

The Mosaic Floor is designed by Mark Podwal for the Museum at Eldridge Street. It was fabricated and installed by artisans from Progetto Arte Poli, a storied and innovative studio workshop based in Verona, Italy, in 2024.

The Mosaic Floor is a gift from the Estate of Roger Jacques Herz.

MARK PODWAL



Mark Podwal is regarded as one of the foremost living American artists of the Jewish experience. Initially known for his drawings for *The New York Times* Op-Ed page, most of Podwal's books – his own as well as those he illustrated for others including such luminaries as Elie Wiesel and Harold Bloom – focus on Jewish history, tradition, and legend. His art has been collected by nearly 80 museums, cultural institutions, and synagogues around the world, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Israel Museum, and Jewish museums in Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Stockholm, and New York, among many others. Author Cynthia Ozick has given Podwal the Hebrew name *Baal Kav Emet*, or "Master of the True Line." In 1996 the French Ministry of Culture named Podwal an Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters; in 2011 he received the Foundation for Jewish Culture Achievement Award; and in 2019 the Czech Foreign Ministry awarded Podwal the *Gratias Agit* Prize.

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THE JEWISH ZODIAC



MOSAIC FLOOR BY MARK PODWAL

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In all of early Jewish art, no single motif has aroused more surprise and scholarly interest than the zodiac mosaic floors of ancient synagogues. Here, each of the zodiac signs includes the Hebrew letter that begins the name of the sign's Hebrew month.



NISAN (Aries) - *The Pesikta Rabbati*, a medieval rabbinic text, says the Temple could not be destroyed in the month of Nisan since its sign, a ram, is a reminder of the ram sacrificed in Isaac's stead.



IYAR (Taurus) - The bull alludes to the great sin that happened this month, the sin of the Golden Calf.



SIVAN (Gemini) - The twins symbolize the twin Tablets of the Ten Commandments, which were given this month.



TAMMUZ (Cancer) - The crab pinches and hurts, and this month is traditionally a time of sadness for the Jewish people. For example, during this month, Moses saw Jews worship the Golden Calf. Enraged by this, Moses shattered the set of tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments.



AV (Leo) - The Temple was called *Ariel*, "the lion of God," and was destroyed during this month by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, who is himself referred to as a lion in the Book of Jeremiah.



ELUL (Virgo) - "Elul" has been interpreted as an acrostic for the verse from "Song of Songs": "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." Thus, Elul's zodiac sign is a maiden often portrayed as holding flowers or wheat.



TISHREI (Libra) - In Tishrei during the High Holidays one's deeds are weighed and one's fate in the New Year is determined, hence the pair of scales.



MARHESHVAN (Scorpio) - "Scorpion" is used to refer to Greece in the Jewish text of the Talmud. Additionally, *mar* means "bitterness" in Hebrew: this month is seen as bitter as it lacks any holidays in contrast to the holiday-rich month of Tishrei.



KISLEV (Sagittarius) - The bow, or *keshet* in Hebrew, is an appropriate symbol for the Maccabees and their fight against Hellenistic forces, which Jews celebrate during the Hanukkah festival beginning on the 25th day of Kislev. A dreidel, a four-sided spinning top played during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, is the arrowhead.



TEVET (Capricorn) - Capricorn is depicted as a mythological creature with the body of a goat and tail of a fish, a symbol found in both the Babylonian zodiac and Jewish mythology. Here, the sea goat holds a menorah, a nod to the festival of Hanukkah, which extends itself to the first two days of Tevet and infuses the month with light.



SHEVAT (Aquarius) - As the purpose of a bucket is to be a vessel to carry water, so too the purpose of the Jewish People is to be the 'Water Carrier,' the vessel of the living waters of the Torah.



ADAR (Pisces) - Two fish swimming in opposite directions evoke fish as a symbol of good luck in the Jewish tradition. Because fish do not have eyelids, their eyes are always open and protect against the evil eye. The zodiac sign includes hamantashen, a Jewish triangular pastry associated with this month's Jewish holiday of Purim.