



Duke Cahill, heavyweight fighter, merchant mariner, restaurant and bar owner, swimming pool builder, sculptor, metal worker, sign maker, created a 3-acre **worker art** environment in South Sacramento in the forty years at the end of the twentieth century.

Cahill is one of the most colorful characters to have ever lived in this region.

We are seeking the attention of museum directors, writers, critics, gallery owners and magazine and book publishers to assure that Duke's unique perspective, humor and creative efforts will be appreciated by future generations.

Initially we are trying to identify free temporary storage space since family priorities have changed and the environment will be dismantled.

If you could lend a hand, please call Steve Vanoni, (916) 457-5269

Graphic design and photography for this effort have been donated by Tom Whitney, Stacey Robertson and Steve Vanoni.

DUKE CAHILL: FIGHTER WORKER, ARTIST

By Steve Vanoni

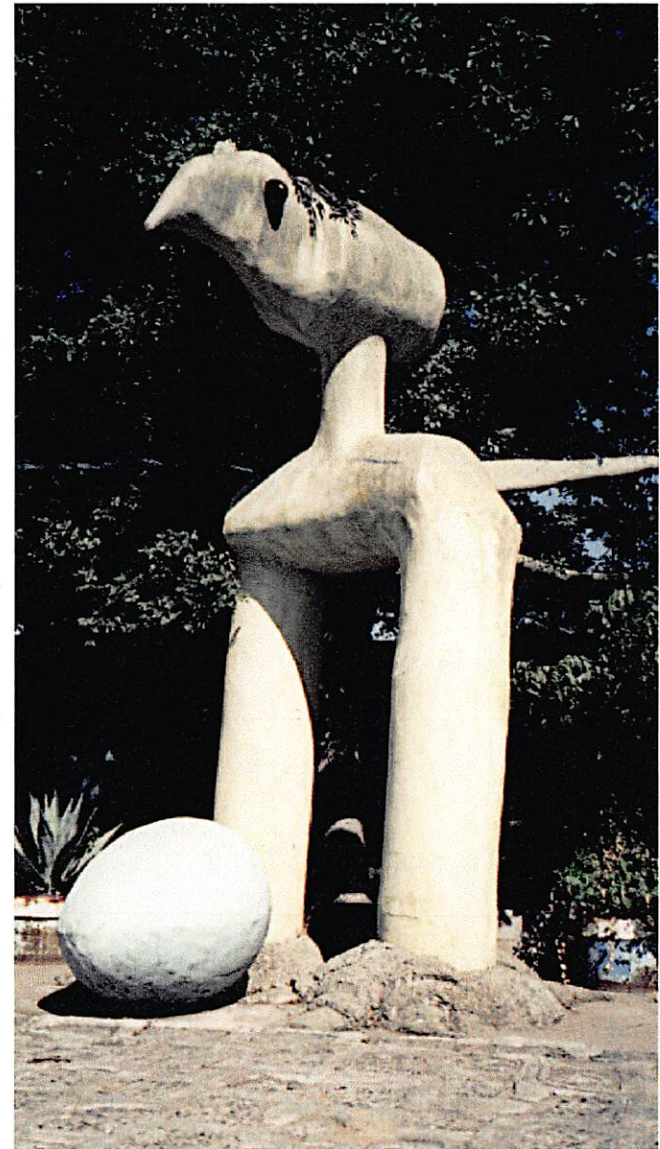
The first time I noticed Duke Cahill's place was in 1978 while driving down a South Sacramento road. Over the next ten years I pulled into his driveway numerous times to admire the artworks and to try to figure out how I could possibly meet the creator of this amazing environmental sculpture park. Signs like "Trespassers May Be Shot," and "Go Away You Are Not Welcome," along with the doberman stationed near the gate, made me feel somewhat uneasy about even standing in his driveway. I always wondered how someone could seduce you with such an array of beauty and at the same time chase you away by posting such threatening signage.

My artist friend Robert and I took a trip down

to his place to try to interview him for a local rag. We pulled up into his driveway, got out of the car and as usual stood there in awe looking around at all the wonderful "stuff." After a couple of minutes the doberman got up and started our way. "Here comes the dog, Robert," I said as we quickly scuffled for the car.

A car pulled up behind us then moved over along my side. The solidly built older man cracked his window a little and I rolled mine down. "What do you want," he asked me. "We wanted to talk to the person who made these incredible sculptures. We've been admiring them for





years. I really love this stuff," I told him.

"Follow me," he said.

Following the guy into his place gave me an ominous feeling, like 'What are we getting into?' 'Is he going to shoot us or what?'

We drove into his four-acre, city-block-sized work yard and parked behind him under a large covered area. We introduced ourselves, then he asked, "So, you boys old enough to drink?" "Sure," we said.





