



WINTER/SPRING 1987

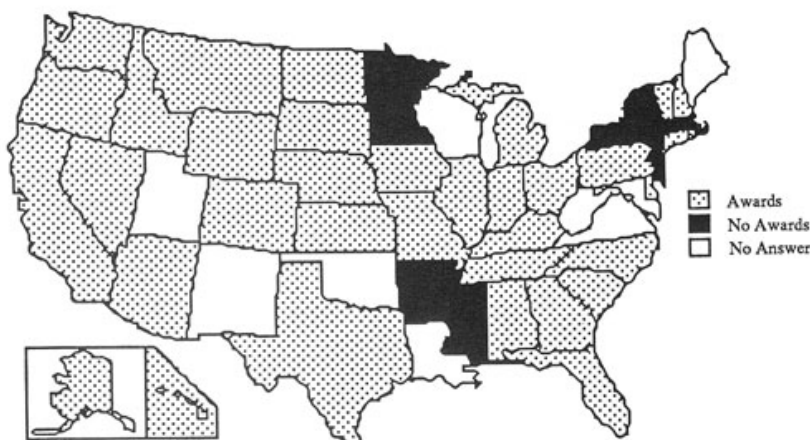
State Arts Awards

Since many of the artists who build folk/art environments are now between seventy and ninety-five years old, one of SPACES's highest priorities is public acknowledgement for the work of these artists while they are still alive and can appreciate the accolades. It's nice that we lecture about them, put them in books, articles, exhibitions. But it's our responsibility to let the artist, the community and the preservation organizations know of our activities and the honor. Awards, publicity, inclusion in books and exhibitions, and notoriety outside of the immediate geographic community also help to get grants and to preserve the sites.

Many state arts agencies, Offices of Historic Preservation, counties, cities and towns have ways to honor people within their jurisdictions. Unfortunately, obtaining acknowledgement for these artists is time-consuming and difficult. National Register status, for instance, demands that the artist be deceased. The process is sometimes frustrating and tedious but most important.

One kind of recognition on the state level is an award that acknowledges an individual as an artist, an artist who has contributed to the cultural life in a particular state.

The map on this page represents the results of a survey which SPACES conducted to ascertain which states have mechanisms through which the artists who create folk/art environments can be honored as artists. In compiling this information, we wrote to each Governor and to each state arts agency. We requested both criteria for selection and nomination forms. Several states did not answer repeated queries, and we are not entirely convinced of the "no" responses (six states responded that they did not have such awards). Our confirmed results



prove that most states do have such mechanisms, and our instincts tell us that the number of states is larger than we were able to corroborate.

Depicted in the map above are states which have means for recognizing significant cultural contributions on the part of artists. Often recognition comes in the form of "Governor's Awards" which are open to a variety of nonartists, organizations and businesses which have helped the arts to thrive in a particular state. Most states give grants and fellowships to artists. Most states have artists-in-schools programs and/or artists-in-prisons programs, and they help support arts activities in a variety of ways. Many states provide services and/or employment to artists. Although we think fellowships and grants are wonderful, they usually entail future work, often particular projects for which the grant is given. We have not included these types of fellowships or grants in our results, although it is certainly an honor to be chosen.

We continue to search for means by which the artists we work with can be honored in their lifetimes—for work they have already completed. They may or

may not be called "Arts Awards." In recognizing the outstanding efforts of the creators of folk/art environments, it may be an asset to compete for awards that are not specifically labeled "art," because the creators of folk/art environments do not always fit into the sometimes very traditional definitions of "art" or "folk art."

The following states have mechanisms through which artists may be honored: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington and Wyoming. The following states do not, to our knowledge, have such mechanisms: Arkansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey and New York. The fact that a state has an award system does not mean that these artists will get awards without considerable local effort. Still, it provides a structure through which such an honor is possible.

A Report from Cincinnati

The Symposium

Contemporary Folk Art in American Culture, a symposium sponsored by the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, was held November 21-23, 1986. This article will attempt to represent some of the main concerns of the symposium participants.

Dr. Robert Farris Thompson, professor at Yale University and author of *Flash of the Spirit*, presented a slide lecture entitled "Indelibly Black: The Afro-Atlantic Art Experience." Thompson urged us to consider the history of iconography and its antecedents in the Congo, citing the statistic that 40% of Black Americans claim Congolese ancestry. Thompson suggested that the essential qualities of this iconography have not changed, as information has passed down from parent to child through several generations. Thompson also asserted and documented with slides the passage of this iconography into the dominant culture.

Dr. Eugene Metcalf, social historian and associate professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio and co-curator of *The Ties That Bind*, spoke about "The Social Meaning of Collecting Contemporary Folk Art." He opposes a romanticized view of folk art as a quaint vision from an idealized past. He contends that contemporary folk art can reflect popular social values, but that the most compelling work transforms popular values; folk art has, in fact, the potential to disrupt society.

