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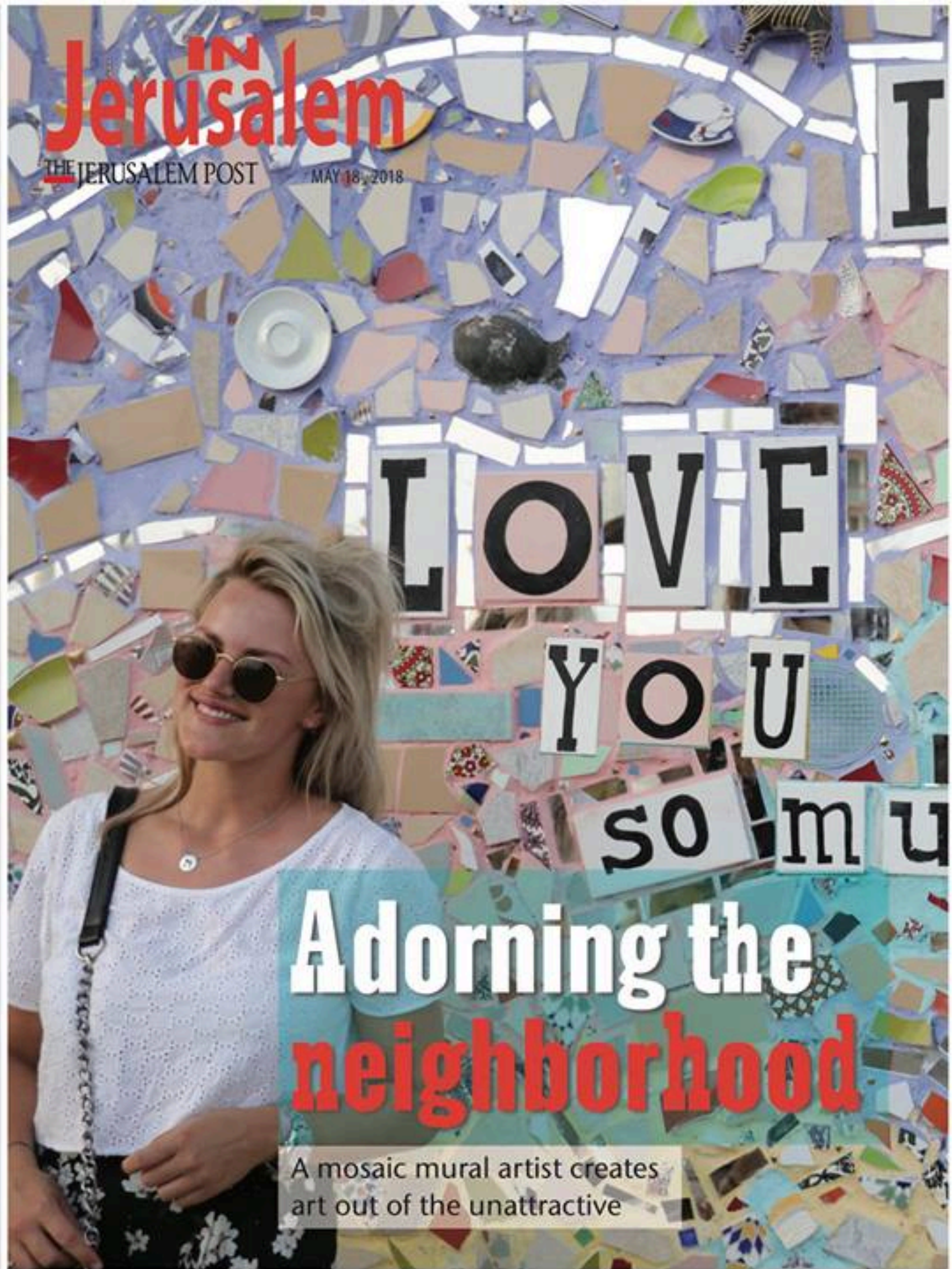
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Adorning the neighborhood

A mosaic mural artist creates art out of the unattractive

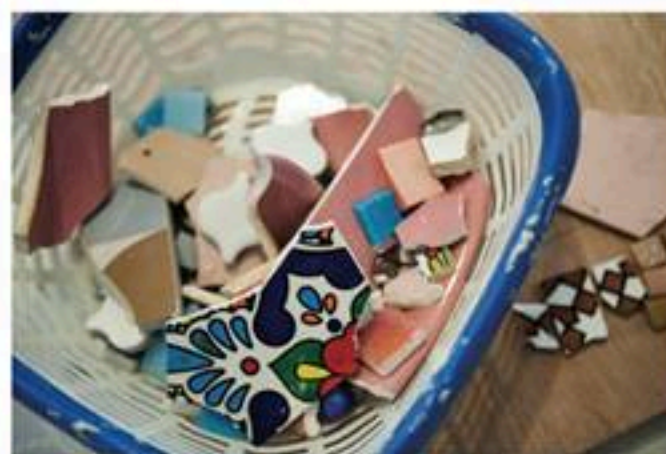
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Fragments of locally made tiles await transformation into a new mosaic. (Photos: Anat Peiser)

Left: Mural artist Mia Schon's colorful mosaic in Mevaseret Zion, and Avital, the client who commissioned it. (Mia Schon)

Schon puts the finishing touches a new piece.



Serendipitous mosaics

• NATALIE CHETBOUN

Shortly after moving to Israel from Boston in 2014, mosaic mural artist Mia Schon found herself in Mevaseret Zion, a suburb of Jerusalem, sleeping in her clients' small home office – converted into a temporary bedroom for her to use after a long day's work.

