



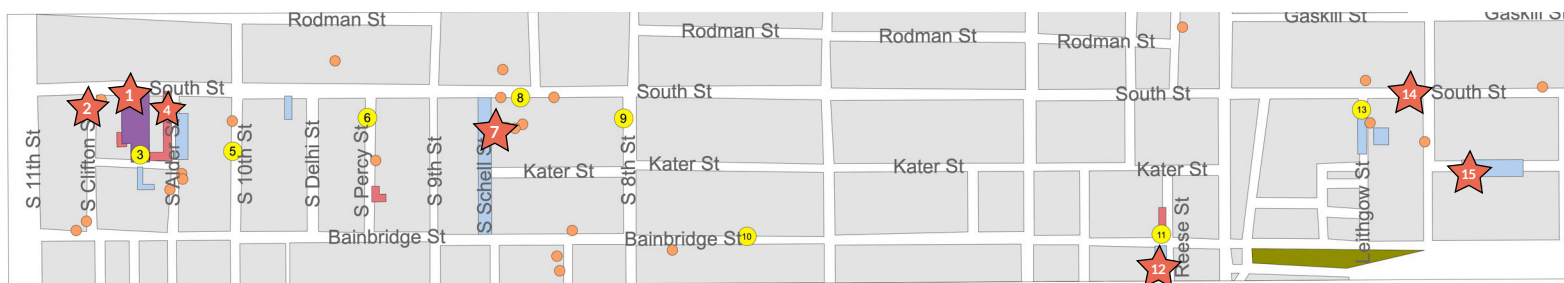
Philadelphia's **MAGIC GARDENS**

Self-Guided **WALKING TOUR**

- ★ 1. Philadelphia's Magic Gardens, 1986-2018
(1020 South Street)
- 2. Bilal, 2013 (604 S. Clifton Street)
- 3. Art is the Center of the Real World, 1995
(1003 Kater Street)
- ★ 4. Rose and the Firefighters
(600 block of S. Alder Street)
- 5. 610 S. 10th Street
- 6. Jonah and the Whale (610 S. Percy Street)
- ★ 7. Schell Street Murals, 1996-2015
(601-698 S. Schell Street)
- 8. The Zagars' House (826 South Street)

- 9. Dreamer (Yellow Snake) (604 S. 8th Street)
- 10. Yoel/Dylan (721 Bainbridge Street)
- 11. Carlos Carpets (515 Bainbridge Street)
- ★ 12. Homage to Mike Mattio: Master Plumber
(700 block of S. Reese Street)
- 13. PhilaDeli Memorial Wall
(600 block of S. Leithgow Street)
- ★ 14. Eye's Gallery (402 South Street)
- ★ 15. Ben Dorfman Building (324 Kater Street)

The entire route is one mile. According to GPS, that's 21 minutes of walking, but we think it will take 1.5 hours, depending on how long you look and linger along the way.



Philadelphia's Magic Gardens is a nonprofit museum. It began as an art environment that local artist Isaiah Zagar (born 1939) worked on over a 30 year period with help from the community. It's constructed from tiles and sculptures made by other artists, as well as found objects and Zagar's own handmade tiles. The space is made up of two mosaicked indoor galleries, which feature a temporary exhibition, and the bi-level outdoor sculpture garden. Isaiah began making mosaics in Philadelphia in 1968 as a way of coping with a mental breakdown. Since then he has created more than 200 public murals, most of which are in South Philadelphia. This tour includes 15 Zagar murals but you will see many more on your one-mile walk. For those short on time, we've indicated murals that you should not miss with a star. ★

BEGIN AT 1020 SOUTH STREET



1

Philadelphia's Magic Gardens | 1986-2018

Isaiah and his wife Julia purchased 1020-22 South Street in 1995. The building was in disrepair, but Isaiah renovated it to house two apartments on the top floors. He used the ground floor for storage for the Eye's Gallery, the shop owned by the Zagars at 4th and South Streets. The back building, where PMG's back gallery and office are located, was once Isaiah's studio. He purchased it in 1986 and added mosaics inside and out.

