

# MEDIA & PRESS INFORMATION

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Philadelphia's  
**MAGIC  
GARDENS**

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# PHILADELPHIA'S MAGIC GARDENS

Philadelphia's Magic Gardens (PMG) is an immersive mixed media art environment that is completely covered with mosaics. The creator, Isaiah Zagar, used handmade tiles, bottles, bicycle wheels, mirror, and international folk art to chronicle his life and influences. The exploratory space is made up of two indoor galleries and a bi-level outdoor sculpture garden.

As a nonprofit museum, PMG celebrates art in its many forms through community outreach, public programs, hands-on activities, exhibitions, and tours. We welcome everyone to explore the space and embrace the possibility of self expression.

## MISSION STATEMENT

Philadelphia's Magic Gardens (PMG) inspires creativity and community engagement by educating the public about folk, mosaic, and visionary art. PMG preserves, interprets, and provides access to Isaiah Zagar's unique mosaic art environment and his public murals.



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

RALPHI CIPRIANO  
Philadelphia Inquirer, 1998







# ISAIAH ZAGAR



Isaiah & Julia Zagar in Peru, mid 1960s



Isaiah Zagar at South Street Shambles, late 1960s

## BIOGRAPHY

Isaiah Zagar is an award-winning mosaic mural artist whose work can be found on hundreds of public walls throughout the city of Philadelphia and around the world. Born in Philadelphia and raised in Brooklyn, Zagar received his B.F.A. in Painting & Graphics at the Pratt Institute of Art in New York City. When he was 19 years old, Zagar discovered the folk art installation of Clarence Schmidt in Woodstock, New York, which inspired him to create Philadelphia's Magic Gardens. His work is also influenced by artists Pablo Picasso, Jean Dubuffet, Kurt Schwitters, Antoni Gaudi, Simon Rodia, and Joseph Ferdinand Cheval, among others.

Zagar's artwork is heavily affected by his travels and the personal connections he has made with international folk and visionary artists. Isaiah and his wife Julia completed three years of Peace Corps service in Peru in the mid-1960s, working with folk artists in the Puno region near Lake Titicaca. Soon after, they settled in Philadelphia and began their lifelong work of creating public art and fostering creativity in all its varied forms.

In addition to his three-year Peace Corps service in Peru, Zagar has completed artist residencies in Tianjin, China, and Rajasthan, India. He also participated in a residency at the Kohler Co. Pottery Foundry in Wisconsin.



Zagar's work is included in the permanent collections of numerous art institutions, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and has been featured in solo exhibitions throughout the Philadelphia area. Zagar has received grants for his artistic excellence from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pew Charitable Trusts for his work in Interdisciplinary Arts.

Zagar has gained recognition in various films and publications, most notably in the award-winning documentary *In A Dream*, created by his son Jeremiah Zagar. He has spoken at several prominent conferences and artists' lectures both domestically and internationally. Through 50 years of creating artwork on a grand scale, Zagar has helped shape Philadelphia into a thriving creative community.

### ARTIST STATEMENT

“My work is marked by events and is a **mirror of the mind** that is building and falling apart, having a logic but close to chaos, refusing to stay still for the camera, and giving one a sense of **heaven and hell simultaneously.**”







# HISTORY

**ISAIAH ZAGAR** has devoted himself to beautifying the South Street neighborhood since the late 1960s, when he moved to the area with his wife, Julia. The couple helped spur the revitalization of the area by renovating derelict buildings and adding colorful mosaics on both private and public walls. The Zagars, teamed with other artists and activists, transformed the neighborhood into a prosperous artistic haven and successfully led protests against the addition of a new highway that would have eliminated South Street. This period of artistic rebirth was coined the “South Street Renaissance.” After the street was saved, Zagar continued creating mosaic murals, resulting in hundreds of public artworks over the next two decades.

In 1991, Zagar started working on the vacant lots located near his studio at 1020 South Street. He spent years sculpting multi-layer walls out of found objects. In 2002, the Boston-based owner of the lots discovered Zagar’s installation and decided to sell the land, calling for the work to be dismantled. Unwilling to witness the destruction of the now-beloved neighborhood art environment, the community rushed to support the artist. After a two year legal battle, his creation, newly titled Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens, became incorporated as a nonprofit organization with the intention of preserving the artwork at the PMG site and throughout the South Street region. Zagar was then able to develop the site even

further; excavating tunnels and grottos while adding his signature mosaics to every surface.

In 2008, Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens opened to the public. Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens is now a permanent art institution and is visited by over 100,00 people annually. Trained guides are available to lead tours of PMG and Zagar’s surrounding public murals. In addition, PMG regularly hosts mosaic workshops, concerts, exhibitions, and other public events.







## KEY PROGRAMMING

PMG is open to the public for self-guided tours of the permanent mosaic art installation and temporary exhibitions. Core programs include:

### PECO FAMILY JAMS

Free, monthly hands-on activities for families, including family-friendly tours.

### COMMUNITY OUTREACH

An initiative to provide low-cost or free arts experiences within local communities. PMG collaborates with other organizations and businesses to provide art experiences outside the museum, furthering PMG's mission to inspire creativity and community engagement and allowing participants to enjoy art in new ways.

### TOURS

Multi-disciplinary educational tours focus on Isaiah Zagar's influences and process, folk and visionary art, South Street history, and more. Site and neighborhood walking tours are offered, along with interactive Discovery Tours that focus on critical thinking and talking about art. The Visionary Visits program offers discounted tours for economically disadvantaged groups.

### ART EXHIBITIONS

Gallery shows and educational exhibitions which feature mosaic, ceramic, folk, visionary and/or artworks that support PMG's mission.

### TWILIGHT IN THE GARDENS SERIES

Monthly events that include a live performance, hands-on art activity, and guided tours of the space.

### MOSAIC MUSINGS

Brief pop-up gallery talks offered daily tell the stories behind some of PMG's most asked about objects and ideas.