The clients, Avital, Ehud and their two children, were finally redecorating their home – a lifelong dream – after Avital survived breast cancer, and commissioned Schon to create a colorful mosaic mural on the outside wall of their house. Facing a large garden and hidden from public view, the piece measures over three meters tall and three and a half meters wide at its broadest point. It was Schon's first private commission, and to save time and reduce travel expenses – she lives and works in Tel Aviv – the family agreed to host her during the project's duration. "Only in Israel," Schon quips. "You couldn't do that in a contract anywhere else."

The commission came about rather serendipitously. Schon's apartment is located on a quiet, central, tree-lined street not far from the Mediterranean Sea, and until recently, was marked by a graffiti-covered wall near the entrance. Walking past this wall for years, Schon wondered why no one painted over it.

Then, after leaving her job as head of customer

experience at a start-up company, she took a short vacation to Barcelona, where she was inspired by the prevalence of mosaics. Upon her return to Tel Aviv, she decided to fix the wall herself. "I just kind of started," says Schon, who studied art and design at The University of Michigan and learned to mosaic from noted artist Isaiah Zager. "And then I freaked out. Like, what did I do? I was still new to this country."

Like many of her mosaics, Schon created the piece on a wall she doesn't own – and didn't ask permission. Still, her neighbors, whom she got to know as she worked, responded positively.

"I understood the impact of putting a piece of art in the neighborhood," she reflects. "Everyone talked to each other. It affects the community."

Schon didn't know it at the time, but the office of Marmelada Market, an online marketplace for Israeli artists and designers, was located across the street. Employees noticed the colorful mosaic Schon was creating and featured her in a newsletter sent to over 16,000 Israeli art lovers – Avital among them. "I liked that she did a mosaic near her house for free, just because she wanted to decorate the street," says Avital. "She's a very warm person."

This warmth is visible in Schon's work, which alongside local tiles she buys in Jaffa's flea market includes curiosities like animal figurines, vases filled with flowers, fragmented images of Elvis, and mirrors

as well as other objects she finds on the street.

She mixes her grout with bright jewel-toned house paint and creates lettered tiles that spell out the playful expressions she uses to title her pieces. These include *I Love You Very Much* (located in Atarim Square, a central but poorly maintained public square near the beach) and *Yalla Balagan* (meaning "Let's go all out," which frames the heavy wooden doors of an old synagogue on Nahalat Binyamin Street).

When location scouting, Schon searches for walls she deems "low risk" – unattractive, slated for demolition, or located in run-down neighborhoods. That way, she says, she's less likely to be questioned and more likely to have a positive impact on the community.

Although most of her mosaics are light-hearted – she even hosted a street party to celebrate the completion of *I Love You Very Much* – her recent work is more contemplative.

She created *We Were All Once Refugees* on upscale Rothschild Boulevard, in collaboration with Kuchinate, a collective of female African asylum seekers in Israel making and selling crocheted baskets to achieve financial stability and educate the public about their cause.

The women are counted among an estimated 40,000 migrants scattered across the country, mainly from Eritrea and Sudan, who live under the constant threat of deportation. Schon created the mosaic



Left: Volunteers from Kuchinate, an African refugee women's collective, working on the 'We Were All Once Refugees' mosaic on Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard. (Courtesy)

Schon's 'Yalla Balagan' mosaic, framing the door of a synagogue on Tel Aviv's Nahalat Binyamin Street.

for free, assisted by friends, students (she teaches mosaic classes in her studio), and the asylum seekers themselves. The piece's title, the idea of Kuchinate's Eritrean co-founder Sister Aziza, appears in the mosaic in English and Hebrew, and is a loose reference to the biblical phrase "And you shall not mistreat a stranger, nor shall you oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

"That was my first time doing a political piece,

which I was worried about," admits Schon. "I made sure I could be an advocate before I did it. I read up on it. It's really awful, what's happening."

She hopes to create more socially aware work in the future.

Although she hasn't spent much time in Jerusalem, she's curious about the city's diverse religious and ethnic populations and how different cultures would respond to her work.

This summer, she's traveling back to Boston as part of Brandeis University's Our Generation Speaks fellowship, a program for young Israeli and Palestinian community leaders seeking to create social impact ventures in the region.

"I want my work to be intentional," says Schon. "It's nice to make fun pieces that bring people happiness – that's just as valid – but I want to be on a deeper level, where I can bring people together."



Tikun Leil
Shavuot
5778

Motzei Shabbat
May 19, 2018

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11:30 pm–12:50 am
<p>What's in the Names of Cain's Many Descendants: Does Genealogy Reflect Destiny? Judy Klitsner</p> <p>Faith, Interrupted: Is There a Way Forward for Religious Belief? Dr. Elliott Malamet</p> <p>What is Behind the Success of the Celestial Marriage Between God & the Jewish People? Yiscah Smith</p>
1:10–2:25 am
<p>Like a Moth to a Flame: A Drama of Rabbinic Desire Gila Fine</p> <p>A Mysterious Tale About the Human Heart: Not for the Faint of Heart Rabbi Dr. Michael Marmur</p> <p>On Becoming a Human Torah: Embodiment, Fulfillment and Teaching Rabbi Leon Morris</p>
2:40–4 am
<p>Marilyn Monroe and the Seventy Faces of Torah Rabbi David Levin-Kruss</p> <p>The Mysterious Tikun of the Hida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai) Rabbi Dr. Daniel Roth</p>