We followed him over to a wall totally covered with signs, and he reached down and pulled up a garage door revealing the inside of a bar and workshop area.

Inside the bar a 65 year old green parrot named Rosita lived in a large metal cage positioned near a wood burning stove. There were a couple of large wooden thrones and a low ceiling with literally thousands of things hanging down suspended over your head.

So finally, after ten years, I met Duke Cahill. His personality exudes an aura more like John Wayne than anyone else I have ever met.

The walls of the entire complex are covered with photos, posters, commercial logos, curios and signs and objects from several bars and restaurants Duke has owned over the years.



There are street signs from all over California, plants, cactii and maze-like passageways winding through the complex.

There are a lot of 30s- and 40s-era fight photographs and posters displayed. These are from the times when Duke was a heavyweight boxer and in the merchant marines

challenging the champion of almost every port he landed in, as well as boxing his way across America on his way to a 62 win, 2 (technical) loss, record.

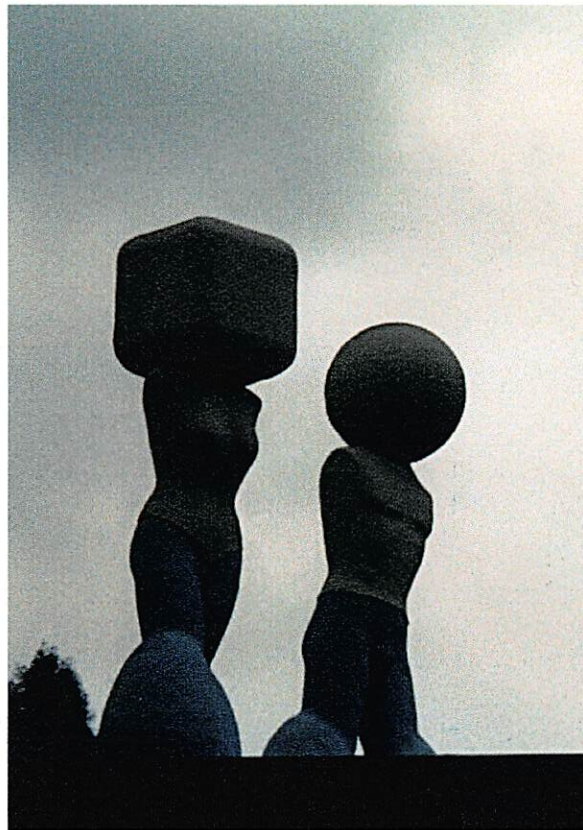
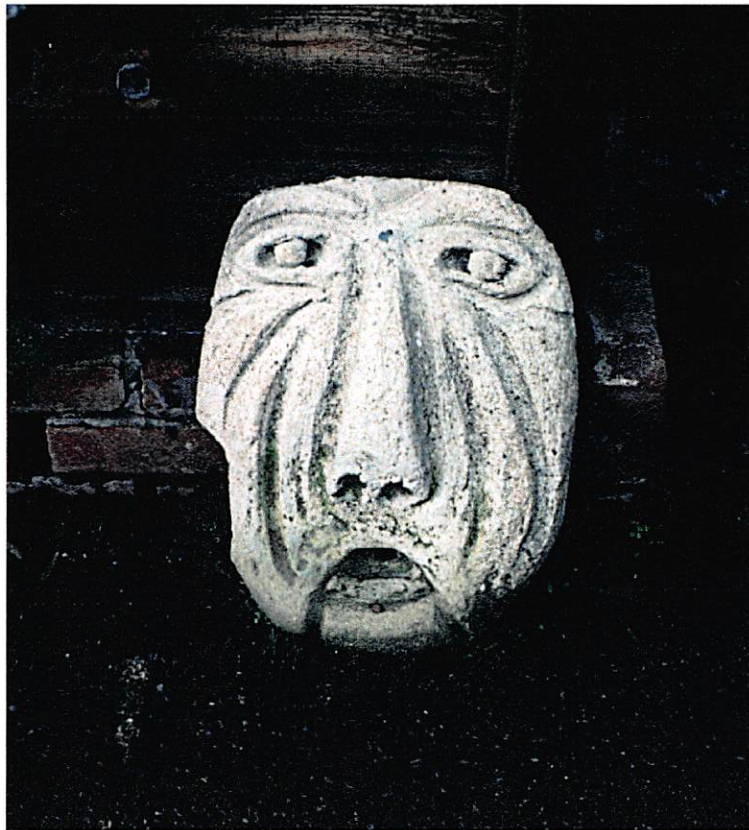
He continued to add rooms for forty years, filling his walls, ceilings and work yard with objects and images. Like the Louvre, it would take more than one day to see it all. You can even take a spiral staircase to the top of a tower and gaze out a periscope at the neighboring modern suburbia encroaching its way up to his once remote and solitary walls.

