



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF
AMERICAN JEWISH
HISTORY
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**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN JEWISH HISTORY
PRESENTS FIRST-EVER PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION,
WORLD-RENOWNED SARA BERMAN'S CLOSET**

A temporary outdoor monument to freedom and independence
How fashion, feminism, art, immigration and history come together in a burst of joy

Outdoor installation complemented by an exhibition by the Kalmans with original works
On view April 5-September 1, 2019

PHILADELPHIA—The **National Museum of American Jewish History** (NMAJH) is pleased to announce its next special exhibition ***Sara Berman's Closet: a small and monumental story*** by Maira Kalman and Alex Kalman. An installation of one immigrant woman's belongings as re-created by Sara's daughter and grandson – the acclaimed artist and writer Maira Kalman and designer and curator Alex Kalman – the project will feature the Museum's **first-ever public art installation** on its Kimmel Plaza, on the corner of 5th and Market Streets. An accompanying art exhibition will continue in the Museum's special exhibition gallery, featuring new paintings by Maira Kalman and new sculptures by Alex Kalman and will include interventions throughout the core exhibition, as well as in-person appearances by the Kalmans throughout the run. *Sara Berman's Closet* will be on view **April 5 through September 1, 2019**.

Sara Berman's Closet is adapted from Sara Berman's modest closet in the studio apartment in New York City's West Village where she lived. Filled with her fastidiously organized personal effects, Sara's closet tells a small and monumental story: "**How a life is formed. How meaning is found. How mistakes are made. And how we have the courage to go on,**" as the Kalmans write in the recently published book of the same name, published 2018 Harper Design, and a 2019 National Jewish Book Award finalist. **Maira Kalman**, the acclaimed author, and **Alex Kalman**, the designer, curator, writer, and founder of Mmuseumm, combine their talents in this captivating family memoir, a creative blend of narrative and

striking visuals that is a paean to an exceptional woman and a celebration of individuality, personal expression, and the art of living.

The Kalmans first exhibited *Sara Berman's Closet* in Alex's small museum in a repurposed elevator shaft in Lower Manhattan, **Mmuseumm**, named **"one of the top 12 international hidden art gems"** by *T Magazine* and **"curatorial genius"** by *The Atlantic*, and later at NYC's **Metropolitan Museum of Art** in the American Wing's period rooms, where it sat in dialogue with a Gilded Age boudoir once belonging to Arabella Worsham, the mistress of a railroad magnate. Attracting 200,000 visitors in its nine month run, *The New Yorker* named Sara Berman as one of the women who shaped the art world in 2017. Judith Thurman described Sara as "the apostle of simplicity." She has become an unexpected hero. Most recently, the exhibition was on view at the **Skirball Cultural Center** in Los Angeles.

The closet has become a phenomenon, making its way around the country and now NMAJH is pleased to present it in Philadelphia. The closet represents Sara's liberation, and is thus a monument to freedom and independence.

Positioned on Independence Mall, adjacent to sites commemorating the stories of our Nation's founding, the installation of Sara's closet puts a woman's humble 20th-century immigration story radically on par with that of the Founding Fathers. Each of the stories told on the Mall is rooted in freedom, independence, and the choices we make; *Sara Berman's Closet* is a powerful and intimate exploration of these ideas as well as identity, immigration, joy, and courage. They speak to the "universal pursuit of order, meaning, and beauty—from the monumental to the mundane" say the Kalmans.

The setting outside of NMAJH will juxtapose the intimacy of Sara's distinctly female and humble closet with its important historic surroundings, highlighting how immigrants of widely varied backgrounds and circumstances came to America to reinvent themselves, and complementing **the broader stories in the Museum about the migration of Jews to the United States** in search of safety, opportunity, and identity, **and how these immigrants and their descendants shaped, and were shaped by, the American experience.** It opens visitors up to conversations about whom and how we choose to commemorate and monumentalize, the meaning of material objects in our lives, identity and reinvention, and family history. The installation will join an existing sculpture on the plaza by Moses Jacob Ezekiel, *Religious Liberty*. While the sculpture, dedicated "to the people on the United States" in 1876 is a monument to religious freedom and the struggle against intolerance, the sculptor was a Confederate soldier. Ezekiel is also the sculptor of the controversial Confederate Memorial in Arlington Cemetery.

Born in Belarus, Sara Berman (1920-2004) left Europe for Palestine, where both her daughters were born, and witnessed the creation of the State of Israel. At age 60, Sara decided she had to leave. One night she left with just one suitcase. She moved into a studio apartment in Greenwich Village NYC where she was happy in a room of her own.

In a burst of personal expression, Sara decided to wear only white. She starched, ironed, folded, and stacked her minimal belongings with precision and loving care. Sara's closet represents the universal pursuit of creating beauty and order and finding meaning in the everyday. When Sara died, her family saved the contents of her humble closet, knowing that one day, it would become an exhibition.