The property where the sculpture garden is located was originally owned by a group of Boston-based businessmen. They bought the lots in the '80s as an investment and left them abandoned. As you might expect, the land was filled with weeds, trash, and rodents. Isaiah got permission from the owners' agent to clean up and beautify the space. There was a chain link fence with an open gate that provided easy access to the lots. Isaiah locked the gate from the inside and started working on his project. By then Isaiah had already created mosaics on the east and west walls of the surrounding buildings. If you look at the front wall

you can still see the original gate entrance and pieces of the chain-link fence peeking through the mosaic.

In the early 2000s, the owners of the lots decided to sell and they discovered Isaiah's "little project." They threatened to have the entire space bulldozed at Isaiah's expense. In their opinion, Isaiah's work was not art. One of them was quoted as saying, "I know what art is, and art is in the Louvre." It was up to the community to save the gardens.

The non-profit organization Philadelphia's Magic Gardens was formed in 2004 by volunteers working with Isaiah to purchase the property. The majority of work on the sculpture garden, including everything below street level, was created between 2004 and 2008. In 2008 PMG opened formally as a museum with its first paid staff member.

WEST ON SOUTH STREET, LEFT TO 604 S. CLIFTON STREET



2

Bilal | 2013

This mural is named Bilal, after a Pakistani man who apprenticed with Isaiah. His face is the central portrait in the mural. Bilal struggled for years to get a visa that would allow him to come to the US to work with Isaiah. He lived in the Zagar's basement for about a month and helped Isaiah with this and many other projects.

Work on this mural was completed on October 28, 2012, the day before Hurricane Sandy made landfall. Remarkably, very little on the mural was damaged by the historic storm. It provides a great illustration of what has come to be known as the "Zagar Method."

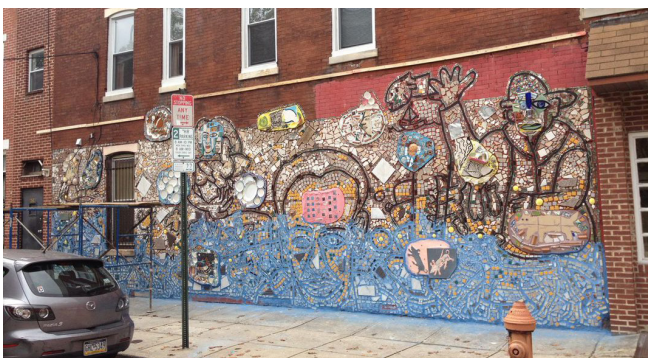


The Zagar Method

Isaiah begins a mural in his studio, making what he calls blobs. Blobs are puddles or pancakes of concrete that can hold tiles, broken dishes, and sculptural objects. The blobs are affixed to the wall with bolts. Next, Isaiah paints simple, large line drawings of the figures that will appear in the mural. Isaiah paints these figures directly on the wall without measuring or sketching beforehand. He says the way he paints is improvisational, like jazz.



Isaiah outlines the drawings in small rectangles of mirror and fills the rest of the wall with tiles using an adhesive called Mastic. Unlike traditional mosaicists, who often plot out the size, shape, color, and location of every tile in a design, Isaiah chooses random pieces of tile from a bucket without looking. He says whichever tile you pick is the perfect tile and wherever you place it is the perfect place.



Isaiah mixes oil-based house paint pigment into his grout to give it rich colors. He then smears the grout across wall with a sponge, pushing grout into the spaces between the tiles. He must polish the tile faces to make sure they are free of grout and everything is left smooth. Finally, Isaiah repaints his line drawings, using the mirror outline as a guide.

LEFT ON KATER STREET (BACK OF PMG)



3 *Art is the Center of the Real World | 1995*

Take a look above the garage doors. Can you read the phrase written in red letters? Art is the Center of the Real World (sometimes abbreviated AITCOTRW) is a statement used throughout Isaiah's work. It is like his slogan or motto. What do you think it means? Art is an extremely important part of Isaiah's life and everything else revolves around that for him.

