



Arkansas Sculptures of Dionicio Rodriguez

Described during his lifetime as a "naturalistic artist," Dionicio Rodriguez was a Mexican-American sculptor whose outdoor works in tinted reinforced concrete clearly imitate forms found in nature, most frequently, though not exclusively, trees and stone masses. His sculptures also depict fallen or decaying trees that function as footbridges, shelters, and benches. Typically his works were commissioned for landscape settings such as parks, gardens and cemeteries. Concrete sculpted to imitate wood is called "rustico" or "el trabajo rustico" (rustic work) in Mexico. So convincing are Rodriguez's imitations of nature that observers unfamiliar with his work frequently mistake it for real or petrified wood. Rodriguez' sculptures are known to exist in seven states, with Arkansas possessing one of the finest and most representative collections.



Rodriguez sculpture resembling a "thatched" palapa shelter with tree-shaped benches, Lakewood Park, North Little Rock. Photograph courtesy of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

Dionicio Rodriguez was born on March 11, 1891, in Talupa, a town not far from Mexico City. He studied sculpture under Robles Hill, a Spanish artist residing in Mexico. Though the instigation of his arrival in the United States is not known, it is possible that the artist was encouraged by Dr. Auraliano Urrutia, a Mexican physician living in San Antonio, Texas, and an early client. Rodriguez' success in the United States was greatly influenced by the fact that his sculptures were unlike those of any other artist, and Rodriguez maintained a strict

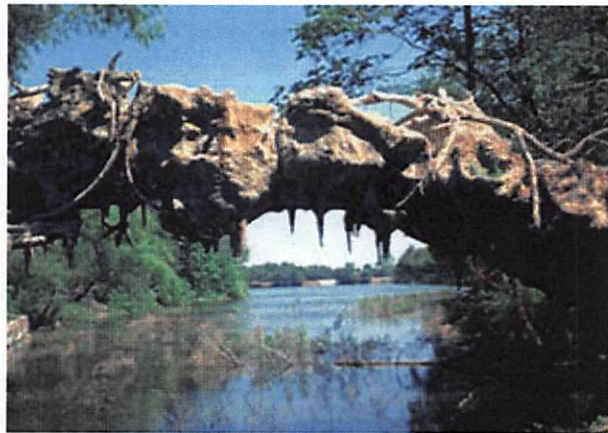


Hollow tree trunk shelter in Lakewood Park, North Little Rock.
Photograph courtesy of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

secrecy regarding his techniques and materials, so that no competition developed. In describing his own work, Rodriguez wrote in 1935 that "It doesn't take much material and gives wonderful results." Working in a folk tradition learned in his native Mexico, Rodriguez was the most skillful and convincing sculptor known to have produced concrete landscape features during the period 1925-1950. Sometime in the late 1940s, Rodriguez returned to San Antonio, and it is not known to what extent he worked during the last years of his life. He died in San Antonio on December 16, 1955. The Arkansas sculptures of Dionicio Rodriguez constitute one of the most representative collections of Rodriguez' work. Three of these

sites, located in parks in North Little Rock, were commissioned. Also commissioned were two sites where Rodriguez' work was displayed, in Garland and Hot Spring Counties.

The T. R. Pugh Memorial Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas, is one of the most extensive and varied collections of Rodriguez' work anywhere in the United States. The park contains a replica mill designed by Frank Carmean. Surrounding the mill are a twisted black locust footbridge, a persimmon tree bridge, a plank wagon bridge, toadstools, fencing, fallen tree branches, a pump and a trough designed and executed by Rodriguez. The sculptures of Rodriguez can also be found in Lakewood Park, in North Little



Two bridge sculptures surrounding the mill at T. R. Pugh Memorial Park in North Little Rock, and another tree trunk sculpture by Rodriguez.
Photographs courtesy of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

Rock. The seven sculptures by Rodriguez include a palapa shelter (an open-sided dwelling), a flower basket planter, a hollow tree trunk shelter, two footbridges, a carved stump drinking fountain and a tree trunk trash container. Other sites in Arkansas containing Rodriguez' work include Crestwood Park, also in North Little Rock; the sculptures at Couchwood, a private estate in Garland County; and Little Switzerland, in Hot Spring County, northwest of Couchwood. Other Rodriguez sculptures are located in Castroville, Houston, and Dallas, Texas; Cedar Hill Cemetery, Suitland, Maryland; Clayton, New Mexico; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago,

Illinois; and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

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