



**Philadelphia's Magic Gardens
Media & Press Information**

WHAT IS PHILADELPHIA'S MAGIC GARDENS?

"Zagar's artwork is what makes South Street, South Street."

-Ralph Cipriano, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1998

Philadelphia's Magic Gardens (PMG) is a mosaicked visionary art environment, gallery, and community arts center that preserves, interprets, and provides access to Isaiah Zagar's unique mosaic art environment and his public murals. The Magic Gardens site, Zagar's largest artwork, includes a fully tiled indoor space and a massive outdoor mosaic sculpture garden that spans half a block on Philadelphia's famous South Street. Inside, visitors can view folk art statues, bicycle wheels, colorful glass bottles, Zagar's hand-made tiles, and thousands of glittering mirrors. The installation pays tribute to Zagar's artistic influences, along with community and personal experiences.

Open to visitors daily, PMG has become a unique Philadelphia destination, hosting year-round, low-cost public programs within its own distinctive venue and the surrounding community. PMG, a nonprofit organization, inspires creativity and community engagement by educating the public about folk, mosaic, and visionary art.

Philadelphia's Magic Gardens History



"South Street looked like Berlin after the Russians invaded it. All boarded up buildings and trash strewn lots. If there were 40 buildings on a block, maybe 15 of them were occupied."

-Rick Snyderman, *Philadelphia City Paper*, 2010

In 1994, Zagar started work in the vacant lots located nearby his studio at 1022-1026 South Street, after tiling his adjacent property. He constructed a fence to protect the area and then spent the next fourteen years excavating tunnels, sculpting multi-layered walls, and mosaicking the 3,000-square-foot space.

Prompted by rising land values, the Boston-based lot owner decided to sell the land in 2002. Unwilling to witness the destruction of the art environment, the community rushed to support Zagar. His creation, newly titled Philadelphia's Magic Gardens, became incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 2004 to preserve and protect this large-scale public artwork.

WHO IS ISAIAH ZAGAR?

“Mr. Zagar has turned a trash- and weed-filled lot into an urban sculpture garden. The broken pottery, shards of glass, tiles and found objects that are the foundation of the sculpture have made many of us rethink our notion of art and beauty.”

-Stephan Salisbury, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2004

Isaiah Zagar is an award-winning mosaic mural artist whose work can be found on over 100 walls throughout Philadelphia. Born in Philadelphia and raised in Brooklyn, Zagar received his B.A. in Painting & Drawing from Pratt Institute in New York City. At 19 years old, he discovered the folk art environments of Clarence Schmidt in Woodstock, New York, which inspired the creation of his visionary installations many years later. With influences that include Picasso, Antonio Gaudi, Clarence Schmidt, Simon Rodia, and Joseph Ferdinand Cheval, he is inspired to include the aesthetics and materials of untrained artists as manifestations of fine art.

After Zagar and his wife Julia completed Peace Corps service in Peru in 1968, they settled in Philadelphia and opened the *Eyes* folk art gallery. Zagar quickly discovered his love of mosaic and began to turn his South Street neighborhood into an open-air mosaic museum. He has since received grants for his artistic excellence from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pew Charitable Trust for his projects. He has gained recognition in various films and publications, most notably in the 2008 documentary, *In A Dream*, created by his son, Jeremiah Zagar.

Zagar's work is included in the permanent collections of numerous art institutions, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art. His work has been featured in solo exhibitions. Through over 40 years of creating public artworks, Isaiah Zagar has helped to shape Philadelphia into a thriving creative community.



PMG KEY PROGRAMS & AUDIENCE

PMG is open to the public every day for self-guided tours of the permanent mosaic art installation and temporary exhibitions. PMG offers core programs that include:

Arts Education:

Family Jams: Free, monthly hands-on activities for families;

Mosaic Workshops: Two-day intensive workshops led by Zagar that teach the entire mosaic process to create an outdoor public mosaic mural.

Tile & Grout Community Outreach: In-depth programs that occur both at PMG, schools, and community centers that focus on folk and vernacular arts and Zagar's mosaic methods. T&G programs promote civic and creative engagement for underserved populations.

Tours: Multi-disciplinary educational site and neighborhood tours that focus on mosaic, folk art, and South Street history; "Mosaic Musings," brief pop-up gallery talks.

Themed Art Exhibitions: Gallery shows and educational exhibitions which feature mosaic, ceramic, folk, and "alternative art media" artworks that support PMG's mission.

Twilight in the Gardens Concert Series: Monthly themed concerts with hands-on activities that showcase diverse local talent, culminating in a summer performance-based festival.