Dyslexia

What do you notice about how his motto is written? Some of the words are backwards and upside down, and the phrase reads right to left. Isaiah is dyslexic. In a way he is sharing how he sees text on a page. Isaiah also likes to play with our attention and perception, so he will sometimes include backwards words intentionally.

Cultural Influences

Above the windows are Chinese characters that also say "Art is the center of the real world." Isaiah went to China for a residency in the 1980s. His lifelong interest in other cultures has inspired Isaiah to include many languages and references to other cultures throughout his work, most often in relationship to Latin America and India.

4-Armed Man

Can you find Isaiah's 4-armed self-portrait in the upper left-hand corner of this mosaic? Isaiah was very affected by an exhibition of Hindu sculptures at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1984. In the Hindu Trimurti (triad) Shiva is the god of Destruction and Transformation, and is often depicted with multiple arms. Isaiah felt an affinity for Shiva because Isaiah takes destroyed objects and transforms them into something new through his art.

The four-armed man also represents the way Isaiah works. He holds his bucket of tools or tiles in one hand and works as quickly as possible with the other hand. He says he moves so fast that it looks like he has multiple arms. Isaiah usually portrays himself having multiple arms on the left side. Even though he is right-handed, Isaiah has trained himself to work equally well with both hands.

LEFT ON ALDER STREET

★ 4 *Rose and the Firefighters* | 1995-2004

The building on your left used to be home to Engine Company 11, the only firehouse in the city with African American firefighters before 1952 when the department desegregated. Engine Company 11 is now located at 6th and South Streets, where a Mural Arts project commemorates the men who once worked here.

This building is now a community center owned by Waters Memorial African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church around the corner. They asked Isaiah to create these murals, and he did the work for free because he was so excited to have such a large public wall. The bottom part of the wall was completed in 1995, and the upper part of the wall was completed when Isaiah could get scaffolding, from 2000-2004.

