**National Register of Historic Places**

**Texas Historical Commission**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name The Orange Show

other names/site number The Orange Show

**2. Location**

street & number 2401 Munger Street

city Houston

state Texas code TX county Harris code 201 zip code 77023

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

**4. National Park Service Certification**

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property--private

Category of Property—buildings, structures, and objects

Number of Resources within Property--1 property containing multiple component parts

Number of related multiple property listings N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater, museum, and work of art

**Current Functions**

same as 6

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

OTHER: Folk Art Environment

**Materials**

foundation CONCRETE

walls CONCRETE MASONRY UNIT

roof CONCRETE

**Narrative Description**

The Orange Show in Houston, Harris County, Texas, is a Folk Art Environment built between 1968 and 1979 by a retired Houston letter carrier, Jeff D. McKissack (1902-1980), which has attained international recognition as one of the foremost Folk-Outsider-Visionary Art sites in the United States. It is a walled compound containing a series of one-story structures of concrete masonry unit construction (several with roof terraces), exhibition installations, and artifacts, some of which are objects from other sites that McKissack incorporated into his complex, others artifacts that McKissack crafted. The Orange Show occupies what was intended to be two single-house lots in the lower middle-income residential subdivision of Telephone Road Place, Section Two, in the East End of Houston. Jeff McKissack planned and personally built the highly decorated, labyrinthine complex. In the last decade of his life, he came to be recognized as one of Texas' outstanding Folk-Visionary-Outsider artists. McKissack constructed The Orange Show as a monument to the orange with materials and artifacts he collected during his travels through Texas and Arkansas and at demolition sites in Houston. Using skills he had learned during World War II, he welded steel birds and other figures and placed them throughout the show. McKissack was fascinated by nutrition. He believed the orange to be the perfect food, and he constructed installations at The Orange Show demonstrating how the chemical energy of the orange is converted into energy for the human body. But McKissack also included something for everyone, such as a wishing well for romance,

lions named Judy and Mike for children, a museum to demonstrate the importance of diligence and hard work,, and a sideshow for entertainment.

The Orange Show lies on flat terrain in a grid-planned subdivision of one-story wood-frame houses, most built after World War II, four-and-a-half miles southeast of downtown Houston. The Orange Show occupies Lots 1 and 2, two seventy-five-foot by sixty-five-foot lots in Block 14, Section Two of the Telephone Road Place subdivision. The site is bounded on the west by Munger Street and on the north by Sanders Street. Interstate Highway 45, the Gulf Freeway, lies one block north of The Orange Show and is visible from it. Like other house sites on the east side of the 2300 and 2400 blocks of Munger Street, The Orange Show backs directly onto what was originally the Yellow Transit Freight Lines trucking yard at 5300 Gulf Freeway. The 5300 block of Sanders Street dead-ends into the walled truck company compound and is now used as a parking lot. The subdivision was platted in 1938 and has evolved considerably from the original plan of single-family dwellings. It was split in two by construction of the Gulf Freeway in 1947-48 and now consists of housing, as well as industrial uses, although it remains a predominantly single-family residential neighborhood. The Orange Show Foundation owns property in the immediate vicinity that is not included in the nomination: a house at 2402 Munger Street on a lot near on the east side of Munger Street.

The Orange Show is an open-air compound subdivided into quadrants of unequal area. The compound is enclosed by a bounding wall of concrete masonry units approximately seven-and-a-half feet tall. Because it is enclosed, The Orange Show is treated as a single

resource. Each component in the narrative description is identified by a letter on the site diagram. The bounding walls lining the front (west/Munger Street) (A) and side (north/Sanders Street) (B) property lines are decorated on their exterior faces. The east and south bounding walls, which abut adjoining properties, are not decorated externally. The entrance (E), facing Munger Street, is elaborately decorated. Once past the tunnel-like entrance, visitors enter a cross passage oriented north-south and bounded on the west by a roofed pavilion, the Oasis (F, which is topped by an inaccessible terrace, F2), and on the east by a line of displays crafted by McKissack (H). The Ladies' Room (G) in the northwest corner of The Orange Show complex is part of the Oasis building. An obelisk-like monument to the orange (I) is stationed next to one of the original exits (J, which is no longer in use), and marks the point where visitors make a one-hundred-eighty-degree turn, walking behind the row of exhibits that confronted them as they entered. At the center of The Orange Show, the roofed Gift Shop pavilion (K) is located behind the displays, facing the entrance. The Gift Shop is structurally part of the Museum (L), a one-room, one-story, enclosed rectangular building with a rooftop observation deck (L2). The entire entry sequence occupies the northwest quadrant of the Orange Show.

Behind the Museum, in the northeast quadrant of The Orange Show, is a fountain (M) and the Wishing Well (N). The Farm Buggy pavilion (O) and its accessible, second-level observation deck (O2) are between the Wishing Well and the Pond (P). The Farm Buggy pavilion houses the Farm Buggy, a steam engine that McKissack assembled to demonstrate the principles of non-polluting sources of energy. It is not operational.

The Pond (a large, circular pool bounded by a low parapet wall) occupies the southeast quadrant of The Orange Show. A fence with a gated entry separates it from the northeast quadrant. Installed in the Pond is the Tri-States Showboat, a miniature steamboat meant to pivot around a central axis. The steamboat is counterbalanced by the casing for a steam engine apparatus that also rotates about the central axis. It is not operational. Terraced bench seats surround the Pond on its west and south sides (Q and R), indicating its intended function as an amphitheater. Above the benches (R) visitors can also view the Pond from rows of tractor seats stationed in another rooftop observation deck (R2). A stairway at the top of the south benches (Q) provides access to the roof terrace (S), which straddles between the southeast and southwest quadrants of The Orange Show.

Below this terrace, in the southwest quadrant of The Orange Show, is a long open-air passage, oriented north-south, leading from the Gift Shop past a fountain (T) and ending at the Men's Room (U) in the southwest corner of the compound. Across from the fountain is the entrance (V) to the Side Show. The Side Show is a second amphitheater-like walled arena that fills out the southwest quadrant and is composed of tiered seats (W, W2, Y2) and a roofed stage (X) backing up to the men's room. The exit (Y) from The Orange Show is parallel to the entrance and divides the southwest quadrant of the complex from the southeast. The north, Munger Street, street wall bounding the southwest quadrant, where the exit is located, advances closer to Munger Street than the northwest portion of the wall, where the entrance is located.

