



## ENVIRONMENTS IN FRANCE

### The Universality of it all

When I was first introduced to the Watts Towers in 1952, there was no particular reason to assume that Simon Rodia was the only person who had ever created a magical place of his or her own imagination. I just never thought about it. Soon someone mentioned that a postman in France had built himself a Watts Towers. Still I considered that this was a particular American phenomenon although many of the places were built by people who had immigrated to this country.

Not so. We have "discovered" hundreds of monumental sites in France, India, Italy, Canada, Venezuela, Russia, Iran, South Africa, Nigeria and Australia, some of which are quite old. We are in fact investigating a site in Australia that dates back to 1850, prior to Rodia's birth and during Cheval's teenage years.

Over the years, a number of patterns have come to the fore and many popular assumptions have proved false. Many of the builders were everyday workmen and women. But we also found a lot of professionals as well as bureaucrats; some very educated, some not; some poor, many more not. There were those self-taught in their profession or business and in fact some had numerous professions and businesses. Although a lot of people were isolated from their community by chance, location, or perhaps desire, a number were also community stalwarts and leaders.

If SPACES' researcher Louise Jackson's insights prove correct, that an inordinate amount of these people in America started building these sites in the 50's in their fifties, it just means that many of these people grew up or

shopping malls, mass communications, much less super highways. If something broke it meant you had to fix it or wait perhaps months for the traveling tinker. It was a time of self-sufficient people. If you needed a house, you built your house. You grew and canned your own food, someone in the family made the clothes, fixed the plow and picked the herbs to cure your illness. If you wanted something beautiful around the house you made it.

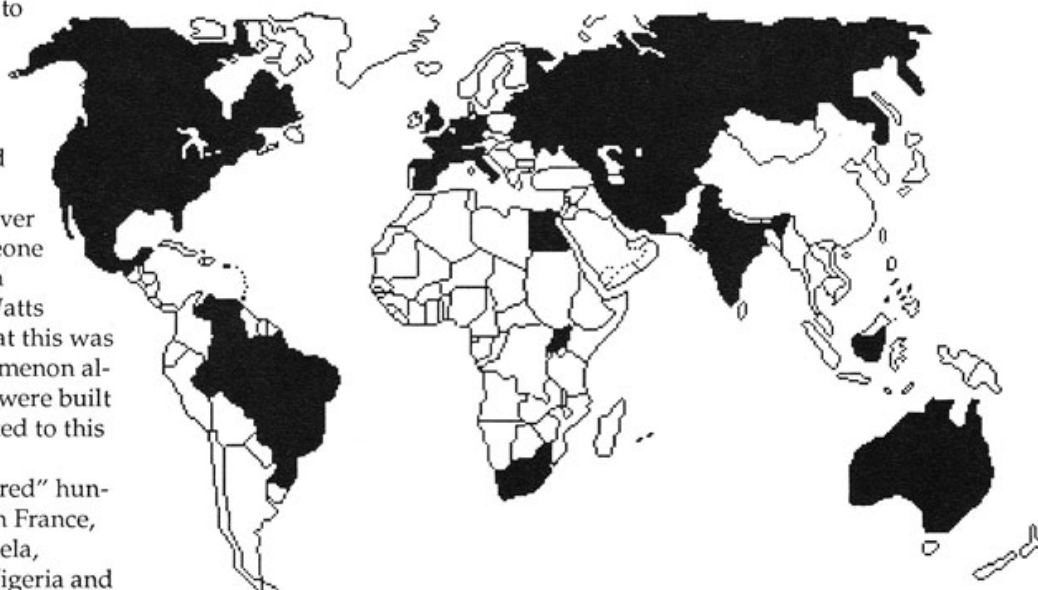
If building these environments during middle age proves to be a norm, then we are talking about mature people with broad life experience deciding to create something in the context of their community that we would like to equate with art. Although we don't have enough information about people outside the United States, a lot of patterns look pretty familiar.

More and more people are getting interested and involved with this phenomenon and touching bases with

Bud Goldstone, the man who designed the test that demonstrated the durability of the Watts Towers just returned from France where he consulted on the restoration of Raymond Isidore's Picassiette. Besides the happy emergence of the English journal *Raw Vision*, more magazine stories and books are in the works. SPACES is in contact with people concerned with preservation in South Africa, in France and of course in the United States. Requests for information are coming from many people and agencies all over the world who did not consider that these works were to be valued as art a few years ago.