Rose And The Everyman

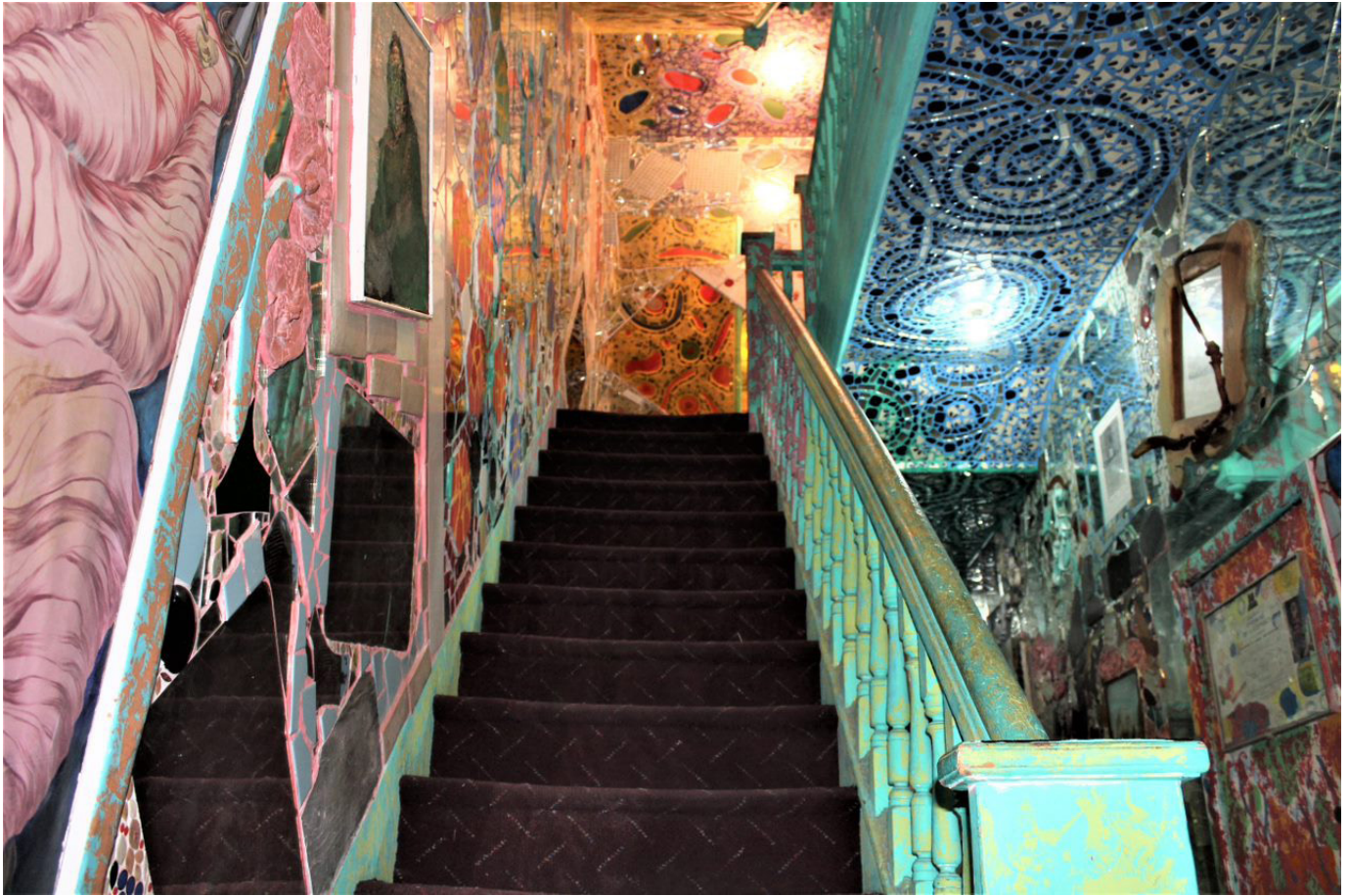
As you approach South Street, you will see a depiction of a Black woman named Rose. She lived in this neighborhood and would walk along this street every day, stopping to chat with Isaiah while he worked. Isaiah often incorporates influences from his immediate environment and from the local community. What kinds of people are usually depicted in public works of art? Isaiah usually commemorates the “everyman” rather than the typical subjects of public art, like celebrities or government officials.



Duchamp

To the right of Rose between the first and second floor windows, you will see a quote from Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). Duchamp was a French Surrealist and Dadaist artist whose presentation of found objects, or readymades, revolutionized art in the early 1900s. One of Duchamp's most significant readymades was *Fountain* (1917), a urinal that he signed “R. Mutt.” *Fountain* was hidden from public view at the art show where it debuted. More than 100 years later, *Fountain* is seen as one of the most influential artwork of the 20th century. Isaiah is very influenced by Duchamp's use of readymades and you will see the repurposing of objects throughout his work. What objects have you already seen in Isaiah's work that have been repurposed as art materials?

