

ENVIRONMENTS IN WISCONSIN

Who Cares?

We're proud, and also exhausted, as we present the results of the very first survey of exhibitions which included the work of artists who build large scale folk/art environments. The statistic that more than 1,500,000 museums viewers have seen these sites will counter statements like, "Nobody knows and nobody cares about this stuff." Anyone who has had the frustrating experience of trying to get grants to produce a show of this work can look upon the number of separate showings with amazement at the number of people who persisted against the odds. We hope these statistics will help in future efforts to bring this work to a broader public.

This exhibitions survey shows the importance of gathering and organizing facts and figures. The sum of the information is indeed greater than its parts. This survey presents a great deal of historical information which can help to bring honor and recognition to the artists, and which can help protect their work. Interest in the phenomenon is hard to access. Although we will probably never be able to accurately estimate how many on-site visits occur, each year 8,000 to 10,000 tour The Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kansas.

SPACES is beginning to develop a computer database on the environments. If you want to be noted as a source of information on any particular sites, let us know the extent and nature of your information (visual, oral, type of documents). Among other things, please help us in our efforts to gather information about the sites to share with those willing to make the local commitment to protect the environments.

Information sitting in the bottom drawer of your desk just gets moldy.

-Seymour Rosen



This photograph portrays the Fantasy Doll Show as it existed within the Birdcage Theatre in 1975 in Possum Trot near Barstow, California. The site has been dismantled, but *The Ties That Bind: Folk Art in Contemporary Culture* will include a tableaux of several dolls as well as taperecordings and signs to try to evoke a sense of the original. ©Seymour Rosen

Folk/Art and Contemporary American Culture

A national symposium entitled "Contemporary Folk Art and American Culture" will be held November 21-23, 1986 in Cincinnati. The symposium, organized by The Contemporary Arts Center, will examine the cultural and aesthetic significance of contemporary American folk art. Participants include Dr. Kenneth Ames, Dr. Robert Bishop, Michael Hall, Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr., Dr. Susan Larsen, Dr. Eugene Metcalf, Dr. John Moe, Seymour Rosen and Dr. Robert Farris Thompson.

In a telephone interview with SPACES, Michael Hall spoke about the symposium. "We hope it will bring folklore people, collectors, researchers, diggers, pickers and scholars together to thrash out the folk art issue again—but, we hope, to thrash it out in a new way

that will build on all the information that can be brought to bear on the subject today."

Opening concurrently with the start of the symposium is an exhibition entitled "The Ties That Bind: Folk Art in Contemporary Culture." The exhibition, which will run from November 21, 1986 to January 10, 1987, has been curated by sculptor and folk art collector Michael Hall and cultural historian Dr. Eugene Metcalf. The exhibition seeks to critically re-evaluate the relationship between the folk art tradition and social circumstances, as well as the relationship between the folk art tradition and modernism. The co-curators argue that "self-taught" art is created in particular contexts, which much modernist museum practice effaces. They also argue that

(continued on back page)

Museum Survey

Some time ago, SPACES initiated a survey of museums and nonprofit galleries to gather information about exhibitions which included the work of artists who produce large scale sculptural folk/art environments. We sent over 150 letters to institutions, curators, and others involved with particular exhibitions. One thing led to another...people returned our survey forms with news of exhibitions we were not initially aware of, and we followed up on their leads. Many of the returned survey forms were incomplete; attendance was a difficult statistic to get (see paragraph 3). Further, we wanted to ensure accuracy. So we did a second mailing of over 100 letters. Some institutions received as many as four letters. We didn't count phonecalls, and don't have a figure on the extensive correspondence which occurred outside of the larger mailings, but we can safely state that the information printed on these pages is the result of a lot of work on the part of many people. We are grateful for all of the contributions to this knowledge. We are sure that the information we gathered will be used again and again, among other things as concrete evidence of widespread interest in the phenomenon and increased interest during the last several years in these wonderful artworks, both from institutions and from the museum-going public.

As stated above, attendance was a difficult statistic to get; we felt, however, that it represented a vital part of our survey. Some institutions are not able to keep accurate attendance records. In many cases, attendance estimates are based on general museum attendance for the duration of a particular exhibition. Some figures represent educated guesses by museum officials and/or curators. Some institutions unfortunately could not estimate attendance.

One criterion for deciding whether or not to include a particular exhibition on this list was if the environment of the artist was represented by artifacts, documentation, and/or essays. Sometimes no evidence acknowledges that particular pieces were created as part of a larger whole. Also, some artists, like Howard Finster, may be involved with several kinds of production, some of which does not relate to the environmental work at all. We have tried to include only those exhibitions which show the work of environmental artists in the context of their environments.

