



Philadelphia's  
**MAGIC  
GARDENS**

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August 6, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Emily Smith and I am the Executive Director of Philadelphia's Magic Gardens, an art environment located in Philadelphia in the United States of America. Our founding artist, Isaiah Zagar, spent over a decade working quietly on an abandoned property that he did not own to construct a massive, eccentric masterpiece made out of found objects, bottles, tile, and mirror. Isaiah's work is both intensely personal and also reflects the history of the community which he has lived in for over 50 years. When the absentee landowner found out what Isaiah was doing illegally on his property- he immediately demanded its demolition and insisted it had no value.

The community fought back. They raised the funds to purchase the property, saved it from senseless destruction, and our nonprofit was born. In just 12 years, this small site, which was initially deemed useless by so many people, has grown from a 3 person part-time staff with a \$30,000/year budget to employing 27 individuals with a nearly \$2 million budget. The site is now hailed as one of the finest examples of American folk art and in 2019 we served over 175,000 visitors from all over the world. South Street, where we are located, has enjoyed millions of dollars of economic impact and considers the site not only a cultural and community anchor, but the foundation of the neighborhood's fiscal success.

*Gerry's Pompeii* is on a similar journey and can share the same outcome. Such authentic cultural placemaking cannot be manufactured- Gerry's extremely personal work encapsulates the story of his community, his own incredible obsessions, and is a priceless gem for British folk art. I cannot express how rare it is to have enthusiastic support from the immediate neighborhood *as well as* the broader country for such a unique site. It is clear the community is not only capable, but excited to champion Gerry's legacy.

The largest threat to these beloved site-specific artworks has always been misunderstanding. The future of this space should not be allowed to rest on the shoulders of one or two individuals who do not understand its value to the public. Needless acts of destruction will extinguish the opportunity for Gerry's community to continue where he left off- they too deserve to empower their own story and shape their future.

I have personally witnessed the positive impact, inspiration, and pride that art sites like *Gerry's Pompeii* can create. Philadelphia's Magic Gardens has been championed by our city, visited by Michelle Obama, and has become a leader in the preservation of these types of sites. In a recent

court battle to save another fully-embellished Isaiah Zagar site from destruction, the judge delivered a historic ruling in our favor stating the artwork is “of incalculable value to the general public” and should be saved at all costs.

We could not be thriving without the support of our community leaders who advocated tirelessly that Isaiah’s art environment was an irreplaceable public resource. They kept pressure on their colleagues, supported us publicly, and were meaningful players in communicating with those who could not envision the artwork’s importance. *Gerry’s Pompeii* deserves the same fight- his legacy should be left in the hands of those who loved him, who understand the importance of the work, and who can work together to realize all the potential of this exceptional site.

Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens pledges our support to *Gerry’s Pompeii* and hopes Gerry’s artwork will be returned in situ as it was always meant to be. I implore you as a community leader to use the resources you have available to ensure the safe return and responsible management of this public artwork so it can engage and inspire for generations to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emily Smith  
Executive Director  
Philadelphia’s Magic Gardens

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