RIGHT ON SOUTH STREET, RIGHT ON S. 10TH STREET

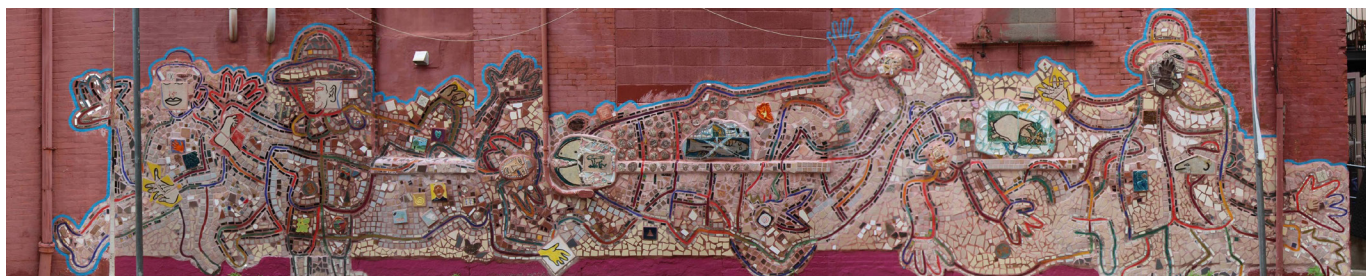


5 610 S. 10th Street | 1976-2004

This is one of 10 run-down properties the Zagars purchased in South Philly. Isaiah restored them, mosaicked them, and rented them out. During those times when Isaiah wasn't making a lot of money from his art, these rental properties allowed him to continue working as an artist. There are three apartments here. Isaiah's studio was also here from 1975, when he bought the property, until 1987.

You might think the Zagars are rich because they were able to buy so many properties but Isaiah says South Street was "as down and out" as they were when they arrived. For years, South Street had been slated for demolition to make way for the Crosstown Expressway. As a result, landlords neglected their properties, storefronts were abandoned, and many families moved away. South Street suffered a great decline.

The Zagars were able to purchase 610 S. 10th Street for just a few thousand dollars



6 *Jonah & the Whale* | 2013

Isaiah completed most of this mural with his artistic collaborator, Majid Iraei, and one other helper who was on her way to Harvard on scholarship.

Types Of Tiles

Majid is from Iran and worked with Isaiah from 2009 to 2014. Majid created face-tiles for this mural by turning the Farsi words for “nose”, “mouth”, and “eyes” into facial features. Isaiah often customizes commercial tiles to create unique pieces like these. When people renovate their bathrooms or kitchens, they frequently

donate leftover tiles to PMG for Isaiah’s mosaics. He paints on the tiles with glaze and then fires them in his kiln, as Majid did for this mosaic.

Fish In Isaiah’s Work

This mural has many aquatic elements. Isaiah says he includes fish in a lot of his work because they calmed him as a child. Isaiah has dealt with mental illness. He experiences very high moments and also very low moments. As a 12-year old boy, when Isaiah felt nervous and miserable about school, he relaxed by watching his tropical fish. Isaiah also attributes his interest in fish to his astrological sign, Pisces.

LEFT ON BAINBRIDGE STREET, LEFT ON S. SCHELL STREET



★ 7 *Schell Street Walls* | 1996-2015

Starting in 1997 Isaiah began creating community murals while teaching workshops. Isaiah taught the Zagar Method to paying participants. Over the course of one weekend a workshop would create a new mural with Isaiah, from start to finish. Many murals from those early workshops are visible on your left as you walk toward South Street. Isaiah taught these workshops through 2017.

Wabi Sabi And Preservation

As you can see, the faces of some of the tiles here have cracked off. Many of these tiles were not made for extremes of outdoor weather. PMG’s preservation team works very closely with Isaiah to repair and maintain his work. Replacing cracked tiles is an artistic choice. Isaiah often feels the weathering of murals makes them more beautiful. There is a Japanese aesthetic concept called wabi sabi, which means finding beauty in imperfection. Isaiah definitely subscribes to this aesthetic. In other cases, Isaiah has made entirely new murals to replace those that have come down.

Jack Orocofsky, 2001

Lou Orocofsky is a lawyer that helped PMG save the South Street lots from the real estate investors who originally owned them. Lou commissioned this mural from Isaiah to honor his father Jack Orocofsky, who was a builder. You’ll find his name at the top of the mural.

On September 11, 2001, while Isaiah was working on the 4,000 Poets mosaic just to the left of the parking lot entrance, a woman asked if he had heard about the World Trade Center attack. Isaiah went back to his studio and turned on the radio. Shortly after, he began making commemorative tiles for this mural. The imagery on the lower half of the mural is Isaiah's direct response to the events of 9/11. 5,000 is a reference to

the original estimated death toll - 2,977 people were later confirmed to have died.

