Hebrew with the word shaday (Almighty)

The Hebrew word shaday is a name for God meaning "almighty," and an acronym for shomer daltot yisrael (Guardian of the doors of Israel). This term, combined with the image of khamsa, points to the relevance of this mezuzah—a reminder of the covenant with God affixed at the entrance of Jewish homes—as an amulet for household protection.

5 x 6

North Africa, 20th century
Brass
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 91.49

Ira Nowinski (b. 1942, United States)

Karaite Synagogue

Born in New York in 1942, Ira Nowinski earned a Master's Degree in Fine Arts from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1973. Working with Magnes founder Seymour Fromer, Nowinski sought out social-documentary photography projects that recorded Jewish communal life, including San Francisco's Russian Jewish community and Karaite Jewish communities in Egypt, Israel, and California.

5 x 6

Egypt, 1985
Silver gelatin photograph
Gift of the artist, 85.49.8

Rafael bar Shlomoh Aznati (Algeria and Palestine, 19th century)

sefer orah ve-simchah (The Book of Light and Gladness)

Manuscript containing liturgical poems and Talmudic excerpts to be recited at Purim festive meals. Decorated with an architectural frame on the title page, eight-pointed stars, and flower and bird shapes.

5 x 6

Hebrew
Sefrou, Morocco, 1812–1813
Ink and pigment on laid paper
Gift of Seymour Fromer, 2008.11.2

CENTER

Khamsa for household protection, engraved with the depiction of a hand holding flowers, surmounted by a rooster

3.5 x 6

Morocco, 19th century
Silver
Gift of Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 77.32

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Khamsa adornment for bridal head coverings

Djerba, Tunisia, n.d.
Silver
Gift of Keren T. Friedman, 2011.6.14

Khamsa engraved in Hebrew with the Tetragrammaton (the Hebrew letters yud, he, vav, he, spelling the four-letter ineffable name of God) and the word shaday (Almighty)

Morocco, n.d.
Silver
Gift of M.S. Sopher, 79.42.6

10.25 x 6

Khamsa for personal protection

Djerba, Tunisia, n.d.
Silver
Gift of Keren T. Friedman, 2011.6.13

Khamsa for personal protection

Algeria, purchased in Djerba, Tunisia, n.d.
Silver and coral
Gift of Keren T. Friedman, 2011.6.12

Khamsa for personal protection

Morocco, 20th century
Silver
Gift of Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 77.33

TOP LEFT

Memorial lamp holder decorated with nazar ("eye beads" to protect from the evil eye), bird shapes, five- and six-pointed stars, crescent moons, and flower and plant motifs; inscribed in Hebrew for a man named Abraham bar Sultana, deceased on 22 Tevet 5649 (December 26, 1888)

Turkey, 19th century (inscribed in 1888)
Nickel
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 79.47.6

TOP RIGHT

Hanukkah lamp flanked by helical columns (associated with the Temple of Solomon) surmounted by dome-shaped elements, decorated with six- and eight-pointed stars and geometrical motifs

Tétouan, Morocco, 19th century
Brass
Gift of the Judah L. Magnes Museum Women's Guild, 74.21

11 x 6

LEFT

Hanukkah lamp in the shape of a pointed arch, decorated with a rooster-shaped khamsa inscribed with a six-pointed star

Morocco, 19th–20th century
Brass
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with funds provided by Seymour Fromer, honoring the 40th wedding anniversary of Fay and Sol Friedman, 75.250

Ketubbah (marriage contract) for the wedding of Shim'on ben Meir and Qanis bat Yitzchaq, bordered with Hebrew blessing for the couple, and decorated with a cypress tree flanked by lions and rising suns, arches, floral and bird motifs

Prominent in marriage contracts made in the Jewish community of Isfahan, one of the oldest in Iran, is the motif of the lion and rising sun (Persian, sher-o khorshed). Lions had a long and varied association in Iran: with kings of ancient Persia, Imam Ali (599–661), "the lion of God" in Shi'i Muslim belief, and later as the symbol for the Persian Qajar monarchs. The sher-o khorshed first appeared on the 1796 coronation coinage of the dynasty's founder, Aqa Muhammad Shah Qajar (ruled 1789–1797), and continued to be used by the subsequent Pahlavi dynasty until the Iranian Revolution in 1979.