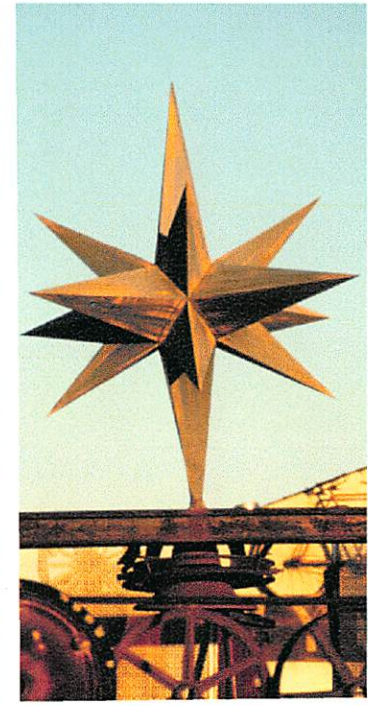
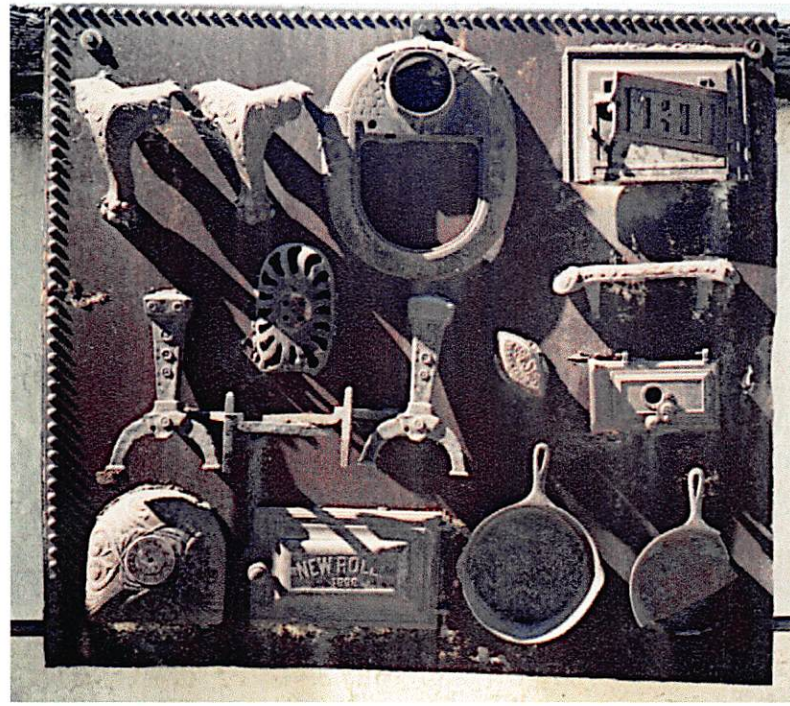
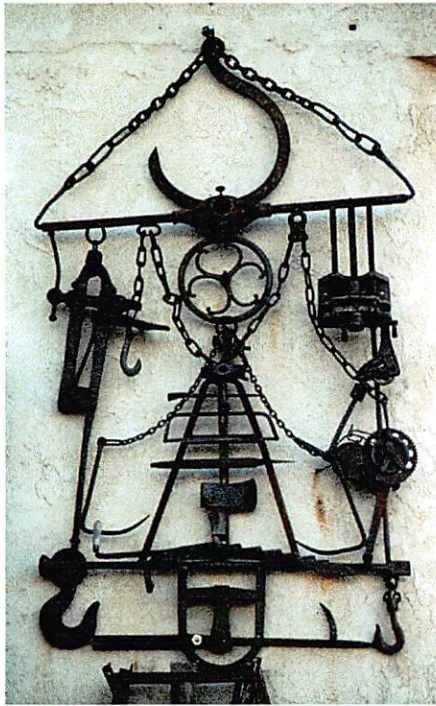
The art is divided into three types: the fiberglass and plaster sculptures, the metal wall assem-



blages, and Duke's signs.

Most noticeable at first because of their large size are the fiberglass and plaster sculptures. A row of creatures faces west, consisting of a fifteen foot pink alien man, a twelve foot cat, a ten foot dog, a large prehistoric-looking bird with a large egg and a huge plaster jug embellished with metal tools pushed into its outer surface. Another twenty foot alien woman stands off to the side with a giant whale that rests on top of a barn-like structure that was once home for a couple of goats and ducks. A trio of sphere-headed aliens stand on top of a boat peering down at you, monitoring your actions near the entry gate.