This mural is an example of how Isaiah uses his art to express pain and grief. He has experienced a number of mental breakdowns in his life and recovered from them by creating art. His first mosaics were created as a form of therapy after a suicide attempt during his first breakdown in 1968.

RIGHT TO 826 SOUTH STREET



8 Zagars' Home | 1984

This is the current residence of the Zagars. They moved here after their second son, Jeremiah, was born. The left stoop was mosaicked by Isaiah in Fall 2012. The stoop is a piece of marble that Isaiah said was constantly being graffitied. He got tired of cleaning it and decided to "mark his territory" with a mosaic of one of his favorite subjects, a dog. It has rarely been tagged since.

The front window is a good example of a faux "stained glass" mosaic technique Isaiah learned from Ricky Boscarino, creator of the Luna Parc art environment in New Jersey. He glues colored glass to the window and grouts the pieces in place. Intentionally removing sections of grout allows light to pass through. There are quite a few of these faux stained glass windows in the sculpture garden at PMG.

Look for Isaiah's motto and a six-armed version of his self-portrait.

RIGHT TO 604 S. 8TH STREET

9 *Dreamer (Yellow Snake)* | 2002

The text in Isaiah's works often includes thought fragments and seemingly random words. Here, Isaiah memorializes a person who used to hang out around South Street: "a black man walking a corn-yellow snake coiling over his shoulder on South Street." Look for the yellow tiles that coil through the mosaic.

There are many tiles in this mosaic made by Jorge Wilmot (1928-2012). Wilmot is a Mexican ceramicist who founded the National Ceramic Museum of Mexico. He is credited with bringing high-fire techniques perfected in China to the tile-making traditions of Mexico. Traditional Mexican tiles made with low-fire techniques cannot stand up to extreme temperatures - water seeps in, turns to ice and cracks the tiles. Wilmot's tiles are beautiful and made to last.

Isaiah became very interested in Jorge's work and went to visit his studio. After receiving a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in the '90s, Isaiah decided to buy several thousand dollars worth of Jorge's tiles. In the meantime, Jorge had decided to become a bread baker. Having gained an appreciation for Isaiah's work, Jorge decided to give Isaiah all the tiles remaining in his factory. Jorge's generosity has allowed Isaiah to make more work, and Isaiah has brought Jorge's work to new audiences.



LEFT TO 721 BAINBRIDGE STREET

10 *Yoel/Dylan* | 2001

Dylan was a childhood friend of Isaiah's youngest son Jeremiah. Dylan was 15 when he was diagnosed with leukemia. This was around the same time that Isaiah's two-year old grandson Yoel also began treatment for leukemia. Both boys would survive but Isaiah knew Dylan would lose his hair while undergoing

chemotherapy. Isaiah thought it might be hard to face kids at school with a bald head. He created this neighborhood monument thinking that, on his way to school, Dylan would see this beautiful glittering bald boy. Isaiah wept as he worked, knowing that leukemia had once been a death sentence for children.



CONTINUE TO 515 BAINBRIDGE STREET

11 *Carlos Carpets* | 2000

Carlos Carpets was owned by the Aschers, a Jewish family from Ecuador who were already part of the South Street community when the Zagars arrived. Isaiah created two mosaics inside Carlos Aschers' home, one during the late '70s and another in the mid-'90s. While Isaiah was working on a very large mosaic across the street from Carlos Carpets, he was approached by Carlos' son Daniel about

a potential mosaic for the family business. Isaiah was initially reluctant but when he learned that Carlos would be away on a trip to Israel, he got to work immediately. By the time Carlos returned, Isaiah had finished the entire front façade. It must've been quite a shock but one that Carlos enjoyed. The red Hebrew letters mosaicked on the top left of the building spell out Dan and Ascher. Ultimately, Carlos asked Isaiah to continue the mural around the building on the adjacent wall.