Dr. Susan Larsen, associate professor of art history at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, spoke about the relationship between what she terms "outsiders" and contemporary artists. She made explicit parallels between the position which a contemporary folk artists holds and the position which the painter Henri Rousseau held in relation to the Paris avant garde in the early part of this century. Rousseau was "in the art world but not of the art world."

Dr. Robert Bishop, Director of the Museum of American Folk Art in New York, spoke on "Contemporary Folk Art and American Museums." He spoke

about the roles of the museum, collectors, Board of Trustees, dealers, and the marketplace, and spoke frankly about their interaction. He discussed the constraints placed on museums and curators by what kind of money is available to do which kinds of exhibitions.

Seymour Rosen, SPACES Director, presented a slide lecture entitled "Environmental Folk/Art and the American Landscape." Rosen presented a variety of kinds of environments in all parts of the U.S. Some of the sites no longer exist; some have had happier endings and have been preserved. He emphasized that these sites represent a genre of activity and are not isolated phenomena. Rosen suggested that one of the reasons this work does not get the recognition it deserves is that it cannot be commodified; it cannot in any real sense be collected. Rosen emphasized SPACES's position that the sites should be preserved on site. He reiterated the fragility of these sites and the advanced age of many of the creators as two reasons for immediate preservation efforts.

Dr. Kenneth Ames, author of *Beyond Necessity: American Folk Art in the Folk Tradition*, spoke on "Folk Art as Artifact: Keys to Understanding American Culture." He stressed the importance of goods/objects in Western culture. Ames wonders why we are attracted to folk art, why we admire it, and why it is always made by others. In our modern world, high in control, ritualized and non-spontaneous, handmade goods help us maintain a cultural balance, an equilibrium. Folk art helps us confront life's questions, including spiritual ones. We believe that folk art is more genuine than other forms of art; its intensity and power impresses us. Folk art becomes an arena of "goods that transcend goods."

Both audience and presenters participated in a lively question-and-answer period which followed. Some issues which were raised included whether or not fine art has an equal potential to folk art for powerful statements. A discussion of whether or not there could be a middle class folk art was answered by gallery owner Randall Morris who said, "That's what we call fine art."

Dr. John Moe, associate professor of art,

Ohio State University at Columbus, presented a slide lecture entitled "The Art of Elijah Pierce." In it, he described his experience of and with the woodcarver Elijah Pierce. For Moe, the study of material culture represents a serious pursuit to find meaning that reveals our past and illuminates our future. Moe describes the focus of Pierce's life as including a belief in the black community, a strong religious conviction, a belief in the importance of black history and culture, and the value of family.

Michael Hall used duck decoys to make a variety of points about folk art, and to indicate the range and complexity of issues in the field. Hall underlined the assumptions a community brings to works of folk art, the often uncontextualized form in which folk art is displayed, the antiseptic function of exhibition practices and framing. He emphasized the variety of original functions and meanings a work has/may have had in ritual, community life, in terms of survival, and as status signifiers. Hall stressed throughout that "folk art is loaded with meaning...it is about something." He concluded his talk with a duck call.

Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr. guided the participants on a personal tour of *The Ties That Bind*, telling stories of acquisition of some of his objects, acknowledging desire for certain pieces he did not own, and in general presenting the position of one of the most important and avid 20th century collectors of American folk art. Hemphill stated that he is always hunting for new pieces to add to his collection.

Didi Barrett, Director of Publications for the Museum of Folk Art, New York and Editor of *The Clarion*, moderated the proceedings during both the Saturday and Sunday sessions.

The Exhibition

The Ties That Bind: Folk Art in Contemporary American Culture opened with a reception for an audience of almost 1,000. This exhibition is divided into several categories, one of which is of particular interest to SPACES members. "Reformulating the World" included "Polski Artiste," a photomural of an environment on the west side of Chicago,

(continued on page four)

Book Reviews

Jack Barth, Doug Kirby, Ken Smith and Mike Wilkins. *Roadside America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986

This is a travel book which states that it will tell "which places are worth going to see." The book describes a lot of craziness to see in between the "serious stuff." In some respects, this book is a rehash of prior ones. It is geared to general audiences, primarily tourists, and includes quite a number of colored pictures. There is an index which lists each "attraction" by state, but, unfortunately, there is no bibliography to encourage interested readers.

Roadside America is a worthwhile addition to your collection, but is not in any respect definitive. *Roadside America* is now available at your favorite bookseller's.

—Seymour Rosen

Folklife Annual 1985. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 1985.