SPACES has also happily expanded its Board of Advisors and welcomes aboard Laurent Danchin, art critic/writer, France, Bonnie Grossman, Director of the Ames Gallery in Berkeley, CA and John Maizels, Publisher of *Raw Vision*, England to continue to reflect the universality of it all.

*Seymour Rosen*



## THANKS! THANKS! THANKS!

During our 12+ year tenure, SPACES' masthead reflected just some of the people that were involved with documenting and preserving America's contemporary folk art environments.

We thought it was time to acknowledge the people who contributed to SPACES' good works and who were never appropriately thanked in a public form:

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We would also like to thank the  
Susan Richter Foundation, and Don  
Weinstein of Photo Impact

and (oops!) all who have contributed to SPACES' archives.

## Exhibition Updates

Roger Manley and David Steels' exhibition "Signs and Wonders: Outsider Art Inside North Carolina," which was produced by the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh moves to the Hickory Museum of Art, Hickory, NC, October 13 - January 3, 1990 and then to St John's Museum of

Art, Wilmington, NC, January 18 to March 14, 1990. We had a quick look at the catalog and it includes an incredible 109 artists many of whom have created environments. More details will appear in an upcoming newsletter.

We included an insert on an upcoming exhibition in New Jersey "Two Arks, A Palace, Some Robots & Mr. Freedom's Fabulous Fifty Acres" by Holly Metz & Robert Foster in NL # 9. The show was very successful and is now at the Jersey City Museum from September 15 to November 19, 1989.

The catalog which shows some 12 sites in New Jersey is terrific. It is also an amazing bargain. For a copy send a check for \$5.00 plus \$2.00 postage/handling, payable to Robert Foster. Mail to Holly Metz, 522 Garden Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030

## Good news from Georgia

Sanity prevails! After the Columbus (GA) Museum refused St. EOMs' gift of his property and possessions, interested local people and the infatigable Fred Fussell rose to the occasion and are re-activating the non-profit Marion County Historical Society.

Tentative plans include assuming responsibility for the property and forming a sub group, the Pasaquan Preservation Society, whose sole responsibility will be the preservation of the site and other works of Eddie O. Martin.

Hopefully, all of this will be in place by November 1989. There are already plans for a massive clean up and repainting of the property by local residents and other fans of St. EOM. The Pasaquan Preservation Society will be developing a national constituency (membership?) to help fund their activities. SPACES' members will be informed of their programs in our newsletter as well as other mailings.

The Columbus Museum has kindly agreed to keep some 4,000 artifacts from the property in a safe humidity controlled environment until the new group can house the items themselves.

If you can't wait for information to come to you, you should contact Mulkey McMichael, Buena Vista, GA 31803. Please tell them you heard about it from SPACES.

## In the News

The Inventory of American Sculpture, a national census of publicly and privately owned art work, will provide a comprehensive list of works by American sculptors from the colonial period to the present. Initial efforts are concentrated on recording indoor works in public and private collections nationwide. Plans are also underway to systematically survey all outdoor works; a local level outdoor sculpture survey was initiated by summer 1989. However, the museum is still in the process of designing a report form suitable for recording complex-sited works, such as folk art environments. The information is entered into a computer database at the Smithsonian: the Smithsonian Institution Bibliographic Information System (SIBIS). As a research database on SIBIS, it will serve art historians, museum professionals and others in locating works pertinent to a particular artist or theme they are researching. Eventually, the museum will also make the information available online through RLIN, the Research Libraries Information Network. As currently structured, the Inventory is designed to index works by artist, title, subject, medium or location. Ultimately, it is hoped that such extensive documentation will help identify the preservation needs of a particular piece of sculpture. By 1991 the Inventory should be ready for public use. For further information please contact Inventories of American Sculpture, Office of Research Support, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20506, telephone (202) 357-2941 or (202) 786-2384. Contributor: Christine Hennessey, Coordinator, Inventory of American Paintings and Sculpture, Office of Research Support.

### A caveat from SPACES:

Please make sure the artist is willing to have the site listed. Also make sure the site can handle the potential traffic such a listing would encourage. If someone trips and hurts himself on a artist's property (even if uninvited), the artist is responsible.

