

Mosaic for Central Reform Congregation, St. Louis, Missouri, by Siona Benjamin

art selection and comment by [Aaron Rosen](#) in the [November 4, 2020](#) issue



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Siona Benjamin's images shimmer with jewel-toned depictions of goddesses, angels, historical figures, and anonymous immigrants. The worlds these figures inhabit hum with diverse, eclectic references, harvested from a life lived across multiple religious and cultural traditions. Raised Jewish in Mumbai and now based on the East Coast of the United States, Benjamin seamlessly incorporates Hindu, Islamic, and Christian iconography, unencumbered by any fear that this might render her work less Jewish.

This exuberant hybridity comes to the fore in the tiled floor she designed for Central Reform Congregation in St. Louis. Inspired by the ancient zodiac mosaics of the Beth Alpha and Sepphoris synagogues in Israel, Benjamin's composition operates like a decoding ring, with concentric circles formed by Jewish holidays and seasons, Greek astrological signs, and iconic locations including the Great Pyramid, the Dome of the Rock, and the Taj Mahal. The Jewish liturgical year progresses not in isolation but along a series of intersecting routes, drawing it into dialogue with other traditions. Moments of anguish come to the surface in this journey, but there is also recurring playfulness. Sometimes Hebrew text is just that, while at other times it turns out to be English in disguise, or an emulation of Devanagari. And biblical heroines find their doubles in Muslim women clad in hijab or Indian brides arrayed in henna. Jewish life, as the central figure reminds us, is a dance through time and space, with the steps learned along the way, sometimes from unlikely teachers.