Some exhibitions traveled to several institutions; we have listed all locations in the year when the show initially opened, with actual opening dates in parentheses. We have listed only the names of artists who have built environments.

We know of 53 exhibitions which traveled to 98 institutions and were seen by an estimated total combined audience of 1,500,000 people. 33 exhibitions have no attendance data. Please send any information about exhibitions we have not listed, plus corrections, if any, of information printed here.

1961

Art of Assemblage

Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
Dallas Museum of Art, TX (1962)
S. F. Museum of Modern Art, CA (1962)
Artist: Simon Rodia; Curator: Peter Seitz; catalog

1962

Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts

L. A. County Museum of Art, CA; 123,952
Henry Art Gallery, U of WA, Seattle, WA (1963)
U of BC at Vancouver, Canada (1963)
U of CA at Berkeley, Art Dept., CA (1964)
La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, CA (1964)
Artist: Simon Rodia; Curator: Seymour Rosen; catalog

1966

I Am Alive

L. A. County Museum of Art, CA; 17,000
Artist: Simon Rodia; Curator: Seymour Rosen; catalog

1971

Hidden Aspects

National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.
Artist: James Hampton; Curator: Harry Lowe

1972

Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Collection, Williamsburg, VA; 14,000
Artist: James Hampton; Curator: Lynda Roscoe Hartigan

1973

Garbage Makes It Possible

United States Information Agency, Munich, Germany; 100,000
Artists: Rodia, Prishrey; Curator: John Vorhes

Twentieth Century American Folk Art: Hemphill Collection

Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH
Artists in ancillary slide show: Rodia, Prishrey; Curator: Jack Bolton

1974

Imprint: People and the Places They Build

MIT Gallery, Cambridge, MA; 3,000
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (1975)
Curator: Jan Wampler; Artists: 22 sites

Naives and Visionaries

Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; 70,000
Dayton Art Institute, OH (1975); 11,550
Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX (1976); 6,000
Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, TX (1976); 6,327
Flint Institute of Arts, MI (1976); 8,000
La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, CA (1976); 10,414
Worcester Art Museum, MA (1976); 90,325
Artists: Hampton, Rodia, Dinsmoor, Schmidt, Smith, Howard, Rusch, Prishrey, Wippich; Curators: Martin Friedman, Gregg Blasdel; catalog

1975

Clarence Schmidt

Hayden Gallery, MIT, Cambridge, MA
Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca,

NY; 6,499

Munson Williams Proctor Institute, Utica, NY; 1,500
Neuberger Museum, SUNY at Purchase, NY
Robert Hull Fleming Museum, U of VT, Burlington, VT; 1,000
Artist: Clarence Schmidt; Curators: William Lipke, Gregg Blasdel; catalog

1976

David Butler

New Orleans Museum of Art, LA
Artist: David Butler; Curator: William Fagaly; catalog

From Foreign Shores

Milwaukee Art Museum, WI; 8,123
Artist: Simon Rodia; Curators: I. Michael Danoff, Verna Curtis; catalog

Grandma Prishrey's Bottle Village

Woman's Building, Los Angeles, CA; 1,200
Artist: Tressa Prishrey; Curators: B. Bouska, C. Gaulke, L. Norlen, N. Angelo

House of Mirrors: Sculpture and Photomurals

From the House of Folk Artist Clarence Schmidt
Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, NH; 2,500
Artist: Clarence Schmidt; Curator: Melvin Watts

In Celebration of Ourselves

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA; 25,000
Artists: 34 CA sites; Curator: Seymour Rosen

Missing Pieces: Georgia Folk Art 1770-1976

Atlanta Historical Society, GA; 20,000
Columbus Museum of Arts and Sciences, Inc., Columbus, GA (1977); 7,500
Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, Savannah, GA (1977)
Artists: Bailey, Finster, Pope, St. EOM; Curator: Anna Wadsworth; catalog

Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, AL (1977); 19,329
National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. (1977-); 360,000
Artist: James Hampton; Curator: Lynda Roscoe Hartigan; catalog

Two Hundred Years of American Sculpture

Whitney Museum of American Art, N. Y., NY
Artist: James Hampton

1977

Jesse Howard

Kemper Gallery/ KS City Art Institute, MO
Artist: Jesse Howard; Curator: Ann Klesener

1978

Grass Roots Art: Wisconsin—Toward a Redefinition

John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI; 9,000
Allen R. Priebe Gallery, U of WI, Oshkosh, WI (1979)
Madison Art Center, WI (1979); 3,134
Artists: Rusch, Smith, Wernerus; Curator: Wanda G. Cole; catalog

