

Philadelphia....A True Art City

By Kathy McShane

This summer, we spent eight days in Philadelphia. We visited the major history venues (Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell), but we were most taken with the art throughout the city. If you are an art lover, Philadelphia is the city for you.

Philadelphia has excellent art museums. Museum Mile is home to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Rodin Museum, and the Barnes Foundation.

The **Philadelphia Museum of Art** is, of course, known for its Rocky statue, beside which tourists line up to have their photographs taken. The Rocky statue has been a source of some controversy, as some detractors believe it is only a movie prop, not "art." The bronze statue of boxer Rocky Balboa was commissioned by Sylvester Stallone in 1982 and stood atop the 72 steps of the museum during the filming of Rocky III. It has been moved several times and is now at the bottom of the museum's steps. As one travel writer said, "Few foreign visitors know or care about Betsy Ross, Carpenters' Hall, or Oney Judge, but their eyes light up in recognition when they see the Museum's steps and the statue of Rocky near the base." The works of the sculptor A. Thomas Schomberg can also be found at numerous sports venues around the country, including Yankee Stadium, the Astrodome, and the Superdome.



The Philadelphia Museum of Art offers so much more than the Rocky statue. For example, the museum's Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art collection is exceptional. Among the museum's 240,000 works of art are paintings by Renoir, Manet, Monet, Cassatt, Cézanne, Pissarro, Van Gogh, Degas, and Toulouse-Lautrec. Its holdings include Vincent Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, Claude Monet's *Japanese Footbridge and the Water Lily Pool, Giverny* and Paul Cézanne's *The Large Bathers*.

Van Gogh painted *Sunflowers* (1889) from memory during the depths of winter in Arles.



The museum's Japanese Footbridge painting is one of 12 works painted by Monet from a single vantage point in 1899.



The Large Bathers (1900-1906) by Paul Cézanne is the artist's largest (measuring approximately 7 X 8 feet) and last work. Considered by some critics to be Cézanne's finest work, it remained unfinished at the time of the artist's death.



Also in the museum's collection are several paintings by the Philadelphia native son, Thomas Eakins. Eakins (1844-1916) was a Realist painter who, according to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was "America's greatest, most uncompromising realist," dedicated to depicting the human form in oil sculpture, photography, and watercolor. Among the numerous Eakins works of art in the museum's collection is *The Gross Clinic* (1875). *The Gross Clinic* is now recognized as one of the greatest American paintings ever made. Eakins, at the time young and little-known, created it specifically for Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exhibition, intending to showcase his talents as an artist and to honor the scientific achievements of his native Philadelphia. However, the jury rejected it as too bloody and brutal for display.



Just a short walk from the Philadelphia Museum of Art is the **Rodin Museum**. The Rodin Museum in Philadelphia holds the largest number of sculptures of the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) outside of Paris. The collection was brought together by Philadelphia philanthropist Jules Mastbaum, who began collecting Rodin's works in 1913 with the idea of eventually donating them to the city. The museum opened in 1929, unfortunately, after Mastbaum's death. It is home to more than 120 of Rodin's sculptures, some displayed in the gardens surrounding the museum. The collection includes original castings ¹ of some of the most iconic Rodin sculptures, e.g., *The Thinker*, *The Burghers of Calais*, *The Colossal Head of Balzac*, and *The Gates of Hell*.

Parenthetically, Philadelphia was the first city in the United States to exhibit Rodin's work. In 1876, the artist sent eight sculptures to the Centennial Exposition in Fairmount Park. The artist was disappointed in his American debut; he received neither medals nor press. Little did he know that, eventually, Philadelphia would be home to the largest collection of his work outside of Paris.



¹ Each version of the sculptures is considered original as long as it was produced under the supervision of the artist or his estate, now overseen by the Musée Rodin in Paris. Most of the sculptures in the collection of the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia were cast between 1924 and 1926, under the supervision of the Musée Rodin and by craftsmen who worked with Rodin during his lifetime,

