

# George Segal

English



**Pérez Art Museum Miami**

# Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael

November 22, 2019–July 6, 2020

## George Segal

b. 1924, New York; d. 2000, South Brunswick, New Jersey

*Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael*, 1987

Painted plaster

107 x 54 x 54 inches

Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami, gift of The George and Helen Segal Foundation

George Segal began making figurative sculptures using plaster casts taken from live models in 1961. *Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael* (1987) belongs to a celebrated series of works created between 1978 and 1987 based on biblical stories found in the book of Genesis.

The installation examines the dilemma faced by the Old Testament patriarch Abraham. Seeking to secure her son Isaac's right of inheritance, Sarah, Abraham's wife, demands that her husband expel his mistress Hagar and their son Ishmael from their home. Upon receiving divine promise of Hagar and Ishmael's safety, Abraham reluctantly banishes them to the desert. Segal's portrayal of this story depicts a diverse range of emotions, from the father's tenderness and melancholy to Sarah's rage and Hagar's resigned acceptance of her and her son's fate.

Segal's hyperrealistic rendering heightens the story's emotional resonances. The life-size components of the installation invite the viewer in as a participant in the drama of this traumatic forced farewell. Unlike many of Segal's plaster sculptures, this work is painted in various tones of a dark and somber grays, which contribute to the overall feeling of sadness conveyed in the piece. On closer inspection, one discovers that these ancient characters are dressed in suggestions of contemporary clothing. This blurring of past and present creates an uncanny sense of familiarity while evoking the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of today. The story that Segal represents here is thought by many to contain the biblical roots of this conflict: per tradition, Jewish people are thought to have descended from Isaac and Arab people from Abraham's exiled son, Ishmael.

A touchstone of PAMM's collection since it was gifted to the museum by the George and Helen Segal Foundation in 2001, *Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael* is on view in this gallery for the first time since its restoration. This restoration was made possible by a generous grant from the Bank of America Art Conservation Project.

## Biography

George Segal received a BA in arts education from New York University in 1949 and an MA in fine arts from Rutgers University, New Jersey, in 1963. He received solo exhibitions at the Princeton University Art Museum, New Jersey; University Art Gallery at the University of Massachusetts, New Bedford; Galerie Thomas Modern, Munich; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach; Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas; Zoellner Arts Center, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; and the Hiroshima Museum of Art, Japan. Segal's work can be found in institutional collections around the world, including those of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Jewish Museum, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Art Institute of Chicago; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Cleveland Museum of Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Portland Museum of Art, Oregon; Seattle Art Museum; and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

*George Segal: Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael* is organized by PAMM Curatorial Assistant Maritza Lacayo. Funding for the conservation of this artwork was generously provided through a grant from the Bank of America Art Conservation Project. Ongoing support for PAMM's project galleries from Knight Foundation is gratefully acknowledged.

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Image: George Segal, *Abraham's Farewell to Ishmael*, 1987. Painted plaster, 107 x 54 x 54 inches. Collection Pérez Art Museum Miami, gift of The George and Helen Segal Foundation. Photo: Oriol Tarridas. © Pérez Art Museum Miami

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