Josh Perelman, Ph.D, chief curator and director of exhibitions and interpretation at NMAJH, feels that the closet is a strong vehicle for storytelling. "We are inspired by Alex and Maira's expression of history

from an artist's perspective, as well as the relevance of Sara's story to the Museum," Perelman says. "The objects that we choose to place in our homes, those that follow us through our daily lives, carry our stories with them. Giving voice to these traces of memory and identity is at the core of what we do at the Museum. And it's so important to our capacity to connect with history."

Maira Kalman, known for her exuberant *The New Yorker* covers, children's books, and books for adults, and Alex Kalman, a visionary designer and curator, tell keenly observed stories through everyday objects, and amplify their meanings through different settings.

Sara Berman's Closet is part of NMAJH's **OPEN for Interpretation** program, which invites artists to provide their own perspective on the Museum's themes through disciplines including visual art, music, dance, writing, and performance. The program's goal is to broaden the Museum's audiences and inspire the public to engage with history in innovative and creative ways.

Companion public programming will feature Maira and Alex Kalman, and will include closet-themed storytelling, conversations on collecting, films (Sara loved Fred Astaire and Danny Kaye), and others. The Kalmans will be present on July 4 to celebrate Independence Day with the closet – handing out Sara Berman lemon ice pops and will occasionally be on site to clean the outdoor monument. This spring will also bring the next installment of the Museum's *Dreamers and Doers* speaker series featuring Warby Parker and Wharton Alum, Neil Blumenthal – friend and fan of the Kalmans – on May 15.

Sara Berman's Closet, an exhibition by Maira and Alex Kalman, will be on display at the National Museum of American Jewish History on Independence Mall with generous support provided by **Amanda and Glenn Fuhrman**. Major support provided by **Hilarie and Mitchell Morgan, Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer and Joseph Neubauer**, and **Joy Wolf**. Additional support provided by the **Kraus Family Foundation; The Streisand Foundation; Jane and Leonard Korman; Sharon Pinkenson and Joseph Weiss**; and **Laurie Wagman in Memory of Irvin Borowsky**. (list in formation)

For high-res images and credit lines, please click [here](#).

YOU'RE INVITED: Press Preview on Wednesday, April 3, 10am-12pm. Save-the-date attached; formal invitation to follow. Kalmans will be present.

About the Artists

Maira Kalman was born in Tel Aviv and moved to New York with her family at the age of four. She was raised in bucolic Riverdale, in the Bronx, and now lives in Manhattan. She is a world-renowned artist, writer, illustrator, and designer. She has published more than twenty-eight books and creates editorial work for many magazines; she has illustrated many covers for *The New Yorker*. She has exhibited her work at institutions such as the Cooper Hewitt Museum (NYC), ICA (Philadelphia), The Jewish Museum (NYC), Madison Children's Museum (Madison, WI), Monticello (Charlottesville, VA), and Skirball Cultural Center (Los Angeles). She is represented by the Julie Saul Gallery and owns a pair of Toscanini's pants.

Alex Kalman, designer, artist, and curator, is the owner of the inter-interdisciplinary What Studio? and the co-founder and director of Mmuseumm in lower Manhattan, which has been called "One of the top 12 international hidden art gems" by *The New Yorker* and "curatorial genius" by *The Atlantic*. He is the creator of Object Journalism and Op-Object for the *New York Times*. His work has been shown in museums and publications around the world including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the V&A (Victoria & Albert Museum), the *New York Times*, and *The New Yorker*. Alex

Kalman also founded the MyBlock Education Program, a low-cost education model for high school students to use video as a tool of self-expression and civic engagement.

About the National Museum of American Jewish History

The National Museum of American Jewish History, located on historic Independence Mall in Philadelphia, brings to life the more than 360-year history of Jews in America. Tracing the stories of how Jewish immigrants became Jewish Americans, the Museum invites visitors of all backgrounds to share their own stories and reflect on how their histories and identities shape and are shaped by the American experience. An open door for all, NMAJH honors the past and contributes to a better future by sharing the power of imagination and ideas, culture and community, leadership and service, in ways that turn inspiration into action.

The National Museum of American Jewish History is located at 101 South Independence Mall East at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets in Philadelphia. Museum hours are Wednesday to Friday, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm, and Saturday and Sunday 10:00 am - 5:30 pm. Museum admission is \$15.00 for adults, \$13.00 for senior citizens and youth, free for children 12 and under, Museum Members, and active military with ID; reduced prices available if purchased online. The Museum offers free admission in February. Connect with the Museum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Pinterest](#). For more information, visit NMAJH.org or call 215.923.3811.

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