The Munger front wall (A) is twenty-one feet long. Inscribed on it in half-inch square orange tiles are the words "The Orange Show." The bright orange tile letters stand out in sharp contrast to the white-painted wall. As with most signs in the Show, the inscription is framed by horizontal bands of blue tiles. A shelf of Arkansas rocks rests below the bottom band; above the upper band are orange-red tiles topped by open frieze panels of red metal filigree scrolls. Surmounting the solid back wall of the Oasis pavilion are scrollwork metal railings enframing red, blue, and white metal structures fabricated by McKissack that resemble partially-closed umbrella frames with flags at their summits. A wide raised platform between the sidewalk and the wall, approximately thirty-five by thirteen feet in area, is paved with gray cement tiles framed as large squares by outer rows of darker gray tiles. Two low screen walls faced with green tiles, five feet long and forty-five inches high, laterally frame the entrance platform. To the left of the entrance stands a bright red and white metal umbrella. Behind the umbrella is a triangular flowerbed with a metal fence forming the front wall. In front of the umbrella, the lower platform is also paved with cement tiles in alternating blocks of pink and green. On the right side of the entrance, past the green concrete masonry unit screen wall, are three planters that line the remaining front fifty-two feet of wall enclosing the stage arena in the southwest quadrant of the Show. Metal palm trees with yellow trunks, fabricated by McKissack, are located near the Sanders Street parking lot and the exit (Y).

The north wall (B), facing the Sanders Street parking lot, is seventy feet long. Stationed in front of it at intervals are a series of nine piers, square at the base and surmounted by cylinders that are fourteen inches in diameters and contain planting. At the bottom of the

wall between each pier are planters. Atop the entire wall is an open metal fence painted in bright primary colors.

Visitors enter the Show through two sets of gates from the Munger Street entrance platform, the first a metal fence gate, three and a half feet high, followed by an elaborate seven-foot-high gate constructed by McKissack of notched gears with a railroad spike welded to the bottom center of each gear. To the right of the two gates is a six-foot-four-inch by thirteen-foot raised platform, three feet high, surrounded by walls of varying height, containing the pole that supports the tall "ENTRANCE" sign, fabricated of sheet metal letters with the N's reversed.

Appearing in almost every area of the Show are painted steel wheel rims, some from the nineteenth century, of which McKissack was quite proud. Most of these are used as balustrades. A variety of different wheels bound the entrance and display area (H), the vestibule enclosing a purple and white turnstile, the Oasis balustrades, and the wall behind the display area. Similar wheels and supports also form the balustrade to the exit (J).

Octagonal piers support the sloped roof canopy of orange tiles above the Oasis (F), an eleven foot by seven-and-a-half-foot open-air pavilion where visitors can rest and enjoy a drink of orange juice. The Ladies' Room (G), approximately one hundred eighty-two square feet, occupies the north end of the Oasis pavilion. The elaborate railing visible from Munger Street surmounts the Oasis. McKissack lavished much care on the Ladies'

Room, using eleven different types and colors of tile in numerous patterns to cover the walls and floors.

While sitting in the Oasis, visitors can read the texts explicating the displays (H), located in a courtyard of approximately five hundred fifty-five square feet, in one of the two educational areas created by McKissack. The displays, shaded by a row of orange and white metal umbrellas that line the north-south passage, demonstrate the nutritional value of the orange. Starting closest to the entrance, a "clown who never lies" explains that he feels alert, symbolizing personal responsibility. Next to him is a map with the locations of orange groves in the United States. Additional displays include a model, perhaps recreating in colorful miniature the refineries that surround Houston. The displays tell the reader that the sea once covered the land where oranges grow and that plants are chemical converters that take nutrients from the ground to feed the body, another chemical converter. A twenty-nine-foot-long balustrade, six-and-a-half feet high, built of wheels on a base of Arkansas stone, backs the display area. On either end of the wall behind the displays are two three-and-a-half-foot square piers that McKissack decorated with an assortment of tiles including panels of multicolored mosaic squares.

At the north end of the display passage, McKissack placed a three-and-half-foot square concrete obelisk, supported on a brick base. A bronze plaque dedicates the monument to the orange growers of America (I). Next to the monument is the beginning of a fifty-three-foot long passage, perpendicular to the path visitors have followed, leading to an exit (J) that is not used. Since McKissack wanted to make sure that visitors left with the

correct message, he emblazoned the wall of this exit with the words "Be Smart – Drink Fresh Orange Juice" inscribed in tiles.

The seventy-seven square foot, roofed Gift Shop pavilion (K), projecting from the southwest corner of the Museum, faces the back of the displays and is visible from the entry to The Orange Show. Set into the walls on either side of the Gift Shop are tiles showing automobiles from 1877 to 1903. The Orange Show's second major educational area is the Museum (L), which is entered near its northwest corner through a tile-encrusted door next to the Gift Shop. Possibly the oldest wheel rims at the Show are the two inside the Museum, painted yellow and converted to light fixtures suspended from a ceiling installed during the restoration of 1988. The ceiling is supported on steel columns installed next to the wall.

Within the twelve by thirty-two-and-a-half foot Museum, McKissack again expounded on the virtues of the orange and provided examples of the benefits of hard work and persistence. A central north-south aisle passes from the entrance near the northwest corner to the exit, near the southeast corner, between three-foot tall platforms that contain an assortment of objects; many arranged to enact morality tableaus. A happy ceramic frog sits atop a butter churn, under a sign that recounts the story of the two frogs that fell into the churn. One gave up and drowned. The other continued to kick until he had created a cake of butter that saved his life. Next to the frog is a bride, a symbol of purity, standing under a sign that reads, "The orange is absolutely pure. It grows right out of the bloom – protected by the rind." Santa's son, standing next to the bride, declares his

intention of planting an orange grove in McAllen TX so that he can bring oranges to everyone at Christmas. The Indian versus white man tableau next to Santa is composed of a mannequin in polyester trousers standing near a wooden Indian in front of his teepee. Between them, a huge stuffed bear waits quietly. The Indian's dilemma is his suffering at the hands of the "white man" and the bear. His salvation, due to the power of the orange, is explained on the wall above. The exit door at the end of the aisle on the east interior wall of the Museum, is guarded by a smiling steel scarecrow wearing a jaunty blue hat. *A Fortune to Share* by Vass Young explains that when the occasional "wise old bird" realizes that the scarecrow is not a threat, the bird can eat his fill and use the scarecrow as a perch. The scarecrow symbolizes the fears of life that can be overcome once understood. The small bird roosting in the center of the blue hat has figured out that the scarecrow is harmless.

