



Educational Resources

ISAIAH & JULIA ZAGAR

WHAT'S INCLUDED:

- Introduction to the Zagars
- Reading materials created by Philadelphia's Magic Gardens (PMG)
- Lesson plans
- A 10-minute video of the history of PMG and Isaiah and Julia Zagar
- Videos created by PMG
- Articles about the Zagars
- Favorite books of the Zagars
- Suicide prevention and mental health services



THE ZAGARS IN GUATEMALA, 2011

INTRODUCTION

WHO IS ISAIAH ZAGAR?

Isaiah Zagar was born in Philadelphia in 1939. He is an award-winning mosaic mural artist whose work can be found on more than 200 public walls throughout the city of Philadelphia and around the world. Isaiah received his B.F.A. in Painting & Graphics at the Pratt Institute of Art in New York City. His work is included in the permanent collections of numerous art institutions, and he has received grants for his artistic excellence from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pew Charitable Trusts.



ISAIAH ZAGAR



CLARENCE SCHMIDT'S
HOUSE OF MIRRORS



PHILADELPHIA'S MAGIC GARDENS
FROM ABOVE

When Isaiah was 19 years old, he traveled to Woodstock, New York to explore Clarence Schmidt's House of Mirrors. This began Isaiah's lifelong interest in art environments – large-scale, fully-immersive artworks which often take decades to complete. Isaiah has created several art environments in Philadelphia. His largest public work is Philadelphia's Magic Gardens (PMG).

WHO IS JULIA ZAGAR?

Julia (Papiroff) Zagar was born in New York City in 1940. She received a certificate in sculpture from Cooper Union School of Art in New York City and a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of the Americas in Mexico City. While at university in Mexico, an art vendor showed up at her apartment, demanding payment for crates of folk art ordered by the previous tenant.



JULIA ZAGAR

Upon seeing the art, Julia decided to pay what she could for the delivery. She sold off pieces during her long journey back to New York City. The chance occurrence set Julia on her life-long path as a folk art dealer.

To this day, Julia travels the world, cultivating relationships with artists working in every medium. The Eye's Gallery, which Julia has owned and operated for more than 50 years, remains a creative touchstone for Philadelphia's South Street.



THE EYE'S GALLERY FACADE, CIRCA 2000s

THE ZAGARS

In 1968, having completed their service for the Peace Corps in Peru, the Zagars returned to North America and opened the Eye's Gallery in South Philadelphia. Around this time Isaiah was hospitalized and attempted suicide. Through this, the Zagars' came to understand that Isaiah lives with a mental illness which is marked by energetic and emotional highs and lows. Isaiah began mosaicking as a form of self-directed art therapy. He first experimented in the Zagars' apartment above the Eye's Gallery, then he moved on to derelict walls throughout the neighborhood.



832 AND 834 SOUTH STREET, CIRCA 1997

While the reputation of the Eye's Gallery continued to grow, mosaicking became Isaiah's primary medium. PMG encompasses five city lots of mosaic work and includes a bi-level sculpture garden. Isaiah's current project is his studio, a 10,000 square-foot warehouse which he has mosaicked inside and out.



1002 WATKINS STREET, ISAIAH ZAGAR'S
CURRENT ART STUDIO



JULIA AND ISAIAH ZAGAR AT
THE EYE'S GALLERY, CIRCA 1968

PMG RESOURCES

- A [brochure](#) that provides an introduction to Isaiah Zagar and PMG, as well as a map that shows the many murals Isaiah has created in the vicinity of South Street; it is available in [Spanish](#), [Chinese](#), [French](#), and [German](#)
- *Philadelphia's Magic Gardens: The Dreamwork of Isaiah Zagar*, a coffee table book edited by PMG Executive Director Emily Smith, including photographs by David Soffa

LESSON PLANS

- [Why Does Isaiah Have 4 Arms?](#), a short video that explores the meaning behind Isaiah's distinctive self-portrait
- [Neighborhood Walking Tour](#), a self-guided mural tour which explores the Zagars' personal history, their longtime connection to South Street, and the many themes found in Isaiah's mosaics
- [Isaiah](#) and [Julia](#) Zagar Paper Puppets, puppets based on Isaiah's drawings with optional [instructions](#) that make the puppets dance; intended for elementary and middle school students but adaptable for any audience
- [Assemblage Portraits](#), a lesson plan from the Niki de Saint Phalle's Charitable Art Foundation, which explores non-figurative portraiture through the work of contemporary artists, then asks students to reflect on their own self-image and self-perception