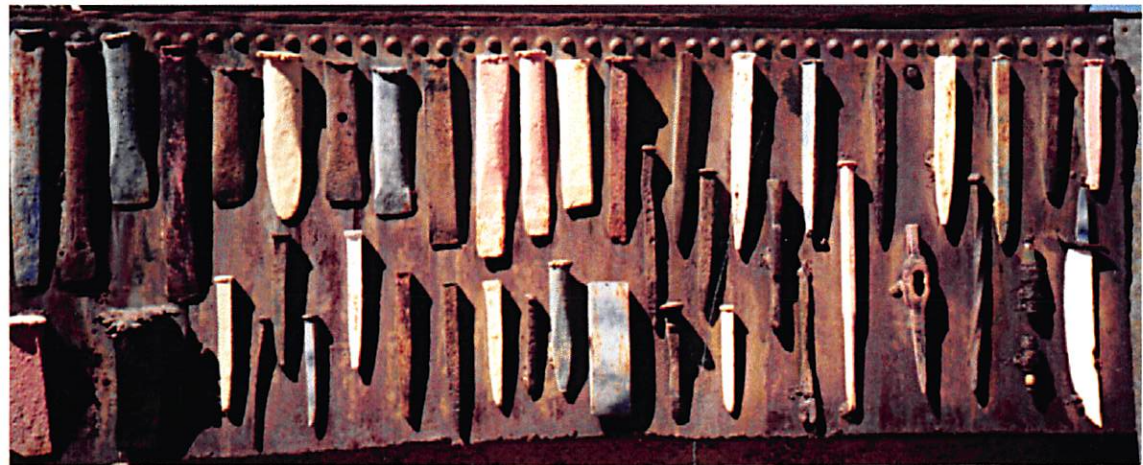
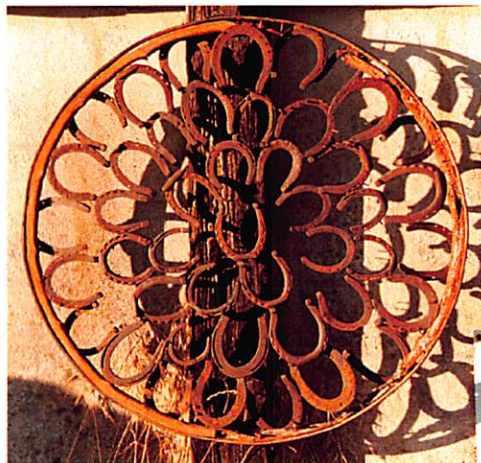
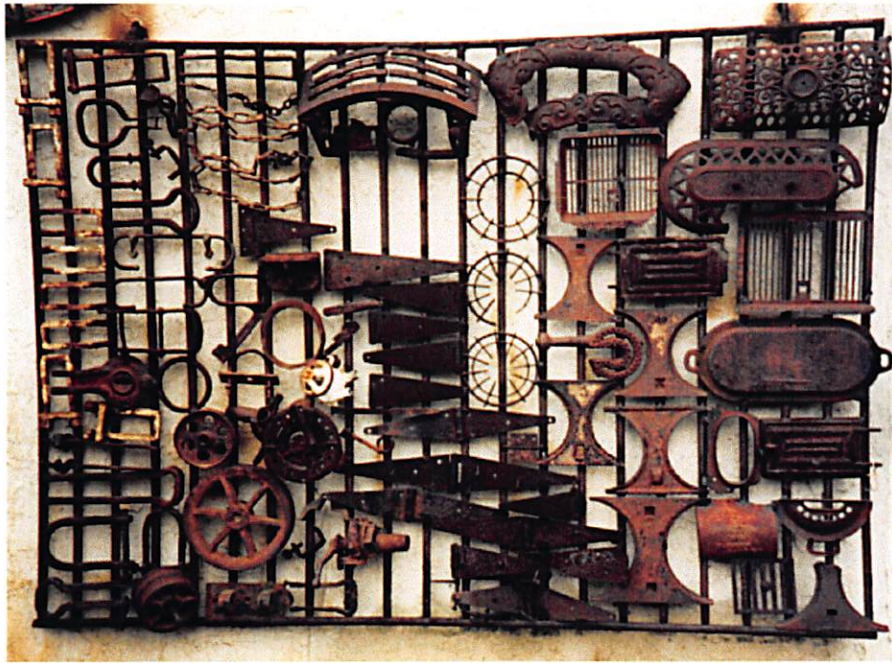