Across the aisle is a collection of tools that expand an analogy McKissack began in his book *How You Can Live 100 Years...and Still Be Spry.* On the page titled "Exercise Means Oxygen," in which the benefits of exercise are promoted, McKissack ends with a quotation from Longfellow's *The Village Blacksmith* that describes the roar of the smith's bellows, implying that we can all have the smith's strength if we only exercise.[1] The tools displayed in the Museum—plows, an anvil on a stump, a grinding wheel, a portable forge, and several lanterns—were commonly used for laborious physical tasks during McKissack's childhood and could have been made or used by a blacksmith. Above the collection are two signs. One, again a quotation from *The Village Blacksmith*, emphasizes the blacksmith's strength. On the second sign we learn the source of that

strength: "The late John Brown, the village blacksmith, 1890-1975, said 'I love oranges. They help make me strong and healthy...delicious and refreshing, too.'" Beyond the collection of tools is the orange-loving Woodsman mannequin standing below two deer heads mounted on the wall. Completing the grouping is a female mannequin dressed in a green pantsuit. Scattered around her matching green shoes are small animal yard decorations and a ceramic piggy bank. The last items on this side of the Museum are two plastic orange trees.

Outside the back door of the Museum, in the northeast quadrant of The Orange Show, is a frog fountain, a row of eight tractor seats, and tile-lettered admonitions to "Be Careful," "Be Alert," and "Watch Your Step" on the walls of the Museum alongside an offset, open-air, dog-leg stair that rises along the north end of the Museum and leads to its roof deck. A small fountain (M) is adjacent to the Wishing Well (N), a simple, circular brick structure, approximately four-foot in diameter and topped by a canopy of green corrugated sheet steel. The white walls surrounding the Wishing Well in the northeast corner of The Orange Show are decorated with alternating red and green tile hearts, each framed by the contrasting color in delicate shamrock tiles. The south wall bears the identifying tile words "Wishing Well."

Between the east wall of the Museum and the rear wall of the Orange Show is an exposed steam engine mechanism, the Farm Buggy (O), like those McKissack admired during his childhood. The Farm Buggy is housed within a nine-and-a-half foot wide by twenty-six-foot long roofed pavilion. Terraced observation decks top both the Farm Buggy pavilion

and the Museum building. The terrace deck above the Museum (L2) and the terrace deck above the Farm Buggy pavilion (O2) are reached by separate runs of open-air stairs on the north ends of the Museum and pavilion. These terraces provide views of the metal whirligigs atop walls that McKissack fabricated (C) and (D) and they are railed with more wheels. A two-foot diameter smokestack was installed to exhaust the Farm Buggy's steam engine. It is faced with colored tiles. A balustrade of red wheels framed between yellow and white steel rails surrounds a second, smaller, cherry red steam engine. This second engine sits directly above the Farm Buggy. At the south end of the roof deck above the Farm Buggy are eight yellow and orange tractor seats in two equal rows from which visitors can watch programs in the Pond arena below. Above the seats on the outer wall is a purple and white windmill-like anemometer that McKissack fabricated.

From atop a pair of square pedestals Mike and Judy, two stern stone lions, guard the entrance to the arena in the southeast quadrant of The Orange Show. This contains the twenty-seven-foot diameter, thirty-four-inch high Pond. On the inside face of the portion of the east-bounding wall, behind the Pond, is a map of the places McKissack traveled while he trucked oranges during the Depression. Beyond the map is a door labeled "Captain's Quarters." A silver eagle looks down from his perch above the door. The door is set into the back bounding wall and leads outside the Show. The sides of the Pond, a symbolic Chattahoochee River, are labeled with the river's four major steamboat stops in three states: Columbus, Georgia; Eufaula, Alabama; Fort Gaines, Georgia; Apalachicola, Florida. Within the Pond is the thirteen-foot long, five-foot wide Tri-

States Showboat, once powered by a third steam engine that rotated in tandem with the boat about a axis installed at the center of the Pond. Bench seats (Q and R) on the south and west sides of the amphitheater-like arena, with front top edges of terrazzo, provide clear views for any programs taking place in the Pond. A roof deck (R2), approximately three hundred seven square feet, holds forty-three orange, lavender, white and red tractor seats. The deck is rimmed with yellow, red, white and lavender wheels inset in the rails. Past the left side of the tractor seats is a landing (S) that overlooks Munger Street.

As construction of The Orange Show was nearing completion in the late 1970s, McKissack decided to add live entertainment. He came up with the idea of a sideshow performance area, like those of old time circuses. Access to the Side Show (W), in the southwest quadrant of The Orange Show, is past another fountain (T), in which a statue of a child and dog huddling under an umbrella is stationed. This forty-foot long roofed passage leads, on a north-south coordinate, to the Men's Room (U) in the southwest corner of The Orange Show and a storage room. This passage is intersected by two steps that lead visitors in a reverse direction up to an elegant foyer of red and white panels set with black and beige tiles and fitted with decorative iron gates. Three curved steps lead to the entry landing for the audience seating area in the Side Show. Three stepped sets of bench seats, also with terrazzo on the front edge, are set directly in front of the three hundred three square foot stage, which is roofed and walled on three sides. The bench seats face south, the stage faces north. The stage is decorated with large red hearts framed in shamrock tiles. Two stairs at the entrance landing give access to additional roof decks W2 (approximately eighty-eight feet square holding eleven tractor seats) and

