

Bud Goldstone

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John James Oddy, Program Officer
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Dear Mr. Oddy,

The purpose of this letter is to inquire as to the possibility that a grant and/or technical assistance, may be made available for conservation of the Las Pozas monument in Xilitla, San Luis Potosi, Mexico. A conservation project has been planned and an architecture and engineering report completed for the 228 sculptures which make up the monument. These colorful, dramatic, mortar surrealistic works, designed by British poet Edward James between 1964 and 1984, are presently deteriorating in the jungle along the Las Pozas river and waterfalls.

In April and May 1998 at the suggestion of Mr. Mario Bravo of the Getty Conservation Institute, the owners and I prepared a list of possible donor's names for invitations to a meeting in early 1999 at the Getty. The hope then was that the Getty would pledge technical support and the donors would fund the conservation program. A copy of the architecture and engineering report on the project was sent to the Getty Conservation Institute in January 1999. The news I received today from Mexico on the condition of the monument is grim. Please see the April 28, 2000 note below from Mr. Avery Danziger. Mr. Danziger, Mr. Plutarcho (Kaco) Gastelum and I came to the Getty Center in Los Angeles March 25-27, 1998 for your "Mortality Immortality ? The Legacy of 20th Century Art" event. At the event they and I met with Miguel Angel Corzo and Mario Bravo of the Getty Conservation Institute who indicated that some support could be arranged through the Getty to effect the conservation of the monument. No action has been taken to my knowledge.

Of interest to the Getty Conservation Institute is the structural conservation problems associated with the rain forest environment of Las Pozas. Robert J. Koestler conservator of the Metropolitan Museum wrote the following for us: **Conservation Issues: Las Pozas monument biodeterioration commentary.** "Conserving iron-rodged concrete in a tropical environment is certainly a difficult undertaking. Iron stains are hard to remove. Lichens and fungi, on the other hand are relatively straight forward. Choice of biocidal treatment must not poison the water table, the people applying the biocide, or stain the sculptures (the iron rods will probably react with most biocides). Different organisms and groups of organisms (often in a so-called biofilm) may react differently to the same biocidal treatment. Testing for possible effects should be carried out before wide-spread application of any biocide. A regular maintenance program, probably annually, will have to be implemented to keep the sculptures free of biological growths. Sheltering of the sculptures from rainfall may be desirable, although in this case probably impractical. "I have found fungi frequently in mortar samples from around the world; Easily seen with our scanning electron microscope. One of the more benign treatments is calcium hypochlorite. This leaves calcium in the stone (a problem where freeze-thaw occurs) and may interact with other chemicals and biocides (e.g., the biocide organoiodide --giving a bright orange appearance to the stone!) A treatment popular in England is a combination of organotin and quaternary ammoniums. Use of heavy metals, like tin, are being reduced in the US, and may even be banned in the future. The organotin component is good at removing growths, while the quaternary ammoniums are good at maintaining a clean surface. (Concrete buildings in Singapore have algal growth problems--I don't recall off hand the treatment, but will search for the paper I saw a few years ago.) Another problem is that the calcicolous lichens (i.e., calcium-loving) send their rhizomes deep into the

stone (or concrete). This attaches the lichen to the stone very strongly. Consequently, when trying to remove them, a layer of the surface comes with them. Other kinds of lichens attach less tenaciously, and deeply, and cause only minor loss." Correspondence from Robert J. Koestler to N. J. Bud Goldstone 12/98

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The more than seventy structures are decorative and sculptural steel-reinforced concrete and vary in size from narrow, three feet high works to elaborate, three story buildings. The works are scattered throughout the 17-acre hilly site across a ravine from Xilitla. We performed site inspection and photography between October 12 and 21, 1998. The surface area of the sculptures is 110,000 square feet and has 5,500 cracks. The staff labor time required for repair is an estimated 47,000 hours. The recommended program for Las Pozas conservation will consist of an initial two-year portion costing an estimated \$450,000. Work includes physical repairs and conservation of the Giant Column, Peristle House and its 42 columns, House of Plants with 32 columns, Homage to Max Ernst, six Utility Columns, the Disco, and Cave to the Disco and the Bamboo Wall and its 32 columns. A six-page chart includes the cost for repair and conservation of each individual sculpture. The program is estimated to extend over ten years at a total cost of \$2,358,000, including the initial two-year portion

The effects of the rain forest growths and resulting funguses are of great interest in many countries and to the field of conservation. Most repairs and maintenance can be performed by applying state-of-the-art approaches and using mostly locally derived materials and labor. The visual inspection showed that all the steel-reinforced, mortar sculptures require cleaning to remove and retard surface growths of fungi and lichen. Cracks in the surfaces must be filled. Some sculptures require treatments for failures in pigmented covers over the cement mortar. Two areas below the upper waterfalls require further study. Both have suffered from rain and excessive flow from the river. This waterfall creates the uppermost of the nine pools and has caused sand and boulders to submerge works in the pool. A mud slide nearby has damaged the rear wall and posts under the Jupiter Palace. Please see the following two photos - one before the damage and the other after the damage.