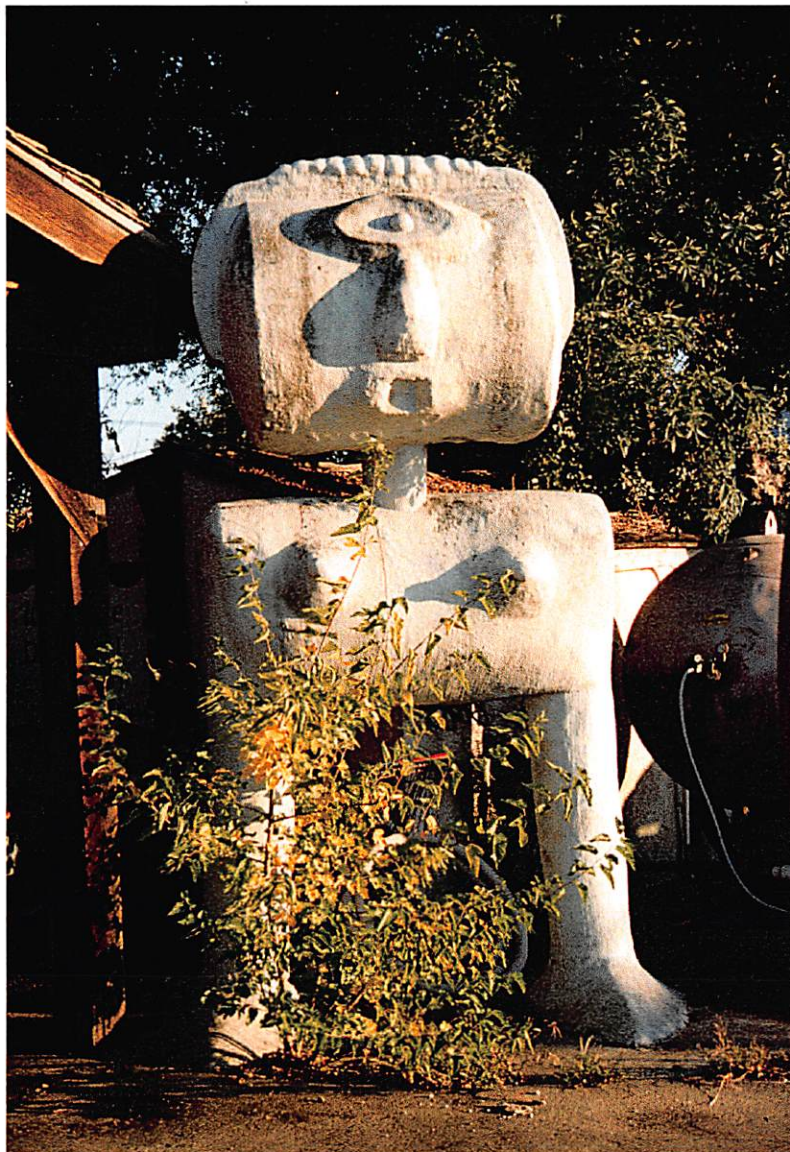
A huge salvage yard is located a couple of miles away where Duke would find objects to use for his metal sculptures.

There are about fifty wall assemblages hanging around the work yard made of rusted and painted metal tools welded together. A seven foot by seven foot metal wall piece composed of various sized rusted wrenches welded together creates a natural-mechanical rhythm by utilizing the repetition of images and tools and is somewhat Arman-esque.

The enormous brightly painted metal gates are particularly beautiful. Some pieces have a minimal amount of color painted on the objects, while most remain entirely covered with their natural rich rust patina.

The sculptures and metal work evolved out of a need for Duke to keep his crew of working men busy when the weather conditions were not optimum for one of his businesses producing fiberglass swimming pools. Duke told me he could use fiberglass only if there was no wind or rain.