## Environments in France and the United States: an Overview

In France as in the United States there is a difference of opinion about the character and range of environmental art. In our estimation, environmental art in the two countries shares striking similarities. For both French and American experts several questions continue to resist easy answers: Should environmental art solely include the creative products of the "untutored?" What kinds of components does it entail? Is it art or is it not? What shall we call it? What are its connections, if any, to other types of art, such as Art Brut? Should it be preserved for future generations to enjoy?

The age range of documented French sites seems to far exceed the time depth of documented sites in the United States, although conceivably a few sites in both countries may have somehow eluded notice and thus skewed the historical record. Construction of the earliest documented French sites, Fouré's carved rocks at Rotheneuf and Cheval's Palais Idéal, commenced in the late 1800's. Virtually all French sites, like their American counterparts, were built over several decades. Interestingly, Ferdinand Cheval and Simon Rodia each spent approximately 33 years devoted to the construction of their enormous, awe-inspiring architectural feats.

Community reaction to the environments has been mixed, as it has been in the United States: reactions from community members and neighbors range from strong approval, even pride, to a complete disavowal of the site's existence. Several environments have achieved widespread public recognition and are currently tourist attractions. Tourist offices were nevertheless amazed to discover that the reputations of some sites have crossed international boundaries.

Glass and ceramic mosaics are a popular media for French environmental folk artists. The materials themselves sometimes represent close social connections between the artist and his or her neighbors: often, an artist collects fragments of dishes and glass from neighborhood businesses and companions. Raymond Isidore, like Simon Rodia, relied not only upon serendipity to provide him with his materials, but also upon the kindness of his friends and acquaintances.

Beyond symbolizing social relationships, easily-available discarded objects challenge the imagination of the artists. These objects, rich in memories as Grandma Prisbrey would attest, are also valued for their intrinsic beauty and potential. To the artists, casting off any object after it has fulfilled its purely utilitarian purpose is unimaginative and short-sighted. As Isidore remarked, "We discard so many things that could be used to create life and happiness... We discard things and human beings."

Numerous French publications, predating the scattered American ones, have

prominently featured environmental art. While there is some extremely in-depth documentation on the range of sites in France, in sheer numbers and materials used, no one is systematically organizing on-site preservation efforts to save sites, endangering or otherwise.

Preservation efforts are generally small-scale and localized. Two French environments, le Palais Idéal and Maison Picassiette, both designated historic and cultural landmarks, have received inconsistent attention. The largest, oldest and most famous environmental site, le Palais Idéal, is a National Monument and has therefore benefitted from some recent repair. Nonetheless, in April 1988, the structure bore a crack of a magnitude

that would force closure of the site, if it were located in the United States. Maison Picassiette in particular has suffered from benign neglect, although it is currently under the supervision of the Musée des Beaux Arts in Chartres and plans are underway for its restoration.

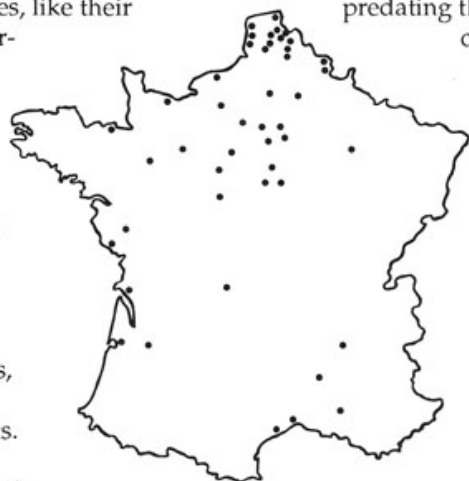
A few French individuals, notably Laurent Danchin, have initiated letter-writing campaigns to preserve French environments. Without concerted documentation and preservation efforts, French sites, like those in the United States, will not exist for future generations to enjoy.

Over the next few pages, our photographic essay will introduce you to the wonder and whimsy of 9 French environments. French environmental art, similar to its American counterpart, represents the culmination of a self-taught artist's long-term creative commitment. The information on the sites was gleaned from a mixture of sources, including French literature on the environments and Seymour Rosen's firsthand experiences during his trip to France last year.