The American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress has published *Folklife Annual 1985*, the first volume in a new series celebrating the traditional expressive life and culture of the United States. Selected by Alan Jabbour, director of the American Folklife Center, and James Hardin, folklife publications editor for the Library's Publishing Office, the essays of this 176 page, clothbound volume are intended for a wide audience.

Two articles are of particular interest to SPACES members. In "Watts Towers and the Giglio Tradition," I. Sheldon Posen and Daniel Franklin Ward posit a relationship between Rodia's work and his southern Italian ancestry (the giglio is a tower six stories high erected as the central part of an annual neighborhood celebration of the Feast of St. Paulinus). The authors suggest that Simon Rodia, when he built the Watts Towers, was working within the framework of a folk tradition.

We at SPACES find the connections interesting. If this repositioning of Rodia's work within a folk tradition helps to preserve the Towers, we think it's wonderful. The authors state, however,

that this connection "redeems, in great measure, a man long thought to be crazy." We are not sure that Rodia's work needs any such redemption.

Biographical information is one fiction which can be overlaid on Rodia's work. However, biography neither explains nor redeems. It is the way in which these works do not conform to a tradition, cannot be explained away and cannot be placed within homogenous categories which is ultimately significant to us at SPACES.

Posen and Ward are to be commended for their efforts, as this article adds to the information surrounding the creation of the Towers.

"Howard Finster: Man of Visions" by John Turner and Judith Dunham is the second article of particular interest to our readers. In 1971 a vision came to the Reverend Howard Finster "to build a paradise and decorate it with the Bible." Thus began Howard Finster's Garden in Summerville, Georgia, which is well described here in words and pictures. For that reason alone, this article is a welcome addition to the growing body of writing about Finster, who has become best known through his paintings. Five photographs, three in color, and nearly one-third of the article are devoted to the Garden.

Turner and Dunham describe Finster's art in the context of his life and self-revelations. He is a person of extraordinary energy and character, a self-described "man of visions." His compulsive energy and insomnia contribute to his prolificacy, as does his strong religious faith. Finster prominently numbers all of his paintings and constructions and keeps detailed statistics about his life's activities. We can only disagree with the authors' claim that Finster's work conveys a timeless and placeless sense. His mixture of contemporary and historical figures, and the detailed depiction of place in his Garden and the settings of his paintings suggest instead the broad view of a traveler. Time is collapsed so that the past, present and future are equally accessible and all places—from home to outer space—are neighbors. This article is a non-scholarly, descriptive addition to the growing Finster bibliography.

Folklife Annual 1985 is a beautifully printed and generously illustrated volume (136 illustrations include 36 in full color). From our perspective, this series provides a wonderful forum within which to question, report, discuss and make connections. The publishers and editors have chosen a broad definition of folklife within which to explore.

Copies of *Folklife Annual 1985* may be ordered for \$16.00 each from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Please refer to Stock number S/N 030-000-00169-9. Payment (checks/money orders payable to Superintendent of Documents) or credit card information must accompany order. Do not send cash or postage stamps.

—Elaine Wintman

Verni Greenfield. *Making Do or Making Art: A Study of American Recycling*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986.

Dr. Verni Greenfield's book, which grew out of her Ph.D. dissertation, explores the motivations, including but not exclusively the aesthetic ones, of three people who have created significant artifacts out of recycled objects: Edward Keinholz, Leo Dante and Tressa Prisbrey. The chapter of most direct interest to us is the one about Tressa Prisbrey, the creator of the Bottle Village in Simi Valley, California. Greenfield uses her direct experience of the Village, her conversations with Tressa Prisbrey, and Prisbrey's biography to make sensitive and intelligent interpretations of Tressa Prisbrey's collages, collecting and building. This is a scholarly book in the material culture of the United States and contains essays on methodology, extensive bibliography, notes and photographs. The chapters that deal with the individuals, however, convey the most fascinating information, with a cool and sensitive eye, about each one's personal vision. This book is one in the series *American Material Culture and Folklife*, edited by Simon J. Bronner, and may be ordered from the publisher: UMI Research Press, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, hardcover, \$39.95.