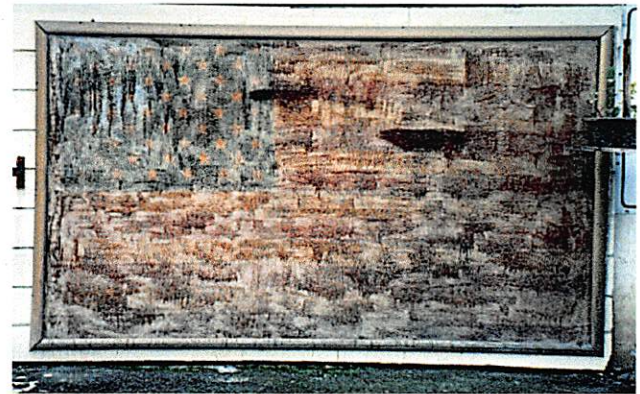


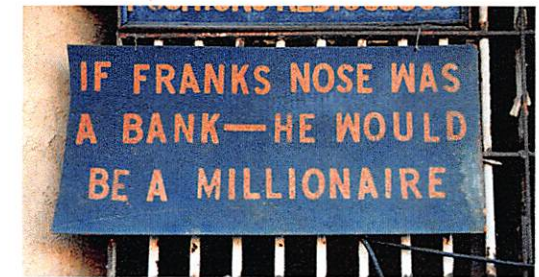
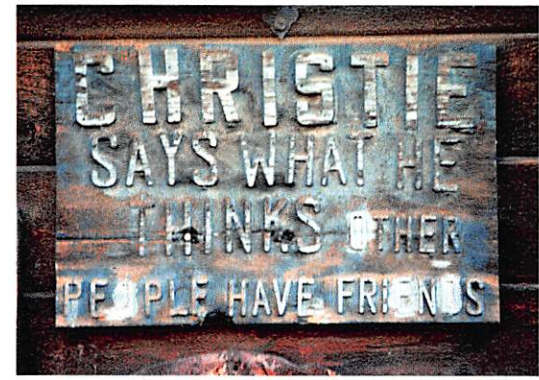
The art is a result of collaborating with his crew using metal shapes and working tools for materials that they came into contact daily in the construction field, and using the fiberglass they were so familiar with.

They built, constructed, crafted and created a truly working man's aesthetic of "Work Art" covering the entire yard.

This industrial age worker's aesthetic has a purity similar to the cave wall artists reflecting the earth's animals of that time using pigments from the earth.





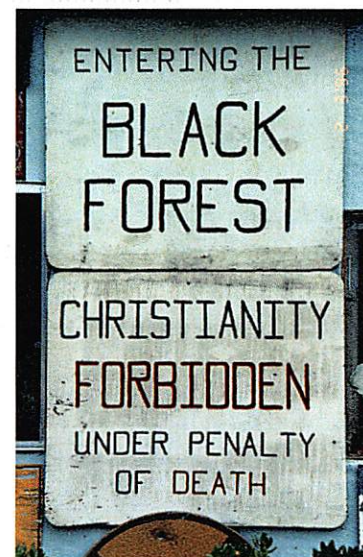
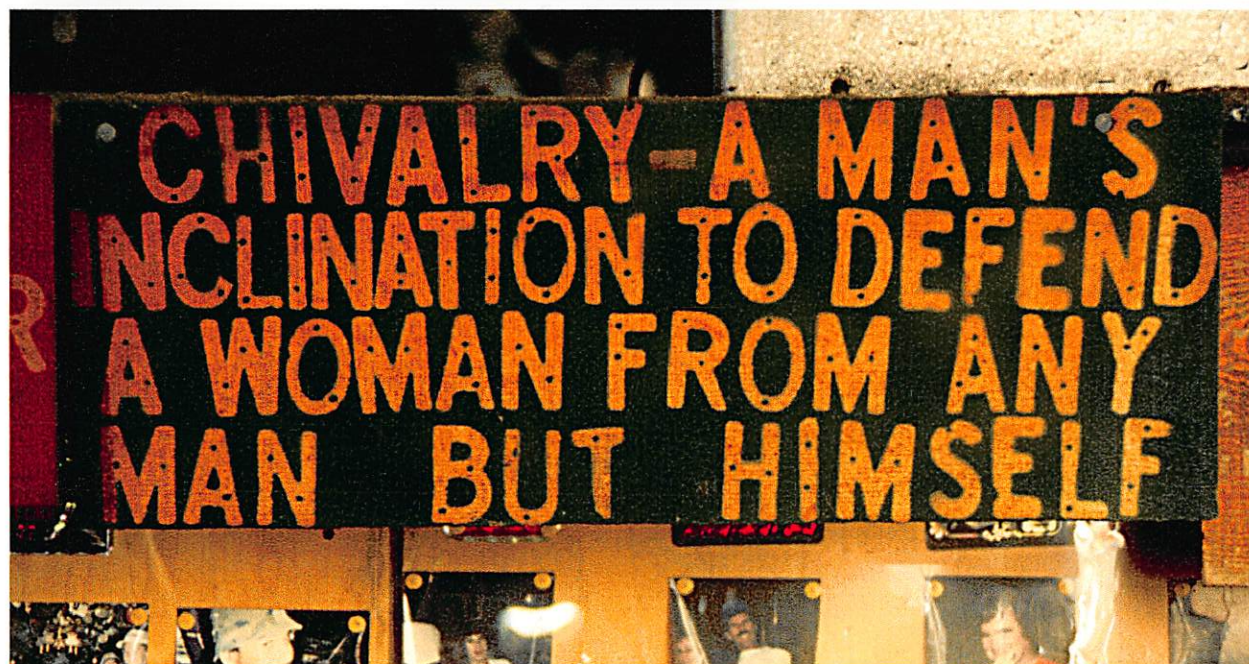
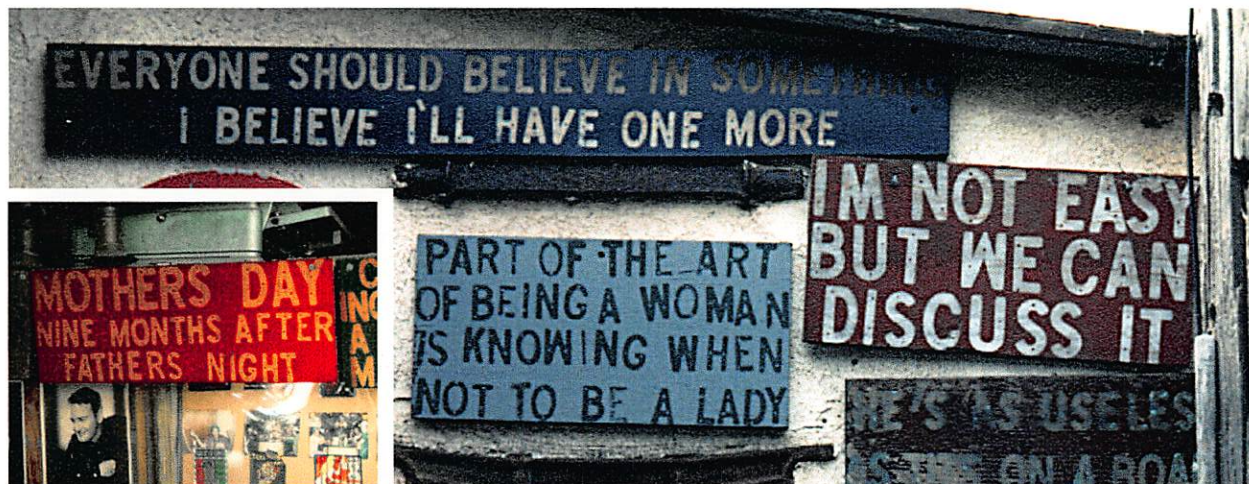