The proposed conservation program is divided into seven parts. The first part consists of a preliminary phase and conservation of the structures in Area 1 - across the road from the main public area. This large public area is then divided into six areas. Task Area One, the initial portion proposed for conservation work, includes the public road from the highway and from Xilitla; the parking area in front of the entrance to the monument; the retaining walls along the road; and sculptures adjacent to the two access roads: the 1 km road from the highway and the 2.1 km road to Xilitla. The recommended program elements include a Preliminary Phase to evaluate safety and security issues, establish operations on the site, produce a detailed work plan and develop a working budget. Conservation in Area One will follow and then conservation in the other six task areas. The preliminary phase and area 1 structural repair and conservation cost is estimated at \$450,000. The budgetary and planning cost estimate for the entire project is \$2,358,000. Total costs were estimated at \$980,000 for labor including the on site foremen; \$920,400 for professionals in architecture, conservation, engineering, survey and materials testing; \$180,000 for communications, materials and equipment; and \$271,600 for administration and on site office assistance. Detailed breakdowns of the costs are available upon request.

Please see this note from Mexico 4/28/00 - "We have made a great deal of progress on Las Pozas I found a huge dry warehouse to house all the forms... So all the forms have been moved (somewhat haphazardly) and are now stored together. Some of the structures in Las Pozas are starting to crack and split open very badly, I am deeply concerned for their future. Next month (may) we will finally be meeting with the "powers that be" to start the process of establishing a tax exempt association for Las Pozas in both Mexico and the US. I have met with an accountant (located in S an Miguel) who is from the US and knows all about starting and maintaining a 501c3 in the States (California) and has helped the Biblioteca Publica in San Miguel maintain there for over 10 years. We have met with the accountants in Mexico City who did the same things for the B.P. for their Mexican "asociacion civil" tax exempt status."

contact call Mr. Avery Danziger at Posada El Castillo in Xilitla S.L.P. (52) 136 5 00 38 or FAX 136 5 00 55.

Las Pozas Background

Las Pozas is the name given a group of more than 200 colorful steel-reinforced cement structures, some as large as two- and three- story buildings. The site is West of Tampico, 4,000 kilometers (2,800 feet) high in the Sierra Gorda range of the Sierra Madre mountains near Xilitla in the state of San Luis Potosi, Mexico. The unique monuments were designed by Edward James, a British poet. James acquired the property in 1945 and, before 1962, built elaborate stone retaining walls to support the hillsides for an extensive orchid collection and for corrals for his diverse collections of animals and birds. In 1962 a surprise freeze killed the orchids. In 1964, James began his creative design and construction effort at Las Pozas. It is believed that his works in Las

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Pozas were inspired by his 1962 visit to the Simon Rodia Watts Towers in Los Angeles, where he donated a valuable Guttenburg press to the Committee involved in the conservation of the Rodia sculptures.

The sculptures, costing an estimated five and one half million dollars, were built by laborers using wooden forms which followed James' designs. As many as one hundred or more laborers worked for twenty years on the monument. Plutarco Gastelum, Sr., father of the present owner of most of James' sculptures was supervisor of the construction. In 1998, both the Governor and Minister of Culture of San Luis Potosi officially recognized the site as a state landmark. Las Pozas received additional recognition the same year at a conference in March at the Getty Conservation Institute. This art conservation conference included participation by an international group of artists, museum officials, conservation authorities and art collectors and was entitled 'Mortality-Immortality, the Legacy of Twentieth Century Art'. A bibliography has been provided later in the report. Some of the structures are located on private property within Las Pozas and three others are located in Xilitla. This report covers all of these Edward James-designed structures.

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Referring to Simon Rodia who had just died James' quote Sustain the vision. "Though a desire to build unauthorized and unorthodox architecture may be less rare than most of us realize, the will to carry out the realization is the truly remarkable achievement. Many may feel themselves inspired; especially after a few drinks, lots of men and women sense stirrings of original genius. What distinguishes the real genius is the ability to sustain the vision." Edward James. Poet

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