From the plethora of books available on French environments, we recommend four overviews in particular: *Les Inspirés du Bord des Routes* by Jacques Verroust (1978, Editions de Seuil); *Les Inspirés et Leurs Demeures* by Gilles Ehrmann (1962, Editions du Temps); *Jardins Imaginaires: Les Habitants-Paysagistes* by Bernard Lassus (1977, Les Presses de la Connaissance); and finally, *Fantastic Architecture* by Michael Schuyt, Joost Elffers and George R. Collins (1980, Abrams). See the Bibliography on French Environments, page 8 for further information.

Cynthia Pansing

[Editors note - Laurent Danchin, a well respected scholar, believes that our definition of folk art environments is too restrictive. He feels that we should include such major French artists as Chomo and Tatin. Not having room in this issue, we will have to save your introduction to these artists for another issue.]







### Ferdinand Cheval, "Le Palais Idéal" Hauterives, Drôme

A postman in Hauterives, Cheval dreamed of creating an "ideal palace" from the naturally-carved sandstone he collected along his 32 km. postal route. He began to construct le Palais in 1879. For the next thirty-three years, he devotedly labored as nature's "architect and mason" in his leisure time. The labyrinthine interior and exterior of the Palace are ornately intertwined with sculptures and grottoes, "supported" on one side by gigantic Druids. Shell mosaics and stones comprise the primary methods of surface decoration. Nestled within the folds of le Palais, Cheval tucked fantastic replicas of Saracen tombs, Hindu monuments, the White House, and "figures of antiquity." Cheval died in 1924. Originally envisioning le Palais as his tomb, his intentions were undermined and he was buried in a smaller structure he built in a nearby graveyard. After his death, his work achieved widespread recognition, especially by the Surrealists. In 1969 le Palais was classified as an "Historic Monument," recognizing the work as a unique example of folk/naive art. Le Palais is currently being restored and a master plan is being developed to enhance the property. The site is open to visitors.



### Fernand Châtelain, "Les Centaures" Fye, Orne

Fernand Châtelain retired from farming in 1961 at the age of 62, yet he "could not stay idle". In 1965, he began building his cheerful, other-worldly sculptures in his garden in Fye, near Alençon. Some of the brightly-painted,

wide-eyed figures recall myths while some are purely creatures of the artist's imagination. Les Centaures (the Centaurs) are the most well-known inhabitants of his yard, surrounded by creatures which appear to have been sent from another planet. Each figure has an internal wire framework, which is filled with crumpled paper, covered with cement and finally painted. From the beginning of the construction, vandals have intermittently invaded Châtelain's environment and destroyed his sculptures. Refusing to let the destruction demoralize him, he continued to create his fragile, playful animal and human figures until his death. The artist, however, steadfastly believed his sculptures should not outlive him, and therefore declined offers to restore his fading and peeling sculptures. On August 28, 1988 Fernand Châtelain died a few days before his 89th birthday. According to Laurent Danchin, this environment is in great need of repair, but no protection plan has been developed.



### M. Da Costa, "la Maison Bleue" Dives-sur-Mer, Calvados

Euclides Da Costa Ferreira enameled objects for the local church, besides working for the metal factory near his house. From 1957 through 1977, Da Costa intricately decorated his Dives-sur-Mer house and garden with mosaics of ceramic and glass, carefully arranged according to color. Many of the mosaics are blue, hence the name, La Maison Bleue, and in some areas are encased in colored cement. He visually replicated animal motifs throughout the garden, including images devoted to the memory of Laika, the canine passenger of a Soviet rocket shot into space in the late 1950's. Laika, it seems, inspired him to build the garden. Walkways and large freestanding structures are embellished with mosaic camels, chameleons, deer, birds, and butterflies, as well as six-pointed stars, hearts and flowers. Madame Da Costa assisted him by helping him collect materials from the local dump. Da Costa died on September 29, 1984. As of April 1988 Madame Da Costa was in the process of selling the environment, hoping to keep it open as a tourist attraction. The town will not list it as a tourist attraction.

As of October 1989 the Calvados office of tourism said Mme. Da Costa moved to Paris, closed the site and still is in the process of selling it.