7 x 6

Hebrew and Aramaic
Isfahan, Iran, 14 Nissan 5664 (March 30, 1904)
Tempera, ink, and gold metallic paint on paper
Gift of Herbert A. and Nancy Bernhard, 98.41.8

Ketubbah (marriage contract) for the wedding of Yosef ben Shlomoh ben-Tatah ben-Tzoltan (Bensoultan) and Lidisiya (Letitia) bat Yehudah Nahon, featuring floral and plant motifs, with Hebrew texts flanked by helical columns (associated with the Temple of Solomon) surmounted by a horseshoe arch

4.5 x 6

Hebrew and Aramaic
Tétouan, Morocco, 6 Tammuz 5588 (June 18, 1828)
Ink, pigment, and paper decals on parchment
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 71.0.10

Ketubbah (marriage contract) for the wedding of Reuven ben David Ben-Zimrah and Yaqut bat Mosheh Chadjwel (Hatchouel), featuring floral and plant motifs, with Hebrew texts flanked by columns surmounted by a pointed arch

4 x 6

Hebrew and Aramaic
Tétouan, Morocco, 22 Elul 5635 (September 22, 1875)
Gouache and ink on parchment
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 71.0.11

Ketubbah (marriage contract) for the wedding of Mosheh ben Shlomoh Algozi and Simchah bat Mosheh Chadjwel (Hatchouel), featuring floral motifs and depictions of hands in Priestly Blessing position, with Hebrew texts framed by horseshoe and pointed arches

4 x 6

Hebrew and Aramaic
Tétouan, Morocco, 27 Sivan 5645 (June 10, 1885)
Ink, pigment, with gold-leafed and painted decals on parchment
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 71.0.6

Untitled [Horseshoe-shaped arches on façade of Dar al-Magana, Fes, Morocco]

5 x 6

The Dar al-Magana (House of the Clock) was built under the rule of Marinid Sultan Abu Inan Faris (1348–1358), near the Bou Inania madrasa (religious school) and its mosque. The building is also known as the "House of Maimonides," based on a belief that it was also the local home of Rabbi, philosopher, and court physician Moses ben Maimon (born in Cordoba, Spain, 1135–died in Fostat, Egypt, 1204).

Fes, Morocco, Studio ABC, 20th century
Silver gelatin print (reproduction)
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with funds provided by
Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 78.4.46.2

TOP

Hanukkah lamp featuring eight horseshoe arch windows, surmounted by khamsa and rooster motifs

8.5 x 6

Morocco, 19th century
Brass
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with funds provided by Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 78.4.30

BOTTOM

Shlomo Ohana (b. Morocco, 1915)

Hanukkah lamp in architectural form

Featuring engravings of brick walls, columns, and geometrical patterns, a colonnade with eight openings surmounted by a mashrabiya (carved stone or wood architectural screen), and depictions of a Torah crown, six-pointed stars, floral and arboreal motifs. Paired with a bird-shaped shamash (servitor for kindling).

Jerusalem, Palestine, ca. 1940
Sheet copper alloy (silver wash)
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 98.7a–i

TOP LEFT

Nissim bar Sheshet

Keter Torah (Crown of the Torah)

Synagogue plaque depicting architectural motifs drawn from within the synagogue and its surrounding urban environment. Inscribed in Hebrew with the Decalogue and quotations from and about the Hebrew Bible, drawn in the colors of the French national flag, and decorated with a six-pointed star, four eight-pointed stars, and with North African architectural elements.

8.5 x 6

The Hebrew inscriptions at the bottom identify, from right to left, the date, the location (Marrakech, referred to here as ‘ir ha-qodesh, a holy city: an expression customarily associated with Jerusalem), and the name of the plaque’s maker (Nissim bar Sheshet).

Hebrew
Marrakech, Morocco, 8 Adar II, 5717 (March 11, 1957)
Graphite and colored pencil on paper
Gift of Seymour Fromer, 76.55

FAR LEFT

Ketubbah (marriage contract) painted in architectural design, for the wedding of Rachamim ben Bembadjan and Meliyat bat Shim'on

Designed in the form of a multi-level building, featuring depictions of floral and plant motifs arranged in symmetric patterns reminiscent of Muslim prayer carpets, with arched windows framing Hebrew inscriptions. A six-pointed star—inscribed in Hebrew with the word tziyon (Zion) and the amuletic expression, magen david (Shield of David)—appears drafted at the top. Other Hebrew texts include wishes for the bride and groom, and blessings beginning with the Hebrew word siman (a "sign" of the love uniting the couple).