Y2 (eight feet by twenty-three feet containing thirty-two tractor seats). Many visitors have become confused by the fact that the balcony seats (W2) seem to be connected to the seats facing the Pond (R2). In trying to pass from one section to another, they discover that a rail of wheels separates the two areas. The exit (Y) is at the west end of the east-west passage between the Gift Shop and the Side Show.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria** B, C

**Criteria Considerations** G

**Areas of Significance** ART

**Period of Significance** 1968-79

**Significant Dates** 1979

**Significant Person** McKissack, Jeff D.

**Architect/Builder** McKissack, Jeff D., designer and builder

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

The Orange Show, completed in 1979, is named for the citrus fruit, which the creator of The Orange Show, Jeff McKissack, believed to be the perfect source of energy for human beings. The Orange Show is of exceptional national importance because it embodies a complex of tangible and intangible phenomena associated, at an extremely high level of achievement, with certain trends in twentieth-century American Folk Art variously known as Outsider Art and Visionary Art. The Orange Show possesses exceptional value and quality in interpreting the twentieth-century Folk Art heritage of the United States

and a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Contextually, it relates to the influence of twentieth-century Folk Art in the United States and to the national context of Folk Art in the United States. The Orange Show meets Criterion B, exceptionally significant at a national level in the area of Art for its association with Jeff McKissack, one of the foremost American visionary folk artists of the twentieth century. It meets Criterion C in the area of Art as the work of McKissack. It is affected by Criteria Consideration G because it has achieved significance within the last fifty years.

**Justification for Exceptional National Significance**

The Orange Show can be determined to be of exceptional national significance because it represents attitudes and practices and is associated with an individual who was a primary contributor to the cultural phenomenon of the Outsider-Visionary strain of twentieth-century American Folk Art. The Orange Show's exceptional national significance can be evaluated in the context of the "garden of revelation," as art historian John Beardsley has characterized the Folk-Outsider-Visionary Art environment, a phenomenon that first came to be appreciated and evaluated in the United States as a branch of art production in the 1970s. The Orange Show can be evaluated in the context of twentieth-century American Folk-Outsider-Visionary Art because it has achieved critical recognition as a prime example of the "garden of revelation" Folk Art environment. The Orange Show embodies a set of tangible and intangible historical associations that represent the obscure and eccentric nature of the garden of revelation and bespeak its relationship with American artistic culture of the 1970s. Its exceptional national significance is further

attested by the role that its conservator since 1981, the Orange Show Foundation, has come to play nationally in the promotion of Outsider-Visionary Art through its preservation of The Orange Show as well as programs, publications, and tours that have contributed to the identification and preservation of other significant Outsider Art environments, the development of new genres of Outsider Art, such as the Art Car, and the formation of an international network of institutions for the appreciation and understanding of Outsider-Visionary Art.

The time period within which The Orange Show is to be evaluated lies principally within the decade of the1970s. It is therefore affected by Criteria Consideration G. Documentation justifying determination of The Orange Show's exceptional national importance resides in a primary work of scholarly research: *Gardens of Revelation: Environments by Visionary Artists* by John Beardsley (1995). It is supported by additional scholarly texts: *Spirited Journeys: Self-Taught Texas Artists of the Twentieth* Century by Lynn Adele (1997), *Raw Creation: Outsider Art and Beyond* by John Maizels (1996), *Self-Made Worlds: Visionary Folk Environments* by Roger Manley and Mark Sloan (1997), and *Fantasy Worlds* by Deidi von Schaewen and John Maizels (1999). An important source of information about the complex is a descriptive article based on an interview with McKissack by the Houston theologian William Martin "What's Red, White, and Blue...and Orange All Over?" published in *Texas Monthly* in October 1977. The consistent representation of The Orange Show in international surveys of Folk-Outsider-Visionary Art environments and the prominence it is accorded in Beardsley's *Gardens of Revelation*, the primary work of art historical scholarship and interpretation

on this artistic genre, justify the determination of its exceptional national significance, achieved within the last fifty years.

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**Founding of the Community**

The Orange Show was built in Houston, Texas, a city popularly known for its new wealth, uninhibited entrepreneurialism, rejection of city planning, and cultural bravado. During the decade of the 1960s, when Jeff McKissack began construction of The Orange Show, Houston became home to the Manned Spacecraft Center of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Apollo Mission Control Center and Space Environment Simulation Lab, NHL, 1985; Saturn V Launch Vehicle, NHL, 2003), the world's first air-conditioned football and baseball stadium, the Astrodome (1965), and a host of tall downtown office buildings whose striking architectural modernity appeared to symbolize the city's energy and enthusiasm for the new. During the 1970s and early 1980s, the city's energy economy peaked as a result of high energy prices following the Arab oil embargo, which led to renewed domestic oil and gas exploration. Beneath the surface of this expansionary cycle, Houston had high crime and murder rates, low levels of public service, and a tradition of racial inequality stemming from its history as a Southern city (McComb: 1969, 167-257). Yet Houston also possessed an unusual cultural scene, which profited from the presence of the French émigrés, collectors, and patrons Dominique Schlumberger and John de Menil (Rothko Chapel, NRHP 2001) during the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Dominique and John de Menil made connections between the international world of modern art, with which they were intensively involved from the 1940s through John de Menil's death in 1973 and Dominique de Menil's death

in 1997, and local artists and collectors. As immigrants, they were especially fascinated by the vernacular cultures of Houston and they stimulated local interest in artistic practices that, from a high art perspective, seemed marginal, eccentric, and bizarre. In the 1960s and '70s the Menils were joined in appreciation of these phenomena by such figures as the art curators Helen Winkler (Fosdick), Paul Winkler, and James Harithas, the latter director of Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum from 1974 to 1978, and the Houston collector and patron Marilyn Oshman (Lubetkin), president of the board of trustees of the Contemporary Arts Museum from 1972 to 1978. The Orange Show embodies the energy of Houston in the 1960s and 1970s in an unusual vernacular vein. Jeff McKissack's dexterity as a welder bespeaks the skilled working class culture of oil industry tool making, which was at its height in Houston during the years that McKissack built The Orange Show. The "discovery" of McKissack and his identification as an artist (rather than an obscure eccentric) in 1975 resulted from James Harithas's enthusiasm for and curiosity about parts of Houston not normally associated with the world of art. In this context, The Orange Show makes connections between high culture and the blue-collar world of the East End. In the 1970s these connections were reinforced by the popular celebrity of the Gilley's dance club in nearby Pasadena TX (the setting for James Bridges's film *Urban Cowboy* of 1980), the construction of *The Indeterminate Façade* of 1975 by the New York artists collective SITE at a Best Products Company showroom near Almeda Mall, midway between The Orange Show and the Manned Spacecraft Center, and the florescence of the University of Houston's studio art program at the Lawndale Annex, a former Schlumberger warehouse in the East End, after 1979.