### Marcel Dhièvre, "Petit Paris" Saint Dizier, Haute Marne

After retiring from his small clothing business at the age of 63, Dhièvre decided to decorate his building. Without an overarching plan in mind, he painstakingly embellished the entire façade, using only his left hand since his right hand was paralyzed. Near the roof line of the building, an homage to Paris, he attached medallion reliefs of the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, the Pantheon, and the Pont Neuf. The name of the site, "Petit Paris," as well as the medallion monuments are inlaid with colorful ceramic fragments. The walls, representing the artist's "flights of fancy," teem with plant and animal life borrowed from the *Fables of La Fontaine*. Painted birds, vines, flowers and trees meander their way up the sides of the house. At the top, front right corner of the house, almost- full-body sculptures of seagulls and other birds are partially affixed to the wall, their freedom barely restrained. After Dhièvre died in 1977, the site deteriorated to its current overall poor condition. No continuous maintenance is apparent. Petit Paris was featured in the 1985 exhibition, "Débris d'Art," held at the municipal museum of Saint Dizier.



### Abbé Adolphe-Julien Fouré, "Carved Rocks at Rotheneuf", Ille et Vilaine

In the late 19th century, the Reverend Abbé Fouré began carving sculptures into the rocky headlands of Rotheneuf, several kilometers from Saint Malo. His carvings portray the history of the legendary Rotheneuf family — noted fishermen, smugglers, pirates and lords in the 16-17th

centuries. Dramatically illustrating the "barbarian" and chivalrous exploits of a family so significant to Breton heritage, he intertwined both real and mythical characters on the outcrop bordering the sea where the Rotheneufs congregated. The carvings also document the family's internecine struggles. For over 25 years the Abbé, assisted by one helper, carved the stone figures of demons, monsters, sea creatures, and lords and ladies. The figures were carved with only a mallet and a chisel. Abbé Fouré completed the figures around 1907 when he was 65 years old. He died in 1910. Based on old photographs, it appears that approximately half of the site has disappeared. The carved rocks, while a renowned local tourist attraction, are neglected. The current owners seem to ignore any obvious signs of deterioration and no preventive maintenance is evident.



### Raymond Isidore, "Maison Picassiette" Chartres, Eure et Loir

A cemetery caretaker, Raymond Isidore collected ceramic and glass fragments from quarry pits and acquaintances. Inspired by the Chartes Cathedral and his visions from God, he began in 1938 to embed the interior and exterior walls of his new house with the mosaics. By 1943 he had decorated every conceivable object in his house, from furniture to 160 flower pots. The objects teem with motifs of butterflies, flowers and birds. Isidore also interwove scenes from the Bible, images of the Mona Lisa, Mont Saint Michel, and of the Cathedral's rose windows. In the garden he placed a miniature mosaic-encrusted Eiffel Tower and other small sculptures, including one of him and his wife holding hands. Rather superstitious by nature, he recurrently represented in his home several names and numbers of special significance to him. He spent twenty six years, and more than 26,000 hours of his spare time on the project. In 1964 Isidore died, having worked on his house until the very end. Since the mid-1960's the Maison Picassiette has gradually fallen into disrepair. The Musée des Beaux Arts de Chartres administers the site as a tourist attraction and is developing a preservation plan. However, most of the painted murals and the mosaics still need restoration.

All photographs are by Seymour Rosen, unless otherwise noted. The captions were written by Cynthia Pansing.



**Robert Vasseur, "Mosaic House and Garden"**  
Louviers, Eure

Around 1952 Vasseur, a retired milkman, began decorating a sink in his house with mosaics from broken dishes and seashells. He collected his palette of materials from community dumps and his neighbors. Vasseur's designs are orderly, meticulously arranged shapes and color patterns. He often uses shells, obtained from fish merchants, as borders outlining a particularly handsome, unbroken dish, or window. In the kitchen/dining area several of the seashell-bordered wall designs resemble stained-glass rose windows. On a gable of the house, large mosaic butterflies flutter around some rose-window designs which are outlined in seashells. Not adhering to long-range planning, Vasseur still sporadically decorates his evolutionary house with shards and shells when his inspiration finds him. Unlike some environmental folk artists, he has enjoyed the support of his wife and neighbors. Vasseur's family, which includes 4 children and 37 grandchildren, will retain and protect this often-filmed environment. One son conveniently lives next door. The city refuses to list this as a tourist attraction, but Vasseur has nonetheless opened his site for tourists.



**Marcel Landreau, "Landreau Sculpture