Rainbows in the Sky: Folk Art of Michigan in the Twentieth Century

Kresge Art Gallery, MSU, E. Lansing, MI;

15,000
Meadow Brook Art Gallery, Oakland U,
Rochester, MI (1979)
Grand Rapids Art Museum, MI (1979)
Hackley Art Museum, Muskegon, MI (1979);
665
Reuther Library, WSU, Detroit, MI (1979)
Artists: Hewes, Lund, Makinen, Raidel; Curators:
C. Kurt Dewhurst and Marsha MacDowell; catalog
1979

America Now

United States Information Agency, Belgrade,
Yugoslavia; 28,840
USIA, Zagreb, Yugoslavia; 41,740
USIA, Budapest, Hungary (1980); 46,078
USIA, Bucharest, Romania (1980); 128,876
Artists: Howard, Prisbrey, Gabriel, Finster,
Butler; Curator, Folk Art Section: John Vorhes

Gathering of California Folk Art

Municipal Art Gallery, L. A., CA; 3,500
Artists: Bond, Chologian, Gabriel; Curator: Lois
Boardman

L.A. Parks and Wrecks: A Reflection of Urban Life

Otis/Parsons Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; 1,500
Artist: Woods; Curators: Hal Glicksman, Helen
Lewis

1980

Twentieth Century Folk Artists

Otis/Parsons Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; 1,500
Artists: Chologian, Finster; Curators: Hal
Glicksman, Helen Lewis

1981

Folk Art in Oklahoma

Oklahoma Art Center Arts Annex, Oklahoma
City, OK
Artists: Galloway, Muhlbacher, Townsend, Hall,
Carroll; Curator: Mary Ann Andrews; catalog

In Celebration of a Legacy

Columbus Museum of Arts and Sciences, Inc.,
Columbus, GA; 9,200
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, AL; 8,374
Artist: St. EOM; Curator: Fred Fussell; catalog

Transmitters: The Isolate Artist in America

Philadelphia Museum of Art; 10,000
Curators: Michael and Julie Hall;
Artists: Finster, Howard; catalog

Watts Towers: Creativity, Play and Technology

Pacific Design Center, L. A., CA; 3,800
Artist: Simon Rodia; Curator: Seymour Rosen/
Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts

Worth Keeping: Found Artists of the Carolinas

Columbia Museum, SC; 12,265
Gibbes Art Gallery, Charlestown, SC
Artists: Carson, Schwartz, Queen, Hamilton,
Land, Samuel, Aun, Jennings; Curator: Tom
Stanley, w/Roger Manley, John Kelley; catalog

1982

Black Folk Art in America 1930-1980

Brooklyn Museum, NY; 25,600
Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA;
15,500
J. P. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KY;
14,573
Birmingham Museum of Art, AL (1983)
Detroit Institute of Art, MI (1983); 60,000

Inst. for the Arts, Rice U, Houston, TX
(1983)

Artists: Butler, Doyle, Hampton, Morgan,
Payne; Curators: Jane Livingston,
John Beardsley; catalog

Currents 1982

New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY, NY;
2,284
Artist: Howard Finster; Curator: Jesse Murry;
catalog

Missouri Folk: Their Creative Images

Fine Arts Gallery, U of Missouri-Columbia,
MO; 600
Artist: Jesse Howard; organized by the
Department of Art; catalog

1983

Land of Our Own: Landscape & Gardening Tradition in Georgia

Atlanta Historical Society, McElreath Hall,
GA; 60,000
Artists: St. EOM, Finster, Pope; Curator:
Catherine Howell; catalog

Many Mansions: Four Folk Art Environments

Beyond Baroque Foundation, Los Angeles, CA;
3,000
Artists: Beal, Ehn, Howard, Mahan; Curators:
Seymour Rosen, Judith Czlonka

Missouri Artist Jesse Howard

Fine Arts Gallery, U of MI-Columbia; 600
Artist: Jesse Howard; Curators: Ann Klesener,
Robert Bussabarger; catalog

Shape of Things: Folk Sculpture from Two Centuries

Museum of American Folk Art, NY, NY; 9,905
Artists: Rodoslovich, Rosebrook, Finster, the
Blacks, Curators: Robert Bishop, Mary Ann
Demos

1984

Dreambuilders of California

Chevron Gallery, San Francisco, CA; 2,000
Artists: Beal, the Blacks, Damonte, Darling,
Gabriel, Prisbrey, Ehn; Curator: John Turner