CAREFULLY CROSS OVER TO 510 BAINBRIDGE STREET AND TURN RIGHT ON REESE STREET



★ 12 *Homage to Mike Mattio: Master Plumber* | 2000

Mike Mattio

In this wall Isaiah memorializes “master plumber” Mike Mattio. Mike’s father was a plumber and Mike’s son is currently Isaiah’s plumber. Isaiah felt such a family legacy should be honored. He used the only photograph of Mike in existence, one that Isaiah had actually taken, to create the portrait found on the bottom right hand corner of the building. Above Mike you will find Isaiah’s memory of giving his kids a bath. The body of Isaiah’s son Jeremiah climbs the wall to the left, seeming to stretch beyond the roof top, while Jeremiah’s head appears one floor below, about to fall into his father’s outstretched hand.

Further to the left, you will find portraits of the Bald

Mermaids, a troupe of female dancers who shaved their heads. They were among the artists and activists, like Isaiah and Julia, who became associated with the South Street Renaissance.

Philly’s Jazz History

Moving to the left across the bottom half of the building, you will find names like Ella Fitzgerald and Stan Getz. These are references to South Street’s rich jazz history. In the early 20th Century, South Street was not only a bustling commercial district with high fashion and great food, it was also home to legendary jazz clubs. The renowned blues vocalist Bessie Smith, bebop pioneer Dizzy Gillespie, and swing king Louis Jordan were among the many Black people who moved to Philadelphia from the American South during the Great Migration. They honed their skills on South Street before heading on to international fame. Later,

artists like Billie Holiday and John Coltrane were regular performers at clubs like the Standard (1100 block of South Street) and the Dunbar (Broad & South Streets).

Isaiah was once commissioned to make a mural celebrating Philadelphia's jazz history but the commission fell through. Isaiah decided to tell the story here using the tiles he had made.

Art History

In addition to the musical masters recorded in this wall, there are references to visual artists like Paul Gauguin, Paul Cezanne, Edvard Munch, Johannes Vermeer, Henry Moore, and Wassily Kandinsky. The great tile maker Henry Chapman Mercer is also included, along with two art-environment creators who had a great influence on Isaiah: Simon Rodia and Clarence Schmidt.

RIGHT ON BAINBRIDGE STREET, LEFT TO 600 BLOCK OF S. LEITHGOW STREET



13 *PhilaDeli Memorial Wall* | 1999

On your left, as you approach South Street, you will see a memorial to Isaiah's parents, Asher and Gertie. Their faces overlap, moving inside and outside each other. As you pass, notice how your own face comes in and out of view through reflections in the mirrors. To the right of this mosaic is a heartfelt memorial for Eric S. Levy Cooper, a young boy from the community who drowned in the '90s.

The next mosaic is a commemoration of Thomas White, better known as "Cap." Before the Great Recession this store was PhilaDeli. "Cap" could always be found sitting at an outdoor table on this sidewalk. If anyone in the community had an odd job or needed an extra hand, they came to "Cap." On a tour someone who knew "Cap" said it's as if he is still sitting there.

The last plaque on the left celebrates the South Street Renaissance. "South Streeters Seekers Streakers Screammers" it reads, capturing the attitude of the free-spirited hippies who made this neighborhood home during the late '60s and early '70s. Many of them, like Isaiah and Julia, joined forces with longtime residents like Black housing activist Alice Lipscomb to stop the Crosstown Expressway once and for all. After that, South Street experienced a creative revival in which Isaiah's mosaics and the Eye's Gallery played a significant role.



RIGHT ON SOUTH STREET

★ 14 *Eye's Gallery* | 1968 (402 South Street)

In 1968, Isaiah and Julia came back to Philadelphia from Peru, where they had been serving in the Peace Corps. They moved into 402 South Street and opened the Eye's Gallery to exhibit and sell folk art which they had collected during their travels. This is where Isaiah

did his first mosaics. It was also where the Zagars had their first son Ezekiel. Julia likes to say that Isaiah started mosaicking as a form of nesting. The Zagars still travel many times a year to visit friends and folk artists, and to bring home works to sell. Finding and exhibiting work has always been Julia's principal passion. She continues to run Eye's Gallery today.