VIDEOS

- [Introduction to Philadelphia's Magic Gardens](#), a 10-minute overview of the history of PMG and Isaiah and Julia Zagar
- [You Belong Here](#), a visual introduction to PMG through the eyes of patrons
- [The Eye's Gallery](#), a visit to Julia Zagar's Eye's Gallery, during which you will learn about the South Street Renaissance, how the commercial corridor of South Street was threatened with demolition, and why Isaiah viewed his first mosaics in this building as therapy
- [In a Dream](#), a feature-length documentary directed by Isaiah and Julia's youngest son Jeremiah Zagar, and comprised of footage gathered during the most challenging period in the Zagars' marriage; available on [Vimeo](#) and [iTunes](#)

Warning: this movie contains nudity and references to drug use, suicide, and Isaiah's childhood abuse

- [The Zagar Home](#), a conversation with the Zagars about the creation of their current home, a fully mosaicked building on South Street
- [A Peek into the Basement of 610 South 10th Street](#), a visual exploration of the Zagar family's onetime home, set to music
- [Zagar's Changing Style](#), a look at how Isaiah's mosaicking style evolved during the creation of 610

ARTICLES

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Far Out on South Street," Ellen Kaye, March 7, 1976, an article that captures the artistic evolution of the first home the Zagars created, which was above Eye's Gallery on South Street• "Anything Isaiah Does Is Art," <i>The Philadelphia Inquirer</i>, Maryanne Conheim, November 9, 1980, an article that discusses many facets of Isaiah's art-making practice, including painting, sculpture, and performance art, and their reception within the art world• "Len Davidson Introduces Isaiah's World of Mirrors and Mosaics," <i>Raw Vision</i>, Len Davidson, Winter 2004, an article that gets to the root of Isaiah's mosaic making• "South St. Icon Threatened," <i>The Philadelphia Inquirer</i>, Stephan Salisbury, May 11, 2004, an article about how PMG was nearly destroyed | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Mr. Zagar's Opus," <i>American Style</i>, Melanie Radzicki McManus, August 2009, an in-depth article that looks at the creation and early success of PMG• "Eyes on Guatemala: An Art and Soul Tour with South Street's Julia and Isaiah Zagar," <i>Philadelphia Daily News</i>, Kitty Caparella, May 16, 2011, a reporter joins the Zagars on an art buying trip in Guatemala• "Preserving the Magic: Can Philadelphia Protect Isaiah Zagar's Dazzling Folk Art," <i>Grid Magazine</i>, Dominic Mercier, March 2013, an article that outlines the difficulty in preserving Isaiah's many mosaicked murals• "Philadelphia Mosaic Master Honors Wife's Art, Love in Show," <i>The Daily Review</i>, Kristen de Groot, June 6, 2016, an article about an exhibition of Isaiah's work honoring Julia |
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FAVORITE BOOKS

- [*The Story of Art*](#) by E.H. Gombrich, a survey of the history of art from ancient times to the modern era; a book that Isaiah frequently quotes in his mosaics
- [*Fantastic Architecture*](#) by Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell, a book compiled by Fluxus artists who advocate for the cross-media thinking of artists such as Buckminster Fuller, John Cage, and Kurt Schwitters; Isaiah was hugely influenced by this book
- [*Self Portrait in a Velvet Dress: The Fashion of Frida Kahlo*](#) by Carlos Phillips Olmedo, Denise Rosenzweig and Magdalena Rosenzweig, a coffee table book that captures pieces of wardrobe and rarely seen personal objects from the Museo Frida Kahlo; one of Julia's favorite books

SUICIDE PREVENTION & MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#), a nationwide suicide prevention network available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress; dial 988 or 1-(800) 273-TALK (8255) or 1-(800) SUICIDE (273-8255); or visit [988lifeline.org](#)
- [Philadelphia Crisis Hotline](#), for mental health emergencies requiring a Crisis Intervention Team to be sent to your location; call 215-685-6440 or 911
- [Crisis Support Textline](#), for those who can't or don't want to speak over the phone, receive free, confidential support from trained professionals by way of online chat, texts, or WhatsApp; text "HOME" to 741741; visit [crisistextline.org](#)
- [NAMI Helpline](#), a nationwide peer-support service run by the National Alliance on Mental Illness between 10am and 10pm, for those who need help but are not in immediate crisis; call (800) 950-NAMI (6264); text 62640; chat [nami.org/help](#); email helpline@nami.org
- [Mental Health Delegate Line](#), 24-hour warmline from the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services (DBIDS) for those seeking help for themselves, a family member, or friend in Philadelphia; call (215) 685-6440