Folk Art Show and Sale

Kemper Gallery, KS City Art Institute, MO
Artist: Jesse Howard; Curator: Willem Volkersz

Nevada's Irrepressible Art

Nevada Historical Society, Reno, NV; 29,000
Artist: Chief Rolling Mountain Thunder;
Curators: Susan Orr, Peter Bandurraga

Pioneers in Paradise: Folk & Outsider Artists of the West Coast

Long Beach Museum of Art, CA; 2,385
Henry Art Gallery, U of WA, Seattle, WA
(1985); 3,316
Mandeville Art Gallery, UCSD, CA (1985);
1,242
Maryl Hurst College, the Art Gym, OR (1985)
San Jose Museum of Art, CA (1985-6); 6,000
Artists: the Blacks, Darling, Bond, Gabriel,
Roeder; Curators: Susan Larsen-Martin, Lawi
Robert Martin; catalog

Sermons in Paint: A Howard Finster Folk Art Festival

Marsh Gallery, U of Richmond, VA; 900
Artist: Howard Finster; Curator: Ann Frederick
Oppenheimer; catalog

1985

Divine Disorder: Folk Art Environments of California

Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA; 700
Artists: Ehn, Rodia, Prisbrey, Cahill, Gabriel,
Damonte, the Blacks; Curator: Seymour Rosen

A Joyful Vision

Craft and Folk Art Museum, L. A., CA; 5,000
Artists: Chologian, Rodia, Gabriel, Damonte,
Ehn, the Blacks, Darling; Curator: John Fowler

Outsiders and Visionaries of the Contemporary Southland

Duke U Hospital, Durham, NC; 33,300
Artists: Finster, St. EOM, Jennings, Doyle;
Curators: Tom Patterson, Roger Manley

Southern Visionary Folk Artists

R. J. Reynolds Sawtooth Gallery,
Winston-Salem, NC; 1,300
Artists: Finster, St. EOM, Hooper, Jennings,
Doyle, Person, Jones, Stephenson, Queen;
Curators: Jargon Society/Tom Patterson, Roger
Manley; catalog

Time to Reap: Late Blooming Folk Artists

Seton Hall U, South Orange, NJ; 3,000
Monmouth County Historical Association,
Shrewsbury, NJ; 525
Noyes Museum, NJ (1986)
Artists: Butler, Darling, Morgan, Prisbrey,
Radoslovich, Smith, Terrillion; Curators: Barbara
Wahl Kaufman, Didi Barrett; catalog

William Edmundson/David Butler

Newark Museum, NJ; 30,000
Jamaica Arts Center (1986); 20,000
Artist: David Butler; Curator: Gary A. Reynolds

Works of Leroy Person

Carr Mill Gallery, Carrboro, NC; 2,800
North Carolina National Bank, Hillsborough,
NC; 3,000
Artist: Leroy Person; Curator: Roger Manley

1986

Cat & A Ball on a Waterfall

Oakland Museum, CA; 22,500
Artists: the Blacks, Cahill, Darling, Damonte,
Ehn, Gabriel, Prisbrey, Rodia; Curator: Harvey
Jones; catalog

Contemporary Southeastern Folk Artists

Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art,
Winston-Salem, NC
Artists: Jennings, Finster, Butler, Carson;
Curator: Richard Craven

Intuitive Art: Three Folk Artists

Squires Gallery, Virginia Tech., Blacksburg,
VA; 1,750
Artists: Jennings, Finster, Criss; Curators: Ray
Kass, Ann Oppenheimer

The Road to Heaven is Built by Good Works: Southern Black Visionaries

S. F. Crafts and Folk Art Museum, CA; 2,000
Artists: Butler, Doyle, Morgan; Curator: John
Turner

World's Folk Art Church: Reverend Howard Finster and Family

Lehigh University Art Galleries, Bethlehem,
PA; 4,000
Artist: Howard Finster; Curators: Norman Giradot,
Ricardo Viera, catalog

Ten Environments in Wisconsin

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin—a strong advocate of grassroots artists since the early 1970's—is currently producing a book documenting 19 grassroots environments around the state. The project is supported by the Kohler Foundation, Kohler, Wisconsin, an organization which has been instrumental in restoring three sites included in the planned book.

Joanne Cubbs, curator of exhibitions at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, is writing the book's major essay, which examines the visionary underpinnings and cultural implications of the "outsider" environment. Robert Mertens, an assistant professor of art at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, has spent much of his time over the past five years photographing and mapping the sites and cataloguing the objects therein; Mertens took nine of the photographs on these pages. Likewise, Dawn Belleau, a reporter with *The Sheboygan Press*, has spent many hours traveling thousands of miles to interview those artists still living, their families, friends and neighbors; she has also pored through hundreds of newspaper files and historical documents as she put together the written portraits of the environments' creators. Joan Krueger, who is an editor for the book, wrote the photo captions on these pages.