RIGHT ON S. 4TH STREET, LEFT TO 324 KATER STREET

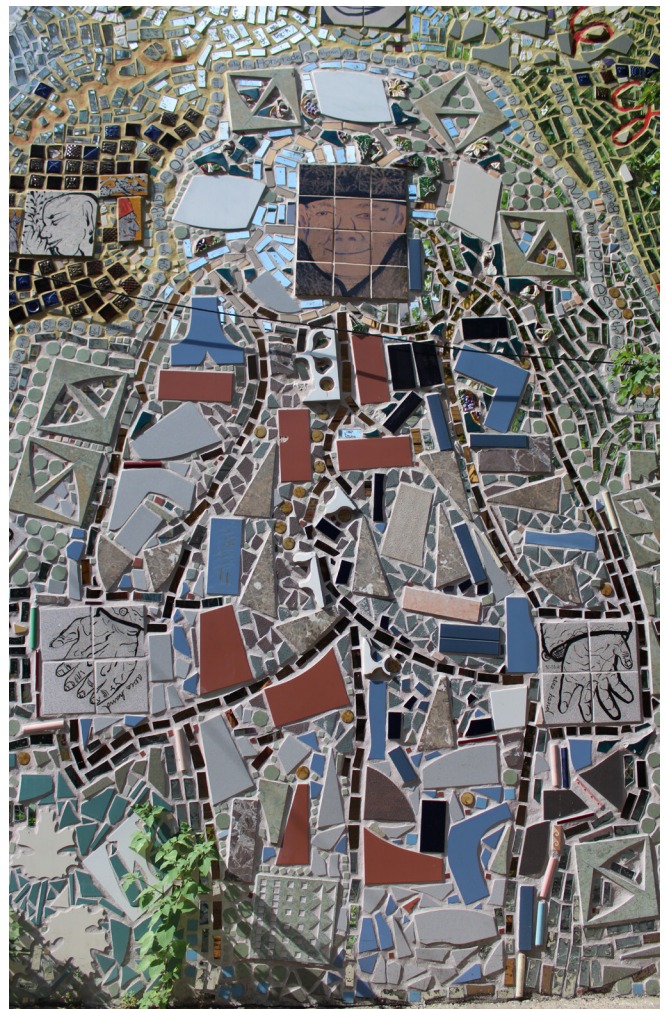


15 Ben Dorfman Building | 2001

This building was once owned by Benny Dorfman, a South Street character who used to rent out tools and report on all the neighborhood gossip from a lawn chair he set up on the sidewalk. The Zagars purchased the building from Benny's sister when he died. It is now owned by the Zagars' son Ezekiel who lives in it. It is mosaicked inside and out. In keeping with family tradition, Ezekiel encourages other artists to fill the empty lot next door with artwork. Isaiah immortalized Benny with a portrait by the front door. The stoop is covered with the names of people involved in the South Street Renaissance and a reference to Carlos Carpets.

Across the street Isaiah made a mural on the back of the Theatre of Living Arts, a venue that has gone

through many manifestations since it opened as a nickelodeon in the 1900s. Troupe members in the early '60s included Danny DeVito and Morgan Freeman. In this mosaic, Isaiah honors Abie Kravitz, a fruit merchant whose stall stood on S. 4th Street where the post office is currently located. Abie was known for fresh horseradish and informal curb-side babysitting. Isaiah inherited Abie's beloved horseradish grinder. He often includes drawings of the horseradish grinder in his artworks. Swirling around Isaiah's portrait of Abie are words taken from a 1971 Philadelphia Bulletin: "When Abie's stand burned the South Street Renaissance chipped in and bought wood to build a new one." This is Philadelphia history as seen through the mosaics of Isaiah Zagar.



We hope you enjoyed your self-guided tour. Come back and see us soon!

For the most complete list of public murals by Isaiah Zagar, in Philadelphia and beyond, check out the interactive mosaic mural map on our website (<https://www.phillymagicgardens.org/about-us/mosaic-mural-map/>).