purchased a lot next to his mother's home and built a small concrete block house with a detached brick garage that he rented out.[5]

McKissack had a reputation as a likeable but unusual man. His outgoing personality and uncommon interests caused conflict within his family.[6] McKissack moved to Jacksonville FL in the early 1940s. After the United States entered World War II, he joined the U.S. Army Air Corps on 29 October 1942, but deciding it was a young man's war he applied for and was granted an honorable discharge on 22 March 1943. After taking a course on welding, McKissack worked in defense industries as a welder building Liberty ships. McKissack worked for six years at the St. John's River Shipbuilding Company in Jacksonville. At the end of the war he used his G.I. Bill funds to take yet another class and obtained a beautician's license. While in Florida McKissack made his only proposal of marriage to a woman who turned him down.[7] He also built a second concrete block house that contained features, such as concrete walks surrounded by quarry tile, that he would later incorporate into The Orange Show.

The death of McKissack's mother on 15 September 1948 affected him deeply. Adding to his stress were difficulties with his siblings. He began to display increasingly erratic behavior. Motivated either by concern or the desire to eliminate his often-embarrassing behavior, his sisters had him committed to a mental institution for evaluation.[8] Released after a short time, McKissack found life in Fort Gaines intolerable. He returned to Florida and arranged the sale of his house and its furniture. When it sold on 21 July 1950, he was ready to begin a new life.[9]

Lured by a potential "land of opportunity," McKissack chose Houston TX for his new home in 1950, probably working for a short while as a produce truck driver. He joined the U. S. Post Office in 1952, carrying special delivery mail on a route that covered about one-third of downtown Houston. His route lasted through the 1960s and during that time he watched as building after building was razed and replaced by soaring skyscrapers. When he first moved to Houston, McKissack rented rooms in a downtown hotel but, dissatisfied there, moved to a small apartment on Munger Street in the East End. On 7 January 1952 he purchased the lot at 2406 Munger and began building another concrete block house that went through several evolutions before he was satisfied with it. On 12 December 1955 he bought property across the street and it was on these two lots that he built The Orange Show.

In 1960, McKissack wrote and published the book *How You Can Live 100 Years...and Still be Spry* in which he described himself as the proprietor of the American Tree Nursery, builder, traveler and adventurer. The book is full of information McKissack absorbed from scouring nutrition guides. Like The Orange Show itself, each page of his book contains supporting evidence in the form of a proverb, poem, or bit of wisdom. The Orange Show is in many respects a physical representation of the beliefs inscribed in this book. Chapters in the book describe how the body processes food while a chemical plant model in the Show demonstrates that the body is a chemical converter transforming nutrients in to energy. McKissack proudly stated that he always followed and would

continue to follow the advice outlined in the book and that one of his goals was to be the oldest man who ever lived in Houston.

During the years he constructed the Show, Houston reporters, including radio reporter Alvin Van Black, *Houston Chronicle* reporters Ann Holmes and Patricia Johnson, and *Houston Post* reporter Mimi Crossley, interviewed McKissack. The most widely circulated article about McKissack was written by William Martin, professor of sociology at Rice University, in *Texas Monthly* in 1977. McKissack believed that thousands of people would visit The Orange Show every year. After it opened, the anticipated thousands did not appear and he became a sad, subdued man. On 20 January 1980, he died of a stroke following a heart attack he suffered in late 1979. Because of his often-expressed abhorrence of burial, his family had him cremated and a portion of his ashes was scattered at The Orange Show.

Jeff McKissack corresponds to the outsider artist persona described by Beardsley. He largely built The Orange Show by himself, drawing on his skills as a welder, block-layer, and tile setter. The intensity of McKissack's vision of what he described as "orange power" was repeatedly noted by interviewers in the 1970s, as was his sense of humor and his optimistic prediction that The Orange Show would be received with exceptional enthusiasm once it opened. In its museum installations and especially in its tile-lettered mottoes and signs, The Orange Show preserves McKissack's idiosyncratic, eccentric, and confident philosophy of living intelligently and well. His conception of The Orange Show as educating its public through a combination of didactic displays and popular

entertainment (the latter never realized during his life, despite the Show's two amphitheaters) led reporters in the 1970s to consistently describe The Orange Show as an amusement park. Resistance to interpreting The Orange Show as art is especially evident in a cover story by the cultural critic Ann Holmes in the *Houston Chronicle's* Sunday magazine in 1978, in which her descriptive prose betrays her ambivalence about the Show, despite, as she makes clear, the exuberant endorsement of James Harithas.

The Orange Show is a primary site for understanding McKissack's exceptional significance as an Outsider artist. He conceptually shaped its interior landscape; a labyrinthine network of open-air passages connecting roofed interiors, walled open-air amphitheaters, and roof terraces, then personally constructed and outfitted these spaces. McKissack fabricated the brightly painted steel birds, trees, umbrella frames, whirligigs, and anemometers with which he decorated The Orange Show. He arranged and installed such found elements as the brightly painted tractor seats and wheel rims that are characteristic features of The Orange Show. He conceived and executed the numerous tile-set inscriptions on walls and piers that alert, orient, and admonish visitors. He is responsible for fabricating the complex steam-driven mechanisms of the Farm Buggy and Tri-States Showboat. McKissack conceived the complex spaces, artifacts, and mechanisms of The Orange Show to materialize and represent his philosophy of living well. As Beardsley indicates is often true of gardens of revelation, The Orange Show was a consuming work. Apart from occasional pieces, such as steel birds commissioned by collectors, it was Jeff McKissack's only major work.