8 x 6

Hebrew and Aramaic
Sanandaj, Iranian Kurdistan, Iran, 22 Sivan 5696 (June 12, 1936)
Ink, watercolor, and gold metallic paint on paper
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 74.0.6

LEFT

Shiviti amulet painted in architectural design, featuring geometric patterns, seven-branched candelabra, and Hebrew biblical and mystical texts in roundels, windows, and square frames

Devotional plaque consisting of Hebrew texts designed to remind one of God's omnipresence. Includes a Tetragrammaton (the Hebrew letters yud, he, vav, he, spelling the four-letter, ineffable name of God), Psalms (67 and 121) written in seven-branch lamp form, and the kabbalistic liturgical poem, ana be-koach. Other texts include the 42- and 72-letter names of God, the Ten Commandments, and the names of the protective angels, Sanoi, Sansanoi, and Semangalaf. The visual symbols featured in the document attest to the intended amuletic powers of the manuscript.

Hebrew
Morocco, 19th century
Ink and lacquer on parchment
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 89.0.3

CONTAINING TEXTS, ADORNING BODIES

INSIDE VITRINE

Torah crown surmounted by a six-pointed star inscribed with the Hebrew word tziyon (Zion), featuring nine bells and four heart-shaped elements with imitation stones, inscribed in Hebrew honoring members of the Ashkenaz and Kunstler families

4 x 6

North Africa (possibly Morocco), via Israel, 20th century
Sheet metal (silver plated) with paste jewels
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Max Eis in honor of Pam Levinson's Bat Mitzvah, 76.283

Mantle for a Torah scroll dedicated by Rabbi David Philo bar Shemuel, embroidered with depictions of a crown adorned with imitation stones, hearts, floral, and ribbon motifs

4 x 6

Morocco, 5688 (1927–1928)
Cotton velvet, metallic embroidery floss, and metal sequins over padded wool applique with glass paste jewels and gold plated brooch; lining: silk and cotton
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Sandor Burstein, 75.183.98

LEFT

Tallit (prayer shawl) bag decorated with six- and eight-pointed star motifs and inscribed in Hebrew for Ya[h]udah bar Avraham Albo on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah, in a shape that evokes both a "white collar" briefcase and a case to hold a Qur'an manuscript

Morocco, ca. 1930–1950
Cutout and engraved silver, with cotton velvet and silverwork cord
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase (acquired in Israel), 75.183.142

RIGHT

Tefillin (phylacteries) bag embroidered with a six-pointed star, floral and arboreal motifs, inscribed in Hebrew for Makhluf Rafael bar Yoreh

10.25 x 6

Tétouan, Morocco, ca. 1930–1950
Metallic thread embroidery and sequins on velvet
Gift of Elhadad Raymonde, 75.183.242

Until the 1930s, the Bar Mitzvah was celebrated by Moroccan families when a boy reached the age of ten or eleven. Through the "modernizing" influences of colonial French Jewish organizations, especially the educational initiatives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the celebration was held closer to age thirteen, with a festive gathering held six months before a boy's birthday. Parents would commission velvet or silver bags to hold the prayer shawl and phylacteries, decorated with the child's name in gold or silver threads.

David R. Crowles (b. 1950)

Keter Torah, Assayag Synagogue

Photographer David Crowles documented Moroccan synagogues that had been vacated after many Jews left the country beginning in the 1950s. This photograph shows the Torah Ark of the Assayag synagogue, built in 1890 and vacated in the 1950s. Renovated in 2022 under the auspices of the Moroccan government, the building is presently the site of a Jewish museum.

5 x 6

Tangier, Morocco, 2002
Gelatin chloride photograph on printing-out paper
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 2004.2.3

Man's wedding vest

Tétouan, Morocco, 20th century
Gold metallic embroidery on velvet
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 75.183.41

2.5 x 6

4.5 x 7

GLOBAL NETWOKRKS

Torah Scroll case from the Magen David synagogue

The style of this tiq (Heb. for case) is Middle Eastern, typical of Jewish communities who immigrated to the Indian subcontinent from Iraq (at times referred to as "Baghdadi Jews"). The dome-shaped crown and finials are decorated with floral, vine, and other motifs, inscribed in Hebrew with biblical quotations (after Genesis 49:18 and Leviticus 26:46) and dedicated to the memory of a woman named Miriam bat Chavuv, deceased on 28 Tammuz, 5590 (July 19, 1830).

Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 1830 (acquired from the Magen David synagogue)
Wood, leather brocade, and repoussé silver
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Bernard Kimmel collection, 69.71 a–f

Torah Scroll case from the Magen David synagogue

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Wood, leather brocade, and repoussé silver
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, Bernard Kimmel collection, 69.71 a–f

INSIDE VITRINE GLOBAL NETWOKRKS

Hanukkah lamp featuring depictions of a seven-branched candelabrum flanked by six-pointed stars and peacocks, against a background of vegetal scrolls (so-called "arabesques"), and inscribed in Hebrew yerushalayim 'ir ha-qodesh (The Holy City of Jerusalem)

4 x 6

Syria (possibly Damascus), 20th century (collected in Morocco)
Brass, silver, and copper
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase, 96.39 a–b

Beaded desk lamp with dome-shaped lampshades, surmounted by a six-pointed star, and a camel-shaped base; inscribed in Arabic with pious phrases and prayer texts, including the shahada (statements of faith) and the adhan (call to prayer)

4 x 6

Damascus, Syria, ca. 1930s
Copper, wood, and glass beads
Gift of Mrs. Mary Schussheim, 85.35.41

Souvenir tray

Decorated with Hebrew biblical quotations, depictions of a seven-branched candelabrum surmounted by a crown, the Tablets of the Law and Decalogue, six-pointed stars inscribed in Hebrew with the word tzyion (Zion), the Dome of the Rock, the Tomb of Rachel, arboreal motifs, elephant tusks, and a bird (possibly a falcon) reminiscent of Arab heraldry.

4.5 x 6

Damascus, Syria, ca. 1925
Brass with silver and copper overlay, with silver niello
Gift of Mrs. Mary Schussheim, 85.35.47

Seven-branched candelabra for synagogue use

Inlaid with depictions of Jewish and Muslim holy sites (including the Dome of the Rock, Rachel's Tomb, and the Tomb of the Patriarchs), cypress trees and other arboreal motifs, six-pointed stars inscribed in Hebrew with the word tziyon (Zion), and the Tablets of the Law inscribed with the Decalogue. Base inscribed in Hebrew after Proverbs 3:35 and 4:18.

4.5 x 6

Damascus, Syria, 1924-1925
Brass inlaid with copper and silver, wood base
Gift of Mrs. Bonnie I. Henning, 2000.5.1

Wedding dress ("Great Dress," berberisca or l-kêswa l-kbira) embroidered with geometrical and arboreal motifs (jacket and modesty panel), an eight-pointed star, 18 golden semicircles, and a small khamsa at the bottom corner (gown)

The eighteen semicircles (corresponding to the Hebrew letters meaning life) and the khamsa decorating the skirt indicate that the dress also functions as a "wearable amulet," protecting the body of the bride.

Morocco, 20th century
Silk and cotton velvet with goldwork
Judah L. Magnes Museum purchase with funds provided by Dr. Elliot Zaleznik, 78.4.21a–b, 78.4.25, and 88.0.4.2

Woman's garment made with rose-patterned fabric, altered to fit children on Purim

Izmir, Turkey, or Rhodes, Greece, late 19th century
Silk, linen, cotton, with gold metallic thread
Gift of Rebecca Israel Contopoulos, 2013.6

Wedding dress from the Levi family of Rhodes

Sara Levi Willis received this dress from her mother ahead of moving to the United States in 1936. The Levi family belonged to a group of Sephardic Jews who had immigrated from Spain to Rhodes in the 16th century, living under Ottoman rule. They maintained close ties with mainland Greece and Turkey, as well as Palestine and North Africa. The community was decimated by deportations to Nazi death camps in 1943.

Rhodes, 19th century (velvet purchased from Morocco)
Purple velvet, gold embroidery couched on cardboard; linen lining
Gift of Sara Levi Willis, 86.42

Ben Mayeri (Isfahan, Iran, 1914–San Francisco, California, 2003)

Passover Seder plate engraved with Hebrew words listing the sections of the Passover Haggadah, and with depictions of a ritual meal scene, with domed buildings (including a Mosque) set in a pastoral background

Educated at the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, the Stuart Memorial College, and the Elite Military University of Tehran, Jewish artist Ben Mayeri created an impressive body of metalwork in his native Iran. His production was halted after he relocated to San Francisco upon fleeing his home country in 1979.

8.5 x 10

Tehran, Iran, 20th century
Tinned copper
Gift of Max Eis, 86.65

Coffee service set enameled with a dense pattern of floral motifs in the style distinctive of the Sarraf workshop (operated by a Christian metalworking family in Damascus)

Damascus, Syria, ca. 1930
Polychrome enamel (glass) on copper
Gift of Mary Schussheim, 85.35.2 a–p

Chair and side table featuring inlaid wood and mother-of-pearl patterns distinctive of Damascus workshops

Damascus, Syria, ca. 1920
Wood and wood inlay (birdseye maple, ebony, walnut), with mother-of-pearl inlay
Gift of Mary Schussaheim, 85.35.58 and 85.35.60