Like any culture, being an American can be a somewhat ambivalent experience: but the heroic and idiomatic voices, Duke's among them, that have emerged from our culture are amongst the greatest on the planet.

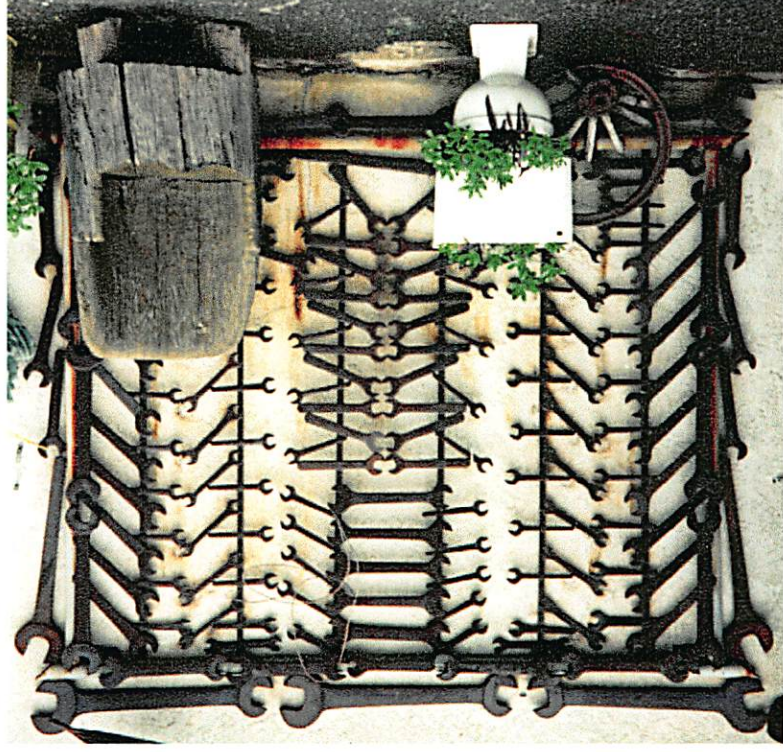
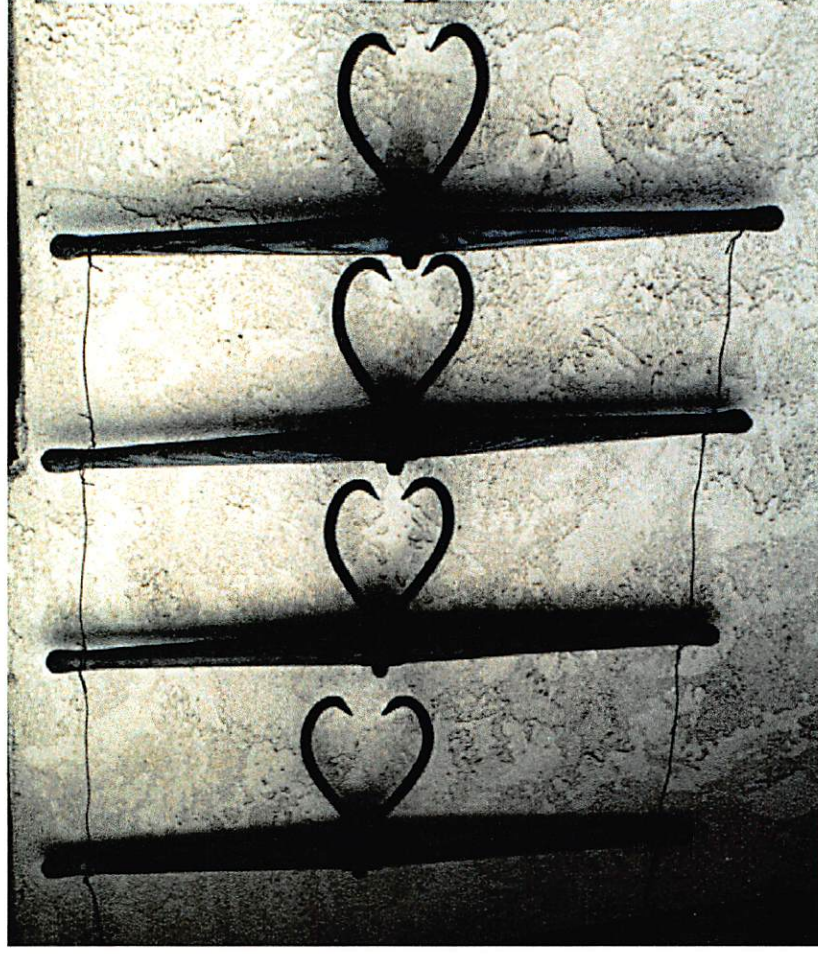
Finally, the last and most personal form of his art are Duke's signs. He used them as a vehicle to communicate humorous sayings he either invents or borrows, and to rib his friends and workers. These signs expose the truth according to Cahill.

