

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Anna Willkomm, 414-390-5500  
awillkomm@muellercommunications.com

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 6, 2022

**BEYOND BORDERS: THE ART OF SIONA BENJAMIN COMING TO MILWAUKEE**

*Exclusive exhibit at Jewish Museum Milwaukee raises awareness of Jewish diversity and explores immigration, gender, the concept of “home” and the role of art in social change*

**MILWAUKEE** – The Jewish Museum Milwaukee has announced their newest exhibit on display from June 17 to September 25: *Beyond Borders: The Art of Siona Benjamin*, presented by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. The exhibit is supported in part by a grant from the Milwaukee Arts Board and the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin. Siona Benjamin will kick off the exhibit with a five-day residency in Milwaukee from June 16-20th, including events and programming open to the community.

“Siona’s work bridges the traditional and contemporary in a beautiful display of thought provoking and engaging pieces,” said Patti Sherman-Cisler, Jewish Museum Milwaukee Executive Director. “In this exhibit you will find a profound marriage between Siona’s art and the impact of the museum as a central source of Jewish heritage and culture, social justice themes and a place where conversations happen.”

**About The Exhibit**

*Beyond Borders: The Art of Siona Benjamin* reflects the layered, multifaceted identity of Siona Benjamin as an Indian-American-Jewish artist. Benjamin’s transcultural view has been shaped by diverse, complex experiences and is inspired by history and mythology, as illustrated by the captivating characters and symbolism which populate her pieces.

Immigration, gender, the concept of “home,” and the role of art in social change are explored through vibrantly hued paintings blending tradition with innovation and navigating feelings of inclusion and exclusion. Further reflecting current issues, Benjamin’s work considers and challenges perceptions about culture, race and religion, and in crossing boundaries and building bridges, she asks viewers to do the same.



**Exhibit Events**

The museum is hosting two free community days on Friday, July 15, from 10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. and on Sunday, August 21, from noon –4:00 p.m.. In addition, the museum is proud to collaborate with a variety of community partners to offer events open to the public, including:

- [Opening Preview of \*Beyond Borders: The Art of Siona Benjamin\*](#)  
Thursday, June 16, 7:00–8:30 p.m.  
Celebrate the opening of *Beyond Borders* with a dessert and wine reception, a welcome from JMM

Executive Director Patti Sherman-Cisler, a presentation from award-winning artist Siona Benjamin, a traditional Indian dance performed by Aditi Narayan and an exhibit tour.

- **[Youth Workshop – I Am Hava. I Am Blue. What Color Are You?](#)**

Saturday, June 18, 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Milwaukee Public Library – Central Branch (814 W. Wisconsin Ave.)

Open to the public, this event will include a reading of “I am Hava” by Siona Benjamin, who served as the book’s primary illustrator. Participants will also be invited to create papier-mâché masks as part of the workshop.

- **[Chalk the Block with Award-Winning Artist Siona Benjamin](#)**

Sunday, June 19, 11:00 am.–2:00 p.m.

- Black Cat Alley (E. Ivanhoe Pl.)
- Jewish Museum Milwaukee (1360 N. Prospect Ave.)
- Marcus Performing Arts Center (929 N. Water St.)
- Mitchell Street Library (906 W. Historic Mitchell St.)

In the spirit of community and creativity, this family-friendly block party provides participants with simple drawings steeped in Indian imagery to use as templates for creativity as public spaces are transformed into works of art, in partnership with Siona Benjamin and other trained artists.

- **[Virtual Lecture – A Multifaceted Glimpse into Modern India](#)**

Tuesday, July 12, 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Rochona Majumdar, author and Associate Professor at the University of Chicago in the Division of the Humanities – South Asian Languages and Civilizations, will be providing an introduction to modern Indian history, focusing on histories of caste, gender and religion.

- **[Interfaith Friendship: Personal and Political Reflections](#)**

Sunday, June 19, 7:00 p.m.

Cardinal Stritch University Kendall Theater (6801 N. Yates Rd.)

Siona Benjamin and her childhood friend Zehra Tahir will discuss paths of understanding Jewish-Muslim relations through an examination of their shared childhood experiences, their insights from working for social justice, and their visionary belief in what is possible through interfaith friendship.

- **[Jews Into and Out of India: From the Bene Israel to Siona Benjamin – Lecture and Book Signing](#)**

Wednesday, August 3, 7:00 p.m.

Historian and author of “Growing Up Jewish In India”, Ori Z. Soltes places the story of the Bene Israel Jewish community within the larger narrative of Jewish migration to, residence within, and emigration from India, largely to Israel, and connects to the life and artwork of Siona Benjamin, an internationally recognized artist from within the Bene Israel community. The presentation will be followed by a book signing.

- **[In-Person Film Screening and Talkback – Blue Like Me](#)**

Thursday, August 25, 7:00 p.m.

America’s Black Holocaust Museum (401. W North Ave.)

A documentary that profiles Indian-American artist Siona Benjamin. Raised in the small Bene Israel Jewish community in Mumbai, India, Benjamin’s art fuses world religions with eastern myths and western pop culture to create vibrant new worlds. “Blue Like Me” travels with Siona to Mumbai, revisiting the Bene Israel Jewish community. The screening will be followed by a talk exploring issues of identity, gender, notions of inclusion and exclusion.

For more information about the exhibit and related programs, visit [jewishmuseummilwaukee.org/beyond-borders/](http://jewishmuseummilwaukee.org/beyond-borders/)

**ABOUT JEWISH MUSEUM MILWAUKEE:**

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee is dedicated to preserving and presenting the history of the Jewish people in southeastern Wisconsin and celebrating the continuum of Jewish heritage and culture. The history of American Jews is rooted in thousands of years of searching for freedom and equality. We are committed to sharing this story and the life lessons it brings with it, so that we may enhance the public's awareness and appreciation of Jewish life and culture. We are committed to building bridges between diverse groups through shared history and to exploring contemporary issues through the lens of Jewish history, culture and values.

**ABOUT SIONA BENJAMIN:**

Siona Benjamin has an MFA in painting from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, Ill., and an MFA in theater set design from the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign. She has exhibited in the United States, Europe and Asia.

She was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship in 2011 to India, and a second Fulbright fellowship in 2016-17 to Israel. As not just a Jewish artist but also as one who crosses cultural boundaries, she's received praise in *The New York Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Financial Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *Art in America*, *Art New England*, *Art and Antiques*, *ArtNews*, *Moment magazine*, *The Times of India*, *The Mumbai Mirror*, *Marg Magazine*, and other publications.

Her multicultural art has also been featured in *The Jewish Week* in New York City and New Jersey, *The Jerusalem Post*, *The Times of Israel*, and other publications.

###