

I am inspired by traditional styles of painting, like Indian/Persian miniatures, Byzantine icons and Jewish and Christian illuminated manuscripts, but I blend these ancient forms with pop cultural elements from our times to create a new vocabulary of my own. Using the rich colors of gouache I apply layers, literally with the paint, as well as metaphorically with the content.

My painting is my ritual, my celebration, my essence. My research and ideas flow simultaneously together and make up the fabric of my work. I use gouache paints and 22K gold leaf to form layers of jewel like color. My background in painting, enameling on metal and theater set design all influence my work. My characters are real as they act out contemporary situations and dilemmas, while also celebrating my womanhood, my abilities, my strengths and my ambitions. The ornateness of the culture from which I came once seemed difficult and unnecessary to apply in my work. Now I have found a way to use it, to be able to weave current issues and parts of my life in its intricacies, thus making this ornateness strong and meaningful. In this way, I attempt to create a dialogue between the ancient and the modern, forcing a confrontation of unresolved issues.

I am an artist originally from Bombay, India, of Bene Israel Jewish descent. My work reflects my background and the transition between my old and new worlds. Having grown up in a predominantly Hindu and Muslim society, having been educated in Catholic and Zoroastrian schools, having been raised Jewish and now living in America, I have always had to reflect upon the cultural boundary zones in which I have lived. In this transcultural America I feel a strong need to make art that will speak to my audience of our similarities, not our differences as I feel I can contribute to a much-needed "repair" (*Tikkun*) through my art. I would like my audience to re-evaluate their notions and concepts about identity and race, thus understanding that such misconceptions could lead to racism, hate and war.

Siona Benjamin