

ENGLISH

MEXICAN FOLK ART

AT Philadelphia's MAGIC GARDENS

WHAT IS FOLK ART?

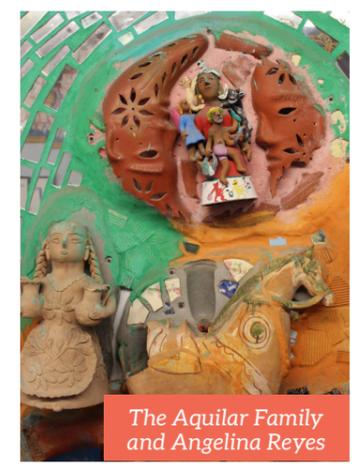


Jorge Wilmot

Folk art is handmade work that reflects the stories, people, cultures and traditions of a particular region. The artistic skills are passed down through generations, often within families. Folk art can include pottery, wood carving, weaving, and more.



Luis Valencia



The Aguilar Family and Angelina Reyes

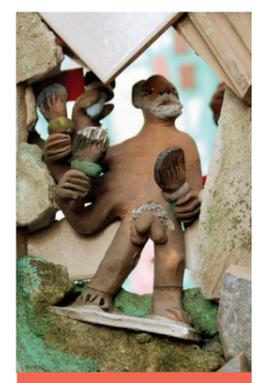


Angelina Reyes



Family of Concepción Aguilar

THE TRADITION CONTINUES



ORIGINAL



STOLEN

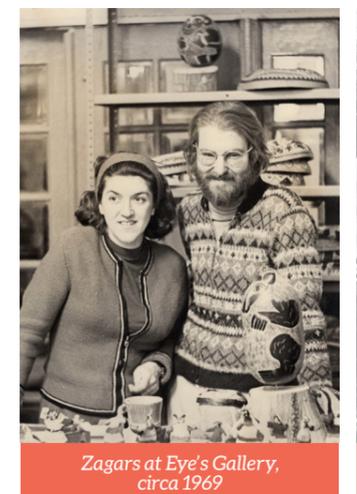


REPLACED

In the 1990s Josefina Aguilar collaborated with Isiah to interpret his 4-armed man figure (left). In 2017 the figure was stolen from PMG (center). PMG commissioned a new version in 2018 (right), which Josefina created from memory since she is now blind. It was installed in a different location at PMG that year.



WHY ARE THERE SO MANY FOLK ART OBJECTS IN PMG?



Zagars at Eye's Gallery, circa 1969



Isiah in Peru, 1960s

Isiah Zagar, the creator of Philadelphia's Magic Gardens (PMG) and his wife Julia first connected with folk artists in the 1960s when they worked in Peru as Peace Corps volunteers. Their love for folk art grew as they purchased works from around the world for the Eye's Gallery, Julia's store at 4th and South Streets.

The objects at PMG are often pieces that broke and could not be sold. Many are special collaborative commissions between Isiah and the folk artist.

If Isiah admires the work of an artist he will leave drawings with them to interpret in their own style. These partnerships sometimes continue for years and result in hundreds of unique pieces that Isiah installs at PMG. The majority of the folk art at PMG is Mexican, since the Zagars fostered so many friendships there over the past five decades. However, there are also folk art pieces from many other countries they have visited. Works from India, Peru, Ecuador, Morocco, Indonesia, and Guatemala can all be found in the space.



Irma Blanco collaborating with Isiah Zagar, 2017



PMG Executive Director Emily Smith with Teresita and Sara of the García Family

The PMG staff began taking trips to Mexico in 2016 to carry on the Zagars' legacy of working with folk artists. It is PMG's mission to continue supporting the work of these talented artists and to share their stories and traditions with the public. PMG's preservation team works with Isiah to add these new artworks to the installation as old ones deteriorate or break.

IRMA BLANCO

SANTA MARÍA ATZOMPA, OAXACA | Unpainted terracotta

Irma Blanco (born 1959) creates whimsical female figurines that often incorporate animals and other creatures. She uses a clay appliqué technique involving small decorations layered onto larger pieces. She learned this technique from her mother, celebrated sculptor Teodora Blanco (1928-1980).

Irma worked with Isaiah to create the totems on top of the archways in the sculpture garden.



Totem by Irma Blanco

ANGELINA GONZÁLEZ CRUZ REYES

SANTA MARÍA ATZOMPA, OAXACA | Unpainted terracotta

Angelina González Cruz Reyes (1929-2005) collaborated with Isaiah over many years to create dozens of sculptures embedded in PMG. Her work is similar in many ways to the work of Teodora Blanco. The two were working in the same time period only blocks from each other and were married to the same man, Antonio García Reyes (born 1924).