Editor's note: Ruth Kohler, Director of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, has been a driving force in Wisconsin documentation and preservation, and an inspiration nationally in the field. She encouraged the purchase and restoration of three sites and helped to orchestrate the eventual gift of each site to the county in which it is located (see Newsletter #1 and #2). She is also well known for having presented some of the most exciting and innovative exhibitions in the country. Ruth Kohler has recently joined SPACE's Board of Advisors.

Sites in Wisconsin



Father Mathias Wernerus

Perhaps the most spectacular grassroots environment in Wisconsin is Holy Ghost Park. Built by Father Mathias Wernerus (who was assisted by much of the population of his parish), the park consists of two large grottoes and two major shrines as well as numerous small niches for statuary. The grottoes are dedicated to the Mother of God and the Holy Eucharist; the shrines, to the Sacred Heart and patriotism. Concrete and rock were the primary building materials; the surfaces of the structures are embedded with bits of colored glass and a wide variety of treasures and oddities donated by Father Wernerus's parishioners. Work on the park began in 1925 and the official dedication was held in September 1930. Although Father Wernerus intended to spend two more years on the park and hoped to construct a shrine to St. Michael, he died in December 1930. Holy Ghost Park is maintained by the church.

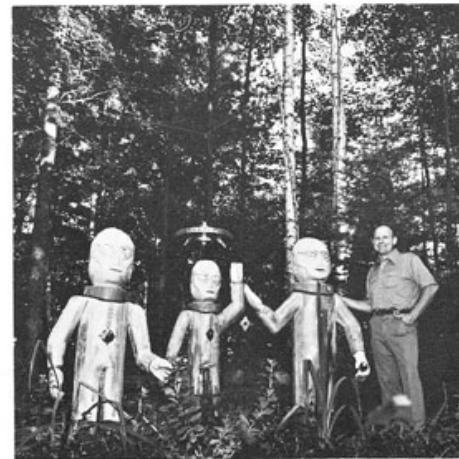


Paul and Matilda Wegner

A Sunday outing to Father Mathias Wernerus's Holy Ghost Park was the inspiration that led Paul and Matilda Wegner to fashion a series of patriotic and religious monuments on their farm. The centerpiece of their project is a two-level Peace Monument, decorated with mosaics of broken glass and crockery. A fence patterned after those made by Father Wernerus encloses the Garden of Prayer. The Wegners also created replicas of the U.S. flag, the seal of the American Legion, a celebrated ocean liner of the 1930s, and a concrete and glass version of their fiftieth wedding anniversary cake. Their most ambitious structure is the Little Glass Church, a nine-by-twelve-foot chapel built of twelve mosaic panels, each depicting a different religious denomination. Paul Wegner died in 1937; his wife survived him by five years. An extensive restoration project, funded by the Kohler Foundation, is in progress.

James Tellen

Hospitalized in 1942, Tellen became intrigued by the statuary visible in the churchyard across the street from his sick bed. He turned his hand to concrete sculpture shortly after his release from the hospital and over the next 15 years created more than 75 works which he placed in the woods around his cottage. His first project was a 50 foot long fallen log fence and tree trunk gateposts at the entrance to his property. Tellen's subjects include animals, religious themes and visions of America's past. His whimsy is evident in small tableaux with elves and in a scene featuring a group of boisterous drinking men whose antics provoke the disapproval of the "upright citizens" seated near them. James Tellen died in 1957; his family continues to preserve his work.



Dave Seidler

Dave Seidler is especially intrigued by the idea of life on other planets, the secrets of ancient civilizations and the mysteries of Earth's murky prehistory; the sculptures and paintings on his cottage property reflect these concerns. A group of little green men emerges from the woods as a flying saucer whirs eerily in the woods behind them. Four large figures reminiscent of ancient Egyptians cluster near a circular altar and a pyramid incised with symbols resembling a mathematical formula. Murals on Seidler's garage and shed depict the landing of visitors from space as well as the dinosaurs and flying reptiles of the distant past. Most of Seidler's creations are fashioned from materials he found: wood, plumbing parts, bits of plastic and metal, circular reflectors. Some of the constructions have been painted with reflective paint and glow in the dark. Seidler continues to add to his collection.