The signs are small wooden pieces, fifty to one hundred of them, with sand-blasted, spray-painted, or stenciled lettering often accompanied by a photo of the person who

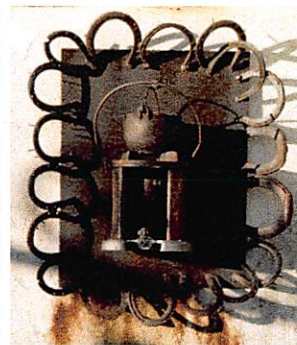
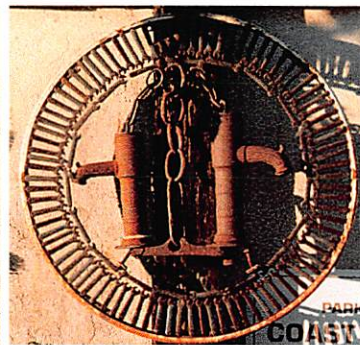
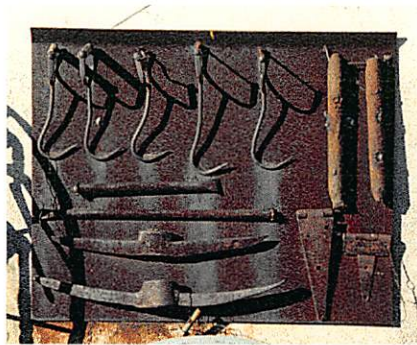




has become the brunt of his joke or judgement.
The artwork incorporated along with everything
else creates the overall organic ambience of walking
through a large five-dimensional abstract
expressionistic field painting of a Pollock, or a



Schwitters collage. You are inundated with
multitudes of auto-socio-primitive information
and wonder. It's epic scale and proportions,
images and ideas create an other-worldly feel
similar to that of Gaudi's Cathedral, Rodia's
Towers, Nec Chand's Sculpture Park, Cheval's
Palais Ideal or the Bhudda Parks of Thailand,
but captures a sensibility indigenous only to our
American West.
Duke has enough work here to have a piece
in every museum around the world.



Back in the 1970s, a curator borrowed a couple of pieces for a show that toured the country. Two years later Duke called him up to ask where they were. They were being exhibited down at the Oakland Museum at that time, so he went there and picked them up. He told me that he liked having his stuff around him and missed seeing the work.

I brought my video camera out to his place once. He asked me why I brought it. I told him I wanted to video some of his artwork.

"So that's what they call it?"

"Yeah, that's what they call it," I said.

"Ya know, Duke, you make some of the greatest art I've ever seen," I told him.

"Have another drink, kid," he said. ♣