The most common works Angelina created with Isaiah are men being lifted to heaven by angels, imagery Isaiah saw in a painting by famed Mexican artist Rodolfo Morales (1925-2001).



THE VÁSQUEZ CRUZ FAMILY

SANTA MARÍA ATZOMPA, OAXACA | Unpainted terracotta



Mermaid by Angélica Vásquez Cruz

The ceramics of Angélica Vásquez Cruz (born 1958) are widely collected and have drawn attention to the work of her parents, Delfina Cruz Díaz (born 1929) and Ernesto Vásquez Reyes (born 1923). Vásquez learned how to make objects like jars and pots from her parents and also studied with Teodora Blanco. She eventually developed her own style based on Mexican history and legends.

Early in her career her father-in-law Antonio García Reyes (father of Irma Blanco and husband of Angelina Reyes) took credit for her work and sold it as his own. She is now an advocate for the rights of women, and many of her works celebrate women.

THE AGUILAR FAMILY

OCOTLÁN DE MORELOS, OAXACA | Painted terracotta



Sculpture by Josefina Aguilar

The Aguilars portray the daily life of rural Mexico in their painted red clay figurines. Isaura Alcántara Díaz (1925-1969) and Jesús Aguilar Revilla (1919-1977) began the tradition, which they passed to their four daughters who have developed their own distinctive styles.

The Zagars started working with Isaura and Jesús's daughter Josefina Aguilar (born 1945) decades ago. Josefina is known for her playful depiction of everyday life. Since losing her sight, she now presides over the work of her children and grandchildren.

The work of her sister Concepción Aguilar (born 1956) and her family has been added to PMG in recent years. Concepción's family's ceramics feature more imaginative content and a vibrant color palette.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Many villages in Mexico are known for a particular kind of craft. Several families or artisans in the same village (puebla) often produce similar artwork using materials derived from local resources. For instance, the black clay pieces at PMG are made by different families but all come from the village of San Bartolo Coyotepec in Oaxaca.



Mermaid by Luis Valencia

THE VALENCIA FAMILY

SAN ANTONINO CASTILLO VELASCO, OAXACA | Painted terracotta

Luis Valencia (born 1957) and his son Jorge Luis Valencia García (born 1979) depict imaginative creatures and townspeople often engaged in dancing, drinking, and other fun pastimes. In this way, the work celebrates life and is often filled with a sense of humor similar to Isaiah's own. Luis lived with the Zagars in Philadelphia on two separate occasions, during which he created many of the works seen at PMG.



Ceramic panel by Jorge Luis Valencia García

THE GARCÍA FAMILY

SAN ANTONINO CASTILLO VELASCO, OAXACA | Unpainted terracotta



Planter by the García Family

José García Antonio (born 1947) works with his wife Teresita Mendoza Reyna Sánchez (born 1961) and their children, José Jr. and Sara. The family is known for their terracotta animals, mermaids, and large human figures, which they create from clay. José continues to work despite being nearly blind.

JORGE WILMOT

TONALÁ, JALISCO | Glazed stoneware

Jorge Wilmot (1928-2012) brought Chinese high-fire ceramic techniques to his home country of Mexico in the 1960s. He founded the National Ceramic Museum of Mexico and also established a studio in Tonalá, where Isaiah spent time collaborating with him. When Wilmot retired, Isaiah used a grant to buy thousands of tiles remaining in the studio, which now can be found throughout PMG and other Zagar mosaics.



DID YOU KNOW?

- High-fire ceramics (stoneware) are much more durable than low-fire ceramics (terracotta). The stoneware tiles and ceramics at PMG are in much better condition than the terracotta pieces, which were not made to be outside.

JOEL GARCIA

MEXICO CITY | Papier-mâché

Joel Garcia (born 1955) utilizes traditional Mexican icons and themes in his papier-mâché work, such as skeletons and alebrijes. Alebrijes are fantastical creatures originated in the 1930s by renowned artist Pedro Linares. Linares trained Garcia, whose own work is now known across Mexico and the United States. Garcia met the Zagars in 1997 and often collaborates with them to create sculptures of Isaiah or Julia.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Skeletons (calacas), skulls (calaveras), and alebrijes appear frequently in Mexican folk art and are especially popular during the holiday Day of the Dead (Día de Muertos.) The holiday celebrates friends and relatives who have passed on. This imagery and the holiday are featured prominently in the 2017 Disney/Pixar film Coco.