Fred Smith

Fred Smith was 63 before he realized that he was a "maker of monuments." During the next 15 years he erected over 200 concrete sculptures in the woods surrounding his home, and named the area the "Wisconsin Concrete Park." His subjects include angels, beasts and men and women from history, mythic and Hollywood legends, and are decorated with flat stones, mirrors, insulators and bottle fragments. Most of the figures are life-size but there is also a twenty-foot-long muskie, a ten-foot-tall angel and a sixteen-foot tall figure of Paul Bunyon. Smith was forced to curtail his activities following a stroke in 1963, and died in 1976. A major restoration project, funded by the Kohler Foundation, the Wisconsin Arts Board, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Anne-Marie Foundation, was begun at the Park in 1977 and was completed in 1978. The Wisconsin Concrete Park is now in the care of Price County and is open to the public.



Frank Oebser

In 1973 Frank Oebser started building a 25' tall windmill. Today, his environment includes a four-seat Ferris wheel occupied by a life-sized Chinese man and a large rooster both constructed of plastic and canvas stuffed with hay, a mechanical bucking bull, a motorized scooter, an electrical teeter-totter, a bouncing swing, a merry-go-round, two motorized waterwheels, and a 40' by 80' pole barn crammed with working antique farm machines peopled with life sized figures stuffed with hay, dressed in cast-offs with Halloween masks on their heads. Most of Oebser's creations are mechanized because he believes, "If it don't work, it ain't worth nothin'." Now 86 years old, Oebser delights in sharing what he refers to as his playground. But he fears that when he dies, no one will take care of the pieces and his working collection of antique farm machinery will be dispersed.



Mary Nohl

Driftwood constructions and concrete sculptures still populate Mary Nohl's lakefront property despite the persistent efforts of vandals who burned, broke or stole many of her creations. Mary responded to their harassment by rigging elaborate booby traps to scare off intruders and by making her sculptures larger and heavier and thus more difficult to carry off or destroy. Her works are generally fanciful—dinosaurs, Chagall-like angels, mammoth heads reminiscent of the carvings on Easter Island, a fence composed of human profiles cut with a bandsaw, bundles of sticks suggesting human or animal forms. She also paints with oils, and has produced nearly one hundred pieces in various stages of completion.



Tony Flatoff

"I recycle everything," says Tony Flatoff. "I just hate to see things go to waste." With fans, ventilator blades, bleach bottles, plumbing pipe, wagon wheels, automobile tire rims, castoff light fixtures and a little paint, Flatoff fashioned a giant red, white and blue whirligig in his back yard. He began work on the assemblage more than 30 years ago when he brought home a ten-bladed fan that had been discarded at the hotel where he worked as a handyman. Today, the whirligig comprises 88 fans and is 15 feet high and 25 feet long. Tony also built two large, wooden model airplanes rigged so that their propellers spin in the wind. He painted them red and white and mounted them on plumbing pipe at opposite ends of his flower garden; he also centered a small fan on each of the house's red shutters.



Nick Engelbert

In 1936, on the small Wisconsin farm where he raised dairy cows, Nick Engelbert erected the first of a series of large, painted concrete sculptures memorializing the immigrant groups that had settled the area. In addition to the double-headed eagle representing the Austro-Hungarian empire, he created a fierce Viking warrior in a rowboat-sized vessel, a miniature Blarney Castle, a Carinthian forest ranger and a group of three men in Swiss costumes. Other works included figures from myths, legends and fairy tales, patriotic symbols, animals, and humorous tableaux. In his later years, Engelbert spent much time working on his oil paintings. He died in 1962. The farm is no longer in the Engelbert family; the current owner wishes to keep intact what remains of Engelbert's work.



Herman Rusch

"You could go around the world five times and not find a fence like mine." That is Herman Rusch's assessment of the 186-foot-long fence of orange-colored concrete arches he built in his seventy-ninth summer. Born in 1885, Rusch was a farmer for most of his adult life. But when he quit farming he found that the slow pace of retirement did not suit him. At the age of 71 he opened a roadside museum to display the natural oddities he had collected over the years. To enhance the museum grounds he built planters, birdhouses, a miniature mosque, sculptures of animals and people, fountains, the fence, and two twenty-foot-tall sun spires, topped with mirrored stars designed to catch the sunlight. Rusch is no longer building but is still brimming with energy. Unfortunately the site is no longer owned by his family.

photo © Seymour Rosen

Bibliography on Folk Art Environments

SPACES Newsletter #2 (Summer 1985) contained the beginning of a bibliography on large scale sculptural environments. The following two corrections should be made to that earlier bibliography: *Les Inspires du Bord des Routes* was listed twice, under Lacarriere and again under Verroust. Jacques Verroust is the proper author (and photographer) of the book; Jacques Lacarriere is the writer of the introductory text; the author of *Back Roads of California* was incorrectly listed as Hollander and should be Thollander. We continue the bibliography here. Also included here are books and pamphlets by artists who built environments, including publications by Art Beal, Tressa Prisbrey, Miles Mahon, Edward Leedskalnin, and S.P. Dinsmoor. Most of the titles listed here are part of SPACES Library. We are always interested in new titles—to add to the bibliography and to purchase for the Library.