**Brief Chronological History of the Property**

Jeff McKissack bought the lot on which he built The Orange Show on 12 December 1955. In January 1952 he had acquired a lot at 2406 Munger, where he built a concrete masonry unit house for himself that was demolished after his death in 1980. The construction of Houston's first freeway, the Gulf Freeway (Interstate 45) between Houston and Galveston in 1946-52, affected the Telephone Road Place subdivision, where The Orange Show lies, by severing the southern sector of the neighborhood from the older, northern portion. Construction of the first phase of the freeway, which was completed in 1948, affected land use adjacent to the three-block wide, two-block long subdivision as well. In 1950-53 the Schlumberger Well Surveying Corporation constructed its headquarters and research center on a thirty-six acre tract at 5000 Gulf Freeway that forms the west edge of the subdivision. The east edge was developed in 1953-54 with the multi-acre trucking terminal yard of Yellow Transit Freight Lines at 5300 Gulf Freeway, isolating the narrow subdivision between the freeway and these large, fenced, non-residential tracts.

McKissack began construction on a foundation at 2401 Munger Street in 1956, when he secured a building permit for a beauty salon. The first time 2401 Munger Street is listed in the Houston City Directory is the 1963 edition, when it was the site of the American Tree Nursery and Worm Ranch, which McKissack operated until 1968. McKissack designed and constructed the high planters that now surround The Orange Show for the nursery so that customers would not have to bend low. Eventually, he modified his permit by writing on the bottom: "Had a permit to build a beauty salon and many closed

down. Had a better idea----THE ORANGE SHOW." On May 5, 1969 he obtained a Certificate of Operation under Assumed Name of The Orange Show. In the Martin *Texas Monthly* interview of 1977, McKissack stated that he began working in earnest on The Orange Show in 1968, the year after he retired from the U.S. Post Office, but that it took him two years to formulate the conceptual design of the complex. In 1977 Martin described the complex as nearly completed. McKissack opened The Orange Show on 9 May 1979.

After McKissack's death in January 1980, Marilyn Oshman organized The Orange Show Foundation, which solicited funds to buy The Orange Show from his nephew Alex Hurst, conserve the site, and open it to the public. Between September 1981 and September 1982 extensive conservation work was carried out under the direction of Barry Moore FAIA and Patrick Moore AIA of Barry Moore Architects of Houston. Because the site is fragile, the Orange Show Foundation has adhered to a conservation plan to ensure the Show's integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. In 1983, the Orange Show Foundation began to assemble a professional staff. In 1989, the foundation purchased 2402 Munger, which is utilized as the office. The Orange Show Foundation has come to be recognized as one of the major centers for the study, identification, preservation, appreciation, and diffusion of knowledge about Folk-Outsider-Visionary Art and environments in the United States.

**Thematic Context: Folk Art**

The primary context for evaluating the exceptional national significance of The Orange Show is that of twentieth-century American Folk Art. The Orange Show represents a twentieth-century type of Folk Art—"Outsider Art" or "Visionary Art"—that came to be recognized in the 1960s and '70s as challenging prior definitions of Folk Art. In his entry on "Folk Art" in the *Dictionary of Art*, James Ayres defines the term to encompass "arts that exist outside the received canons of taste established by or on behalf of the leaders of a given society....Folk art exists in clearly defined geographical regions among peoples with shared characteristics such as language or religion. Tradition usually provides some component, not only in terms of content, subject-matter, or use but also in structure, craft techniques, tools, and materials." Ayres notes that this understanding, premised on pre-industrial, communal cultural models, does not adequately describe the production of "outsider art," which he associates with individuals "confined within their own preoccupations, some of whom have been or are sufficiently obsessional to have been confined in mental institutions" (1996: vol. 11, 239-241).

Histories of Outsider Art identify two important progenitors: the German doctor Hans Prinzhorn, who in 1922 published a book illustrating artwork produced by patients in German mental institutions, and the French modern artist Jean Dubuffet, who in the mid-1940s began to collect and promote what he called "*art brut*" (literally: raw art). Unlike "traditional" folk artists, Outsider artists tend not to have had a background in skilled artifact production. John Beardsley, in *Gardens of Revelation*, traces the recognition and reception of Outsider Art as "art" by the American art world to a series of publications and exhibitions of the late 1960s and the 1970s, the period in which Jeff McKissack built

The Orange Show. The artist Gregg N. Blasdel's documentary photo essay "Grass-Roots Artists," published in *Art in America* in 1968, recorded fifteen sites, most of them in Kansas and Wisconsin and most constructed by creators who were still living. Roger Cardinal's book *Outsider Art* (1972) and Michel Thévoz's *Art Brut* (1975) were reinforced by the exhibitions *Naïves and Visionaries* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (1974) and *An Art Without Precedent or Tradition* at the Hayward Gallery in London (1979).

Blasdel's essay focused not on two-dimensional artwork but constructed environments. The Watts Towers in Los Angeles, built between 1921 and 1954 by the Italian immigrant Sam Rodia, has come to be considered the American archetype of the Outsider Art environment because of its scale and the publicity it attracted beginning in the late 1950s when the City of Los Angeles sought to demolish it as a nuisance. A French example from the turn of the twentieth century, the Palais Idéal of another letter carrier, Ferdinand Cheval, in Hauterives, also attracted international publicity through the efforts of Max Ernst and other surrealists, who championed it. The Watts Towers and the Palais Idéal came to function as standard points of critical reference for interpreting other Folk Art environment because of their homemade construction, imposing size, but obscure and personal symbolism.