—Jocelyn Gibbs

SPACES Board of Directors
Seymour Rosen, *President*
Allen Porter, *Vice President*
Linda Mundel, *Secretary*
Ruth Baker Bricker, *Treasurer*
Dr. Ronald Gottesman

SPACES Board of Advisors
Dr. Robert Bishop, *Director, Museum of American Folk Art*
Dr. Ray Browne, *Director, Center for Popular Culture, Bowling Green University*
Lynda Hartigan, *Assistant Curator of Painting and Sculpture, National Museum of American Art*
Ruth Kohler, *Director, John Michael Kohler Arts Center*
Alan Jabbour, *Director, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress*
Edward and Nancy Kienholz, *Artists*
Bates Lowry, *Director, National Building Museum*
Marilyn Lubetkin, *President, The Orange Show Foundation*

SPACES Staff
Seymour Rosen, *Director*
Elaine Wintman, *Assistant Director*
Jocelyn Gibbs, *Consultant*
Louise Jackson, *Researcher*
Rick Ripley, *Computer Consultant*

Newsletter Staff
Elaine Wintman, *Editor*
Jocelyn Gibbs, *Writer*
Seymour Rosen, *Photographer*
Laserprinting by Access Publishing

SPACES is a membership organization which depends on a national constituency to advocate for the preservation of contemporary large scale sculptural folk/art 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 folk/art environments. Membership levels are Students/Seniors \$10; Individual \$15; Individual Sponsor \$25; Institution \$25; Individual Patron \$50; Individual Benefactor \$100; Corporate \$250.

The programs of SPACES have been supported in part by the L. J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, TRW Corporation, the Inter-Arts 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's members.

SPACES
1804 NORTH VAN NESS
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90028
(213) 463-1629

©1987 SPACES All rights reserved. Reproduction of this newsletter, in whole or in part, without the express written permission of SPACES, is prohibited. All reprints or reproductions must credit SPACES. SPACES's newsletter is published three times a year. The numbering is consecutive.

What To Call Them

Although naming and defining this "wonderful stuff" does not necessarily lead to preservation, it's hard to talk about something—much less preserve it—that doesn't have a name. SPACES has used the term "folk/art environment" which, although flawed, seems to be a recognizable term for both viewer and artist. In the Summer 1986 newsletter, we initiated this regular column to air views from a variety of perspectives. In this issue, we publish the response of Robert T. Teske, Associate Curator of Exhibitions, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, Wisconsin. We invite your participation in this conversation.

With regard to your inquiry regarding what to call the environmental constructions SPACES is documenting, I would suggest *grassroots environments*. Because most of these fabrications are highly individualistic and personal, I would not designate them *folk art*. The latter suggests a shared communal aesthetic, traditionality and informal transmission. *Grassroots* seems to me to convey the self-taught, idiosyncratic character of these works more positively than terms like *isolate*, *naive* or *instinctive*. It also suggests to me the strength of the individual's urge to create such works and the location of their presentation—not the gallery or museum, but the artist's home or yard.

The Clarion

The Clarion is a quarterly publication of the Museum of American Folk Art, New York. Current Editor Didi Barrett is particularly interested in contemporary production, and the next issue (Spring/Summer 1987) is completely devoted to contemporary folk art. Future issues will contain articles relating to folk/art environments. A single copy is \$4.50. For further information, write 444 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016.

Fellowships

Kansas Grassroots Art Association, Inc. has initiated two fellowships for academic study in the area of environmental art built by untrained artists. Daniel Franklin Ward, a Ph.D. candidate at Bowling Green University's American Culture Studies Program, received \$500 for work toward his dissertation on Simon Rodia. Another \$500 fellowship was awarded to Ann Taft who is writing about Arizona artist Valenty Zaharek for her M.A. thesis at Western Kentucky University. For information about 1987 grants, write Barbara Brackman, KGAA, P.O. Box 221, Lawrence, KS 66044.

Plaque

John Medica's site will be the next California folk/art environment to receive a Historical Landmark plaque from the State Historical Resources Commission. The site became a State Historic Landmark in 1985, appended to California Registered Historical Landmark #939, 20th Century Folk Art Environments (thematic). SPACES nominated John Medica's site to landmark status; SPACES has successfully nominated ten sites in California. John Medica's site is the third site to receive plaque designation in 1986; there are six California sites which now have plaques or will have in the near future.

(continued from page 2)

A Report from Cincinnati

a photomural of Rosetta Burke's downtown Detroit environment, a painted barrel from that site, an audio tape, and a composite stage reconstruction of the Possum Trot Theatre including several dolls, audio tapes, and a photograph of the original theatre.

We are delighted that these artists and their sites were included. We think it represents another significant step toward greater recognition for these artists and their works. We are glad the work is being taken seriously. Unfortunately, there were no site plans; there was no biographical information about the artists. There was no history given or timeline for important events regarding the history of these sites or their artists. No indication was given in the exhibition concerning the current status of these sites.

The Ties That Bind, curated by Michael Hall and Dr. Eugene Metcalf, will travel to Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (January 25-February 22, 1987); Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York (April 21- June 14, 1987); North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks, (August 27-October 4, 1987); San Jose Museum of Art, California (November 9-January 1988); Akron Art Museum, Ohio (February- March 1988). We highly recommend the exhibition.

—Elaine Wintman