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What to Call Them

In the last newsletter we printed a variety of decriptive nouns and adjectives which have been used to name some wonderful things on the landscape (e.g. Grassroots, Art Brut, Self-taught, Naïve). We requested interested parties to send in their proposed names with explanations; the confusion caused by so many names and the difficulties encountered by the use of any particular name hinders the process of documentation and preservation. We were not overwhelmed with response, but this is partly because the work defies a one or two-word description. In the hope of promoting a serious dialogue, we will print as a regular column excerpts from the fearless few who are willing to be quoted in such a public forum.

In this issue we have chosen to print the opinion of Fred C. Fussell, chief curator at the Columbus Museum of Arts and Sciences, Inc. in Columbus, Georgia. Fussell is engaged in the preservation of the St. EOM site in Georgia.

In response to your plea for opinions, I offer these thoughts.

My somewhat limited experience in dealing with environmental artists has been confined to a handful who have been or are now active in the Deep South. Without exception their efforts have been prompted by the occasion of a very personal and deeply felt visionary experience. Such comments as, "I saw a great white blazing light" (St. EOM) or "It comes to me to build a Paradise" (Howard Finster) are typical. So my tendency is to call them visionaries.

But it isn't that easy, of course. I'm afraid that my own personal reluctance to academically categorize the world of art and artists sometimes gets in my way. I'd rather take them one at a time as unique individuals who produce unique work. Whether they should choose, consciously or not, to work within a tradition is not of great interest to me. A great many academic artists have employed personal visionary experiences as a part of their work processes.

So where does this leave us? With a group of people who produce extraordinary and highly creative works of personal expression. These people are, simply, artists.



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Nitt Witt Celebration!!

For perhaps the first time, Arthur Harold Beal (alias Captain Nitt Witt) was speechless when friends and admirers gathered around him on June 26th to celebrate his 90th birthday. Art Beal and friends also used this occasion to dedicate the plaque designating Nitt Witt Ridge as California Landmark #939, "one of California's remarkable 20th Century Folk Art Environments."

Santa Barbara Savings donated the use of its Community Room and townspeople, old friends, a television reporter and local political figures came together to admire Art's longevity and energy, and pay tribute to his creation, Nitt Witt Ridge. The plaque was displayed; it will be installed at Nitt Witt Ridge as soon as a base is built. The plaque is the result of a joint effort among the California Department of Parks and Recreation, SPACES, and the Art Beal Foundation, Inc.

Nitt Witt Ridge is a 2.5 acre site in the western section of Cambria; it is comprised of multi-leveled terraced gardens and rambling structures built of wood, cement, brick, stone, pots and pans, tires and wheels, cans, shells, and more. Mr. Beal, who has been called a master builder by architect Jan Wampler, began creating Nitt Witt Ridge in 1928 and continued to build for 50 years.

Earthquakes and rains have taken their toll on the site; if left untouched, Art Beal's creation will return to the hillside from which it has grown. Admirers of Beal's work do not want that to happen. The Art Beal Foundation, founded in 1975 to restore and protect Nitt Witt

Ridge, deserves special credit and recognition for the hard work of its members. Founding directors of the Foundation are John Fitzrandolph, Vicki Leon, and James Duenow. Current directors are Frances Dukehart, James Fajardo, and Steven Rebuk. Members of the consultant support group include Michael Edwards, Peter Fels, James Gazzola, Mel Green & Associates, Ken Haggard, Jan Wampler, David Fitzpatrick, and Seymour Rosen. Anyone wishing to help the Art Beal Foundation preserve one of this country's unique works of art and best examples of hand-made, personal architecture should write to the Art Beal Foundation: P.O. Box 571, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406.

—Jocelyn Gibbs

Survey Form

We've produced a survey form for use in the field. It asks a variety of important questions and includes the perspectives of several disciplines. The survey form, when it is completed for an individual site, represents a basic body of descriptive and pertinent information.

Although we don't want to overwhelm anyone with the number or specificity of the questions, we wanted to be inclusive and specific. Ideally, the form will be completed in full; the reality is that people will fill in what they can. We hope that users will understand that some information is better than no information. We also hope that in some cases, users will be prompted to ask more questions and do more research than they originally planned to do.

