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**REMEMBERING ISAIAH ZAGAR: INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED, AWARD-WINNING MOSAIC MURAL ARTIST AND CREATOR OF THE MAGIC GARDENS MUSEUM, PASSES AWAY AT 86**

*Philadelphia's Magic Gardens reaffirms its commitment to preserving and maintaining Zagar's celebrated mosaics for future generations*

**Photos and Video footage (Courtesy of Philadelphia's Magic Gardens): [here](#)**

**Philadelphia, PA | February 19, 2026** – [Philadelphia's Magic Gardens](#) (PMG) is saddened to announce the passing of its creator and internationally renowned, award-winning mosaic mural artist, [Isaiah Zagar](#), at the age of 86 due to complications related to congestive heart failure and Parkinson's Disease. He passed away in his Philadelphia home surrounded by friends and family and is survived by his wife of over 60 years, Julia, and their two sons, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Zagar is best known as the creator of the world-renowned immersive mixed-media art environments, **Magic Gardens Museum** and **Magic Gardens Studios**, which feature his iconic mosaics comprising handmade tiles, bottles, bicycle wheels, mirrors, and international folk art chronicling his life and influences. More than 50,000 square feet of public walls and spaces adorned with Zagar's mosaic murals can be found throughout Philadelphia. He created more than 200 works found on public walls throughout the Western Hemisphere, including in California, New York, Hawaii, Florida, Mexico, and Chile. A complete map of his works is available on the PMG [website](#).

"The scale of Isaiah Zagar's body of work and his relentless art-making at all costs is truly astounding," shared **Emily Smith**, Executive Director of PMG. "Most people do not yet understand the importance of what he created, nor do they understand the sheer volume of what he has made. It is distinctive and wholly unique to Philadelphia, and it has forever changed the face of our city. He was so inspired by other art environment sites and their creators, and, in that vein, was obsessed with creating something special, which he worked at every day for decades. He loved Philadelphia and wanted it to be known for its art scene."

While most known for his public murals, Zagar's other work is also included in the permanent collections of numerous notable 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, the Hinckley Pottery Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the Kornblee Gallery in New York City. He received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pew Charitable Trusts. Zagar was also fortunate to participate in artist residencies in Tianjin, China, Rajasthan, India, and the Kohler Co. Pottery Foundry in Wisconsin.

Since 2011, PMG has worked closely with Zagar to develop strategies to preserve and maintain his public murals, mosaics, and art environments as part of its core mission. The nonprofit has three full-time preservation team members who have trained alongside him for over a decade, recorded hundreds of hours of interviews, documented his process with video and photographs, and archived his private

collection of work. Additionally, the two sites, Magic Gardens Museum and Magic Gardens Studio, are owned by the nonprofit, ensuring they will be protected and preserved in perpetuity.

After over 40 years of creating art on a grand, public scale, Zagar helped shape Philadelphia into a thriving creative community. While the staff and Zagar family are currently observing a period of mourning, operations will continue as normal. A public memorial will be announced at a later date. At Isaiah's request, PMG welcomes donations to the organization's [preservation fund](#) as an expression of sympathy. Follow the latest news and developments at: [www.phillymagicgardens.org](http://www.phillymagicgardens.org).

### **The Life of Isaiah Zagar**

Born in Philadelphia in 1939 and raised in Brooklyn, Isaiah 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 House of Mirrors, Clarence Schmidt's folk art installation in Woodstock, New York, inspiring a lifelong dream of creating his own art environment. Influenced by Schmidt, Pablo Picasso, Jean Dubuffet, Kurt Schwitters, and Antonio Gaudí, Zagar was inspired to include the concepts of untrained artists as manifestations of fine art. In 1963, he met his future wife, Julia, while they were both art students living in New York, and the couple were married three months later.

In the mid-1960s, Isaiah and Julia completed three years of Peace Corps service in Peru, where the couple worked with folk artists in the Puno region near Lake Titicaca. After moving to Philadelphia in 1968, Isaiah's first experiments with mosaics coincided with a turbulent period for his mental health. He used art as therapy and started what would become a decades-long journey to create his own labyrinthine mosaic environment in the city he loved. At the same time, the Zagars opened the [Eye's Gallery](#) on 402 South Street, which featured Latin American folk art collected from their travels as well as Isaiah's iconic mosaic artwork covering the walls and ceilings of the space. Here, Isaiah began his life's work of creating public art and fostering creativity in all its varied forms.

