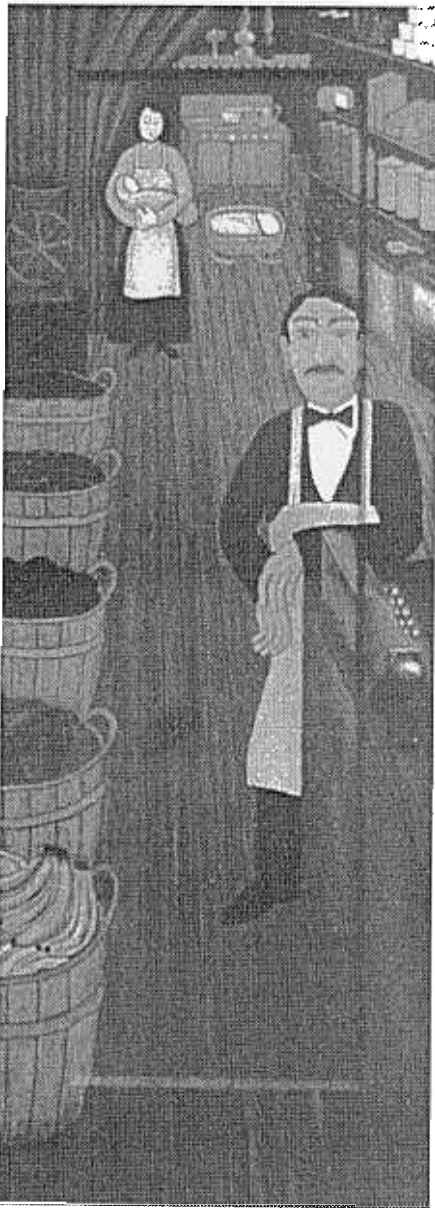


# FORWARD

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## OPENING THE DOORS TO THE PAST



**WORLD'S APART:** In the exhibit 'Passages: An Immigrant's Story,' Beth Grossman paints scenes from her great-grandmother's life on seven doors, one of which, 'Home,' is pictured above.

The immigrant experience is one of the great themes of American studies. Henry Roth and Isaac Bashevis Singer both portrayed the Jewish immigrant experience in their novels; Irving Howe, in "World of Our Fathers," portrayed it in his nonfiction.

California artist Beth Grossman contributes to this important realm of American-Jewish history with "Passages: An Immigrant's Story," an exhibition of her work on display at Philadelphia's National Museum of American Jewish History. The exhibit comprises a series of portraits painted in acrylic on seven antique wooden doors, all created in 1995. On the doors, each of which is 77 inches by 28 inches, Ms. Grossman has painted images of her Ukrainian great-grandmother, Bella.

The first six doors depict Bella's departure from Europe, her arrival at Ellis Island, her brother's efforts to find her a husband in America, her wedding, her impoverished home in the back of a grocery store and a Sabbath dinner. On the

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final door, titled "Encounter," Ms. Grossman has painted herself along with her great-grand-

mother. In the painting, which was inspired by the artist's own journey to Ukraine, Bella passes a menorah to her great-granddaughter as the two board a plane.

In addition to "Passages," the museum is also displaying "Home in a Suitcase," a related exhibit by Ms. Grossman consisting of a series of three suitcases that the artist worked on from 1993 through 1995. In each suitcase, Ms. Grossman portrays a different era, and each is perched on a pile of suitcases that rises waist-high. Inside the first suitcase, Ms. Grossman has painted what she imagines her grandmother would have brought with her from the old country; the second portrays a domestic scene from Bella's house in the 1930s, and the third features a scene with the family, including Bella, in the home of the artist's mother several decades later.

— MAX GROSS

*National Museum of American Jewish History, Independence Mall East, 55 North 5th St., Philadelphia; Jan. 20-May 19, Mon.-Thu. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Fri. 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Sun. 12 p.m.-5 p.m.; \$4, \$3 students and seniors, free for children under 3. (215-923-3811 or [www.nmajh.org](http://www.nmajh.org))*