We want your comments and suggestions. Most importantly, we want you to use this survey form to help compile a record of this country's large scale sculptural environments. If a copy of the survey form is not attached, simply write us and enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. If you do use the forms, remember SPACES's Archive and please send us a xerox of the information you've gathered. We will use the information you send us in exact accordance with any wishes you (the researcher, the artist, the preservationist, the student) may have; place whatever restrictions you choose on the information you share with us.

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The programs of SPACES have been supported in part by the L. J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, TRW Corporation, the Interarts and the Museums Programs of the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, Microsoft Corporation, Telos Software Products, Photo Impact, Pitney Bowles Corporation, Industrial Photo, Micro:Maps, and the generosity of SPACES members.

SPACES is a membership organization which depends on a national constituency to advocate for the preservation of large scale sculptural environments. Annual membership includes a subscription to the newsletter. Individual memberships of \$30 or more receive a copy of *In Celebration of Ourselves* by Seymour Rosen, a book which documents popular culture, including 34 contemporary folk/art sites. Membership levels are Students/Seniors \$10; Individual \$15; Individual Sponsor \$25; Institution \$25; Individual Patron \$50; Individual Benefactor \$100; Corporate Sponsor \$250.

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Folk Art/Culture (continued from page 1)

folk art has for too long been viewed as the production of an idealized "common man," and has been placed in a romanticized and "more genuine" past. Both suggest that art is and has always been in part a direct response to contemporary social circumstance.

The exhibition includes sculpture, painting and photographs of the work of 32 artists from midwest galleries and collections. The work has been divided into the following categories: reformulating the world (including a depiction of the environment of Clavin and Ruby Black as well as that of Rosetta Burke), questioning political authority, perpetuating popular traditions, enshrining heroic figures, appropriating popular imagery, transforming technology, preserving ethnic identity, and confirming faith. These categories, which address the social, political and religious functions of art and/or describe the cultural identity of the artist, attest to the ideological position of the co-curators as well. The categories represent the view that real people living real lives make art from their specific material conditions.

A fully illustrated catalog, written by Michael Hall and Dr. Eugene Metcalf and published by The Contemporary Arts Center, accompanies the exhibit. In his essay, Metcalf addresses the social history of the discovery and collection of contemporary folk art. Although the popularity of folk art is due in part to its ability to afford a passive escape from our society, it has not always functioned this way. Metcalf traces the history of interest in American folk art to the 1920's, when contemporary avant-garde artists valued folk art for the ways in which it echoed values of their own work. Contemporary modernist artists were also an early audience for twentieth century "self-taught" artists. Metcalf traces the history of seminal exhibitions of "self-taught" artists and the history of what these artists have been called (see "What To Call Them" column on page 7). Metcalf warns that in the same way the concept of "outsider art" isolates the work from real social significance, removing the work from its original context discards an important facet of its original meaning, social significance and makes it safe for consumption.

In his catalogue essay Michael Hall uses the Duchamp sculpture *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* in discussing folk art. Hall places a great deal of currency in the idea of context, and states that just as particular works have been stripped of cloth or paint to reveal "pure" sculpture, when the objects are exhibited out of context, meaning is stripped away. Hall suggests that in the early modernist period, this process might have been necessary, but wants us to consider retrieving what was lost in the process of reduction and stripping away. Further, Hall posits a particular relationship between folk art and fine art which has changed over the past twenty years. Referring to the title of Duchamp's sculpture, Hall suggests that although fine art has historically been the bride and folk art the bridesmaid, folk art has come of age. Hall maintains that the exhibition cries out for a redirecting of historic assumptions about folk art. He also describes and discusses the categories of the exhibition, and some of the work within those categories. Finally, he encourages an interdisciplinary approach, not simply an aestheticising of particular objects.

Also included in the catalog is an extensive annotated bibliography of writings about contemporary American folk art. These writings come from a variety of disciplines, and the bibliography seeks to relate individual works included in the exhibition to development of interest in contemporary folk art.

Both the symposium and the exhibition promise the opportunity to raise significant issues and to engage in stimulating dialogue, the results of which will likely have lasting implications in the field for years to come.

-Elaine Wintman

Note: Although we enjoyed the Metcalf essay, unfortunately, it does not mention certain early and instrumental exhibitions and articles, especially concerning the Watts Towers and other West Coast phenomena.

The exhibition catalog is available from The Contemporary Arts Center, 115 East Fifth Street, Cincinnati, OH 45202. The catalog is \$15 ppd.