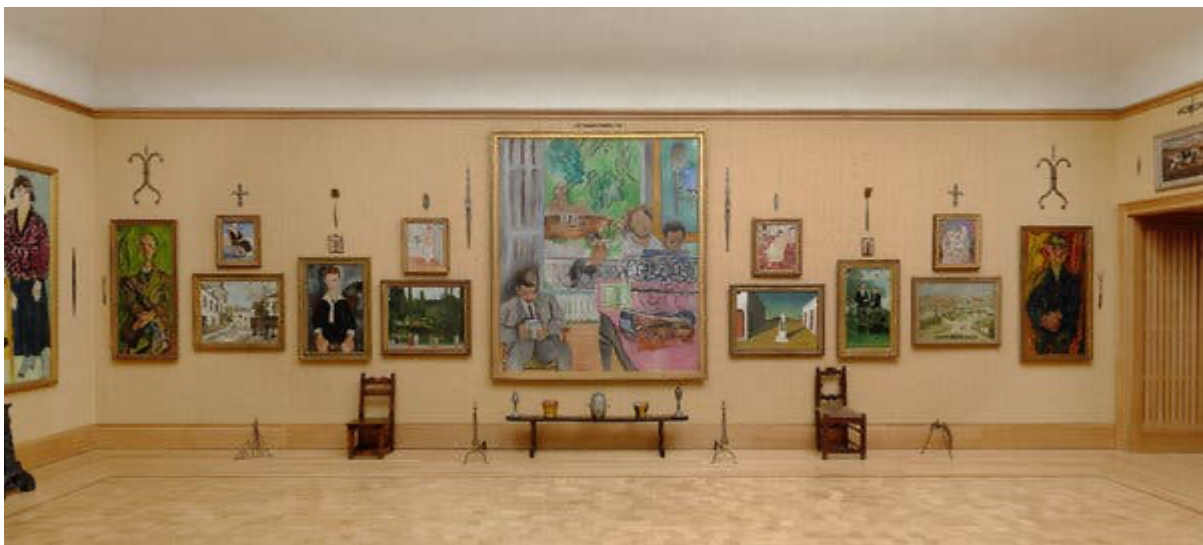




Just a three-minute walk from the Rodin Museum down Museum Mile is the **Barnes Foundation**, one of the most extensive repositories of impressionist and post-impressionist paintings in the world. The museum owns 181 works by Auguste Renoir (the largest single collection in the world), 69 works by Paul Cézanne, 59 by Matisse, 46 by Pablo Picasso, and 16 by Amedeo Modigliani. It is also home to numerous paintings by renowned 20th-century American artists, Old Masters (Rubens, El Greco, Titian), and a collection of African and Native American art and artifacts. The entire collection is valued at approximately \$25 billion.

In contrast to many museums, there is no explanatory information accompanying the works (although there is an app that uses a cell phone camera to identify and learn about the artwork). The art is displayed in the manner the museum's founder, Dr. Albert Barnes, instituted in idiosyncratic "'ensembles,' creating unusual mixed-media groupings of objects from different cultures and periods."

The photo below is an example of how the works in the collection are displayed.



The painting below is Renoir's *The Bathing Group* (1916). Dr. Barnes called it his favorite Renoir.

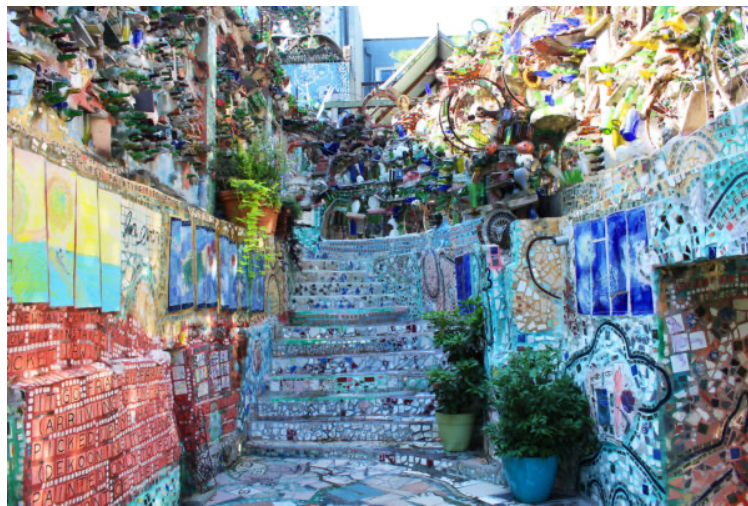


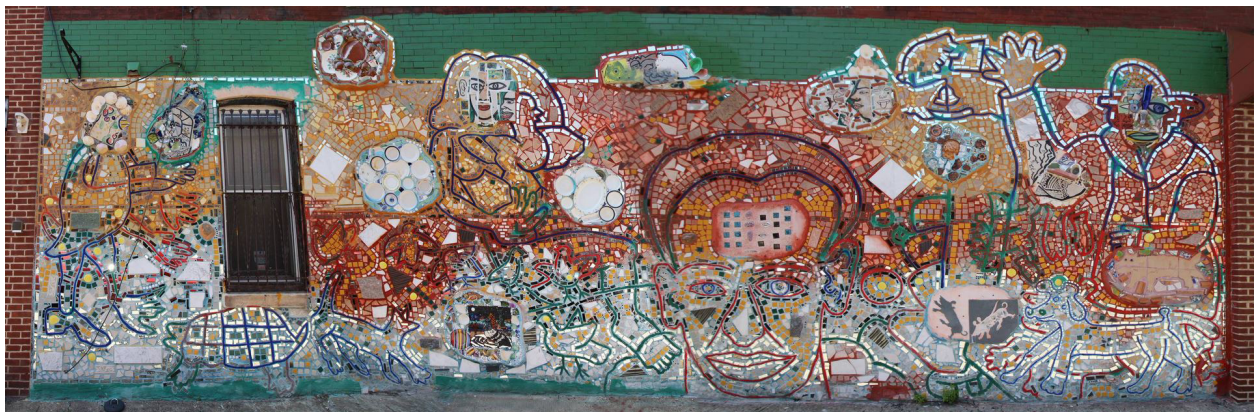
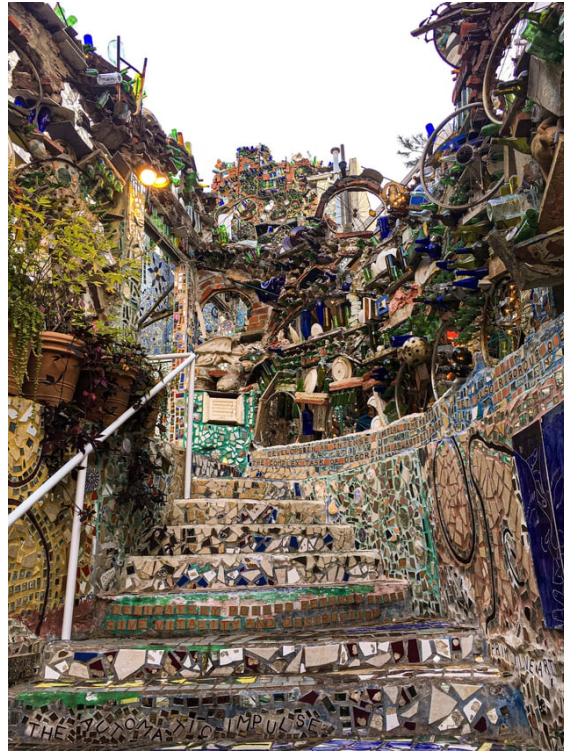
Also at the Barnes is Matisse's *Le Bonheur de Vivre* (*Joy of Life*) (1905-1906), one of the great paintings of the Fauvist School. It once belonged to the famed writer Gertrude Stein, who said of the painting, "Matisse painted *Le Bonheur de vivre* and created a new formula for color that would leave its mark on every painter of the period."



