

HUMBOLDT CULTURAL CENTER

422 FIRST STREET · EUREKA, CALIFORNIA 442-2611

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NEWS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -

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for reference

An unique experience awaits the visitor who travels North on U. S. 101, the "Redwood Highway" to Eureka, California, and the Redwood National Park.

The restored and complete collection of Romano Gabriel's wooden "SCULPTURE GARDEN" will be on display daily, noon to 5:00, from June 2nd through August 14th, 1978, in Eureka's "OLD TOWN" area. The Garden will be exhibited in the Humboldt Cultural Center, an iron-front, 103 year old Victorian building, which is in the National Register of Historic Buildings, and in itself, is a work of art. Admission \$1.00 Adults/ 50¢ Seniors - children.

America has a rich heritage of Sunday painters, craftsmen and folk artists. Occasionally an individual creates an illusion by which the originality of his concepts, his freedom of vision and the totality of his committment transcends the category of the amateur. California possesses two outstanding and internationally known examples of such folk art; Simon Rodia's "Towers" in Watts, and Romano Gabriel's "Sculpture Garden" in Eureka.

Romano Gabriel was born in Italy and came to this country in 1913. In Italy he had worked with his father as a furniture maker. In America he served in World War I and then moved to Eureka. He was a carpenter, a lumber-yard worker and a gardner. He built his

home on Pine Street, where his wooden "Sculpture Garden" began and "grew" for over 30 years. Gradually his home disappeared behind the wooden garden. The first objects were trees and flowers, some of which moved in the wind. Later animals were added, some turned like carousels. Ultimately he made faces of people he had known or read about. Many of his people are peasants in perpetual celebration, continuously happy, always feasting, dancing, playing songs. The women are in peasant dress; the men with monumental noses, are mustachioed, have long hair of rope, some with small goatees. They are joyous, almost humorous; things that appear to have been created to arouse a smile. Romano Gabriel himself seemed to have viewed the garden as an instrument of public propaganda rather than as an object for his own contemplation and pleasure; the gardens are designed to be read. They are a vehicle for the communication of ideas. While many of the trees seem purely decorative, others embody their creator's attitude about society and its institutions, and his reactions to public events. His sources of inspiration seem to have been memories of people and places he had seen and the National Geographic magazine which he received each month.

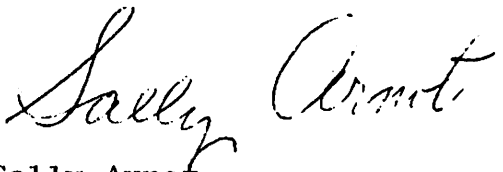
At first he used a hand saw to cut the pieces, later he built a small power circular saw. "My idea was just to make these things, I wanted to make something different. I just made up pictures out of wood. I don't buy any materials, I take all the boxes and lumber down in the store, they are all ends of fruit boxes", was Romano Gabriel's reply to questions about his wooden garden.

Romano Gabriel died in 1976. The "Sculpture Garden" was purchased by Dolores and Ray Vellutini, who fully realized the value of the Garden as American folk art and had a concern for its preservation. The Garden was photographed in its entirety, then identified and catalogued, before being dismantled, in preparation for full restoration. All the pieces have been repainted in their original colors, broken fragments have been recreated, with the care that is given to great masterpieces.

The Garden has been published in American periodicals of national circulation, and in 1977 several pieces were part of the folk art exhibition organized by Mr. Seymour Rosen, for the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, entitled "In Celebration of Ourselves".

Now fully restored, the Garden has been offered to the City of Eureka, with the stipulation that it be placed in "Old Town" in a protective enclosure, and in a setting identical, or at least in scale, to the builder's original setting.

Prior to a site selection, and details of relocation, the Garden is to be exhibited at the Humboldt Cultural Center, 422 First Street, in Eureka, California.


Sally Arnot