Beardsley's survey and interpretation focus on Outsider Art environments in an international context. Beardsley characterizes these sites as "handmade environments that express a personal moral or religious vision typically fabricated of found material by

people who aren't necessarily identified by themselves or by others as artists. These environments...often have an obsessive character and are the result of many years of work...Part architecture, part sculpture, part landscape, visionary environments seem insistently and purposefully to defy the usual categories of artistic practice" (1995: 7-8). Among the major U.S. sites surveyed by Beardsley that display affinities with The Orange Show are Cabin Home and the Garden of Eden in Lucas KS by S. P. Dinsmoor (1910s-20s) and the Watts Towers by Rodia. Other analogous sites were constructed during the same time span that McKissack worked on The Orange Show: Fred Smith's Wisconsin Concrete Park in Phillips WI (1950-64), Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village in Simi Valley CA (1950s-'60s), St. EOM's Land of Pasaquan in Buena Vista GA (1960s-'70s), Howard Finster's Paradise Garden in Summerville GA (1960s-'70s), and Rolling Mountain Thunder's Thunder Mountain Monument in Imlay NV (1969-89). Since the late 1970s a number of these sites have been listed in the National Register: Watts Towers (1977; NHL 1990), the Garden of Eden (1977), the Shaffer Hotel and Rancho Bonito in Mountainair NM (1978), Ave Maria Grotto in Cullman AL (1989), Desert View Tower in Ocotillo CA (1980), and Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village (1996).

Outsider Art developed a significant constituency in the 1980s and '90s. The programs of The Orange Show Foundation indicate the expansion of an audience for this twentieth-century variant of Folk Art. Since the early 1980s members and staff of the foundation have identified more than fifty additional Outsider environments in Houston, most of them much smaller in scale and even more fragile than The Orange Show. John Milkovisch's Beer Can House and Cleveland Turner's Flower Man installation are the

two best-known Houston sites. The foundation rescued the artifacts with which Ida Kingsbury had decorated her front yard in Pasadena TX for nearly twenty years prior to her death in 1990 and they likewise retrieved the work of Bob Harper, the Fan Man, from his rented homesite after his death in 1995. In 2000 the Orange Show Foundation acquired the Beer Can House to ensure its preservation. Since 1988 the Orange Show Foundation has organized the annual Art Car Parade, which led to the opening of the Art Car Museum, founded by Ann and James Harithas, in Houston in 1998. The foundation sponsors local, regional, and national tours of folk art environments and related sites and maintains the largest archive on Folk Art in the southwestern US.

**The Orange Show meets Criterion B**, exceptionally significant at a national level in the area of Art for its association with Jeff McKissack, one of the most significant American Outsider artists of the 1970s.

**Criterion B: Jeff McKissack** Jefferson Davis McKissack (1902-1980) was nationally significant in the history of twentieth-century American Folk Art as an Outsider artist and the creator of The Orange Show. The Orange Show is a primary site for understanding and appreciating McKissack's exceptional significance as a Folk-Outsider-Visionary artist because it is a setting shaped by him to express a personal vision of how humankind benefits from the energy delivered by nature as embodied in the orange.

Jeff D. McKissack was born in Fort Gaines, Georgia on 28 January 1902. McKissack's family operated a large general merchandise store where McKissack worked as a boy.

Fort Gaines, one of Georgia's oldest towns, looks down on the Chattahoochee River from a tall bluff. The river was a major influence on McKissack's childhood and youth. As a child the steamboats propelled by paddle wheels fascinated him. As a young man, he went to the riverboat landing to attend dances on the brightly lit boats.[3] During the summer of 1918 McKissack began what would become a life-long habit, traveling with his mother and sisters to Hot Springs AR to bathe in and absorb the spring's therapeutic properties. After McKissack moved to Texas, this yearly trek to Arkansas provided him with opportunities to visit antique shops and junk yards along the way, where he collected many of the objects used to construct The Orange Show.

McKissack attended Mercer College in Macon, Georgia, graduating in 1925 with a bachelor's degree in commerce. He moved to New York in 1926 and obtained a position in a Wall Street bank. At the same time, he continued his studies in graduate school at Columbia University, but did not graduate. In 1929, national magazines carried Thomas A. Edison's advertisements for recruitment tests. McKissack applied and failed his test. When Edison told him that he would never amount to anything, McKissack seems to have become dejected, although he later told visitors to The Orange Show that some of his inspiration came from Edison. McKissack's father died in 1929 and for the next few years he wandered from job to job, returning to Fort Gaines in the early 1930s. McKissack began trucking oranges and produce from Florida to the Atlanta farmers' markets, driving different routes to sight-see and look for a machine to take juice out of oranges. In 1934, he opened a fruit store and café in Fort Gaines.[4] In 1939 McKissack

Beardsley compares aspects of the Orange Show to Howard Finster's Paradise Garden and Herman Rusch's Prairie Moon Museum and Garden (1960s-'70s) in Cochrane WI, as well as Harry Andrews's Chateau La Roche in Loveland OH (begun 1929, 1955-81) and Edward Leedskalnin's Rock Castle Park/Coral Castle in Homestead FL (1936-51). Speaking collectively of The Orange Show and the group of sites with which he linked it, Beardsley wrote: "these are all profoundly symbolic spaces in which their creators sought refuge from the world, creating a safe place in which to articulate idiosyncratic variations on political or moral philosophy, notions of wholesome living, or ideas about love" (1995: 13).

As the only public site conceived, constructed, and outfitted by Jeff McKissack, The Orange Show is the primary site for understanding and appreciating his convictions, intentions, and working methods. It is the primary site for understanding how McKissack came to be accepted as an artist rather than a mentally aberrant obsessive-compulsive, and how his reception as an artist portended broad patterns of change in American art during the 1970s. The Orange Show spatially conserves Jeff McKissack's effort to recover a sense of wholeness and well-being in life and share this understanding with a broad public.

**The Orange Show meets Criterion C**, exceptionally significant at a national level in the area of Art as the work of Jeff McKissack, because it represents the work of an artistic master, possesses high artistic values, and embodies distinctive characteristics of

American Folk-Outsider-Visionary Art of the 1970s exceptionally valuable for a study of the style, period, and methods of making.

**Criterion C: Art** The Orange Show is exceptionally significant at a national level in the area of art because it represents the works of a master of twentieth-century American Folk Art, Jeff McKissack, possesses high artistic values, and embodies distinctive characteristics of American Folk-Outsider-Visionary Art of the 1960s and '70s that make it exceptionally valuable for the study of this artistic movement, this period in American art history, and methods of its making.

The Orange Show embodies distinctive characteristics of American Folk Art of the 1960s and '70s. It is a primary site for the study of the Outsider Art movement and corresponds typologically to the context of the Outsider-Visionary environment outlined by Beardsley. Its single-minded dedication to the orange and McKissack's devotion to the orange as a privileged transmitter of nature's energy to humankind represent the idiosyncratic personal vision that seems to motivate Outsider artists to construct such environments. McKissack's concept of orange power gives The Orange Show thematic coherence. The Orange Show is a work of architecture: a constructed landscape containing buildings and structures conceived and built by McKissack. It contains multiple artifacts that McKissack salvaged from demolition sites and antique, junk, and surplus material stores, combined with welded steel artifacts that McKissack made. It contains such decorative details as tile-work displays and railings that McKissack fabricated for didactic and practical purposes, further reinforcing the conceptual and

thematic coherence of the site. It is the combination of "vision"—the conceptual planning of a program of exhibitions and performances—and systematic realization through the construction of a network of spaces and contributing details that reinforce and lend coherence to the site's theme and meaning that led art curators and artists in the 1970s to identify sites such as The Orange Show as works of art and their creators as artists.

In its methods of making, The Orange Show is an exceptionally valuable primary site for studying the connections between an artwork and its local subculture, the level of cultural connection at which outsider artists tend to be most intensely involved. The making of The Orange Show relied on craft skills—building construction, steel welding—that were pertinent to the economy of Houston in the 1960s, '70s, and early '80s. Jeff McKissack incorporated explicit thematic references to refining and commercial navigation in The Orange Show, a reflection of the economic importance of petrochemical refining and commercial navigation to Houston. McKissack's version was considerably more benign than the nearby refineries of the Houston Ship Channel, a poignant one-man plea for respecting rather than violating nature. The materials that dominate The Orange Show—reinforced concrete, concrete masonry units, cement tile, welded and molded steel—are a vernacular reflection of the materials and labor processes involved in constructing and maintaining the infrastructure that supported Houston's industrial and transportation economy in the late twentieth century.

The Orange Show possesses characteristics that make it an exceptionally valuable primary site for studying the relationship between Outsider Art and mainstream art practices during this period in American art history. In the 1970s Outsider Art was recognized by mainstream American art culture as a legitimate category of art production. The Orange Show's enthusiastic reception by Houston's art vanguard in the 1970s represents at a local level the opening-out of the American art world during the 1960s and '70s to art-making that occurred beyond the institutional confines of the academy, the museum, and the commercial gallery. The "discovery" of Jeff McKissack as an artist was paralleled in the 1970s by the Houston art world's "discovery" of the work carried out since 1950 by the art department at Texas Southern University, the historically African-American public university in Houston, and of its foremost faculty members, the painter John Biggers and the sculptor Carroll Simms. The search for alternatives to existing institutional patterns was materialized in Dominique and John de Menil's construction in 1969 of a metal-surfaced shed, the Art Barn, as a gallery and studio for the Institute for the Arts at Rice University, where unconventional directions in art could be explored in the same place that international art exhibitions were organized. Simultaneously, the Menils supported establishment of the Black Art Center in the abandoned Deluxe Theater on Lyons Avenue in Houston's predominantly African-American Fifth Ward in 1971 in a further effort to support art-making and constitute a public for art outside the predominantly Anglo-American, upper-middle class milieu of Houston's art world. The Orange Show derives significance from its participation in these broad patterns of late twentieth-century cultural history as the foremost example of a Folk Art garden of revelation in Houston and Texas.

In this cultural context James Harithas was a key figure nationally in expanding perceptions of what constituted art in the 1960s and '70s. During his tenure as director of the Contemporary Arts Museum, Harithas avidly promoted the national (and, more important, regional and local) reception of artists working in Texas. The take-off of the studio art program at the University of Houston--associated with the artists James Surls, John Alexander, Gael Stack, Derek Boshier, Patricia González, Manual, George Krause, and the program's most celebrated graduate, Julian Schnabel—which was located in an ex-Schlumberger warehouse on Lawndale Avenue in the East End of Houston from 1979 until 1990, resulted in the coalescence of what the curators Barbara Rose and Susie Kalil in 1985 designated a "Houston school" of contemporary art. Like McKissack, many of the "Houston school" artists drew on the industrial detritus of Houston for their imagery and material. In the 1970s, the obscure, obsessive, vernacular, anti-establishment, anti-art status of a creative work such as The Orange Show represented to artists and curators, working restively within the institutional framework of the academy, museum, and gallery, the energy, conviction, independence, and inspiration needed to renew contemporary art. The Orange Show is exceptionally significant at a national level because its reception as a work of Outsider Art was rooted so profoundly in currents sweeping American art culture in the 1970s. It is a primary site for studying and interpreting the liberating, anti-institutional trends that contributed to the broad pattern of American history in the 1960s and '70s.

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The Orange Show is the primary site for understanding and appreciating the work of Jeff McKissack. It is the primary site for understanding his convictions, intentions, and working methods. It is the primary site for interpreting McKissack's expectations about how he could affect the awareness and attitudes of visitors to The Orange Show. The Orange Show spatially and materially conserves Jeff McKissack's effort to illuminate and represent his understanding of the human condition and the value of human life. It is of exceptional national significance as a primary site for studying the phenomena of the Outsider Artist and the garden of revelation.

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 0.18136 acre

**UTM References**

Park Place TX

**Verbal Boundary Description** Lots 1 and 2, Block 14, Telephone Road Place Section Two, Houston, Harris County TX. The North 75 feet of the North 150 feet of Block

Fourteen (14) of Telephone Road Place, Section No. 2, an addition to the City of Houston in Harris County, Texas, according to the map thereof recorded in Volume 15, page 66 of the Map Records of Harris County, Texas.

**Boundary Justification** These are the two lots historically associated with The Orange Show.

**11. Form Prepared By** Susanne Theis and Stephen Fox for the Orange Show Foundation

**Additional Documentation**

**Property Owner** Orange Show Foundation, 2401 Munger St., Houston TX 77023 (attn: Susanne Theis, Executive Director)