Now, for something different, Philadelphia's **Magic Gardens**. On the cusp of South Philly, Magic Gardens is described as a mixed-media art environment. The concept began to take shape in the 1960s, when artists began buying up or renting derelict buildings in the South Street area and recreating the neighborhood, the aptly called "South Street Renaissance." The effort was spearheaded by Isaiah Zagar, who began creating what eventually began a massive mosaic labyrinth in a home he didn't even own. When the landlord decided to sell the building in 2004, the neighborhood banded together and was able to form a non-profit organization to purchase and maintain the property. In addition to the Magic Gardens facility, there are numerous mosaic installations around the neighborhood created by Zagar. Magic Gardens is a fantastic conglomeration of found and donated items (tiles, bicycle wheels, mirrors, plates) and folk art pieces acquired by Zagar during his global travels.

The first two photographs below are of Magic Gardens; the third is a photo of one of Zagar's other mosaic creations in the neighborhood. You can visit Magic Gardens and, with the help of an online self-guided walking tour, discover a number of other fascinating Zagar mosaics in the South Street neighborhood.







This mural above is called *Theatre of Life*. Created in 2001, it was, at the time, the most expensive ever undertaken in the city, using 400 gallons of paint, one ton of concrete, 5,000 marbles, and over 10,000 pieces of glass. Among its collaborators was Meg Saligman, a Philadelphia mural legend.

Saligman was also the creator of the mural below, named *Philadelphia Muses*. The mural's figures symbolize the nine muses of the arts.



Another acclaimed Philadelphia muralist is David Guinn, who has completed approximately 40 murals for Mural Arts Philadelphia. The one below is called *Garden of Delight*. This stylized vision of a garden was created with transparent colors to simulate a watercolor painting, with the painted garden spilling out to blend into the community garden below.



A public art adventure in Philadelphia would not be complete without a sculpture walk. Starting at City Hall and walking down Benjamin Franklin Parkway, you can see no fewer than 30 sculptures before the Parkway merges with Kelly Drive. If you continue past the Philadelphia Museum of Art into Fairmount Park, there are almost 20 more.

Among the sculptures are ones by three generations of the Philadelphia Calders, of whom the third generation, Alexander "Sandy" Calder, is perhaps the most famous, renowned for his innovative mobiles.

At the outset of the sculpture trail is the colossal statue of William Penn (cast in 1892) by Alexander Milne Calder (1846-1923), standing atop City Hall. The statue is said to be one of the world's largest cast bronze statues, measuring 36 feet high and weighing over 53,000 pounds.



The second-generation Calder Alexander Stirling (1870-1945), created the Swann Memorial Fountain (1924) in Logan Square. The fountain features the figures of three bronze Native Americans representing Philadelphia's three main waterways, the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers and Wissahickon Creek.



Alexander "Sandy" Calder (1898-1976) was the sculptor of the stable *Three Discs, One Lacking* (1968),



Also along the route is pop artist Robert Indiana's (1928-2018) iconic *Love* statue (1970), located in the John F. Kennedy Plaza, also known as Love Park.



Finally, along Kelly Drive in East Fairmount Park is Frederic Remington's (1861-1909) *Cowboy* (1908). *Cowboy* is Remington's only large-scale work by the artist and his last. Remington selected the location for the statue himself and found a horseman to pose for it in that very spot.



P.S. Philadelphia is a very walkable city, which is a good thing because, in addition to its extensive art, it also has excellent food!