In the 1970s, the Zagars helped spur the revitalization of the South Street area by renovating derelict buildings and adding colorful mosaics on both private and public walls. In collaboration with other artists and activists, they 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 became known as the "South Street Renaissance." After the neighborhood was saved, Isaiah and Julia remained in South Street while he continued to create mosaic murals, resulting in hundreds of public artworks over the next five decades.

In 1986, Isaiah purchased a building at 1003 Kater Street as a studio space (currently Magic Garden Museum's back gallery and office). The adjacent property where the outdoor sculpture garden is now located was formerly an abandoned space owned by a group of businessmen in Boston. Zagar received permission from the owners' agent to beautify the space. In 1991, he began creating his guerrilla art project, mosaicking both vacant lots and the buildings on either side located near his studio on 1020-1022 South Street.

Zagar's creation, the now internationally known Magic Gardens Museum, led to the incorporation of the nonprofit organization **Philadelphia's Magic Gardens** (PMG), which formally purchased the property in October 2004. Today, the nonprofit is responsible for preserving and providing access to his artwork found at his two art environments and throughout Philadelphia. Learn more about the history of PMG [here](#).

In addition to his early work on what would become the Museum, Zagar spent nine years creating a 7,000-square-foot mural called “The Skin of the Bride” on the exterior walls of the Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia’s Old City neighborhood. Completed over the course of nine years, Zagar’s largest public mosaic was considered a cultural landmark and one of his masterpieces due to its vibrant and eclectic use of materials, which reflected his signature style. Learn more about “The Skin of the Bride” [here](#).

In 2023, Isaiah and his wife, Julia, donated a second site, a massive 10,000-square-foot studio space on 1002 Watkins Street now known as **Magic Gardens Studio** (the Studio), to PMG to be preserved and maintained by the organization. Zagar purchased the former autobody garage in 2007 and converted it into a studio and art environment, filling it with floor-to-ceiling mosaics, sculpture gardens, and storage space to archive his artwork. It now represents the largest body of Zagar’s work. The Studio’s incorporation into the PMG umbrella was publicly announced in August 2024 following a series of open houses for the neighborhood, and is now open to the public for limited tours, workshops, and programming on select dates. This, coupled with the PMG’s extensive efforts documenting his work, ensures Zagar’s legacy and work will be preserved for decades to come.

Throughout his life, travel influenced much of Zagar’s work, dating back to the 1960s when he and his wife connected with folk artists during their time as Peace Corps volunteers. The Zagar’s love of folk art continued to grow as they purchased works from around the world for the Eye’s Gallery. If any of the pieces broke or couldn’t be sold, Isaiah would then incorporate them into PMG or in his other public mosaics. The majority of the folk art found at PMG is from Mexico since the Zagars fostered so many friendships there over the past five decades; however, visitors can also find pieces from India, Peru, Ecuador, Morocco, Indonesia, and Guatemala.

Many folk art objects are special collaborative commissions between Zagar and the many international artists he met on his travels. This includes pieces by world-renowned creatives such as Mexican paper-mâché artist Joel Garcia, Mexican popotillo painter Luz Maria Salinas, Oaxacan figurine sculptor Irma Blanco, West Virginian metalwork artist Mark Blumenstein, English brickwork artist Michael Morgan, New Jersey mixed-media artist Ricky Boscarino, Philadelphia light sculpture artist Warren Muller, and many more. These partnerships often continued for years and resulted in the installation of hundreds of unique pieces at the Magic Gardens Museum and the Studio.

Even after he stopped independently developing new projects in 2018, Zagar continued to work with PMG’s preservation team to create new tiles, drawings, and mosaics with their assistance. He leaves behind an indelible legacy, both in Philadelphia and wherever his worldly travels brought him. An important part of that legacy is also how Zagar survived by making artwork through his mental health struggles and later, when he unknowingly had Parkinson’s Disease. PMG is only now beginning to understand the disease as a part of his final years. Even during that difficult time, Isaiah Zagar’s hope was that his work and PMG could connect more and more to the Parkinson’s community.

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#### **About Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens**

Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens (PMG) is a nonprofit organization that preserves and interprets the artwork of Isaiah Zagar and furthers the legacy of Isaiah and his wife, Julia. The organization provides access to Zagar’s two largest immersive mixed media art environments: the Magic Gardens Museum (1020 South Street) and the Magic Gardens Studio (1002 Watkins Street). They are completely covered with mosaics. Isaiah used handmade tiles, bottles, bicycle wheels, mirrors, and international Folk Art to chronicle his life and influences. PMG celebrates art in its many forms through community outreach, public programs, hands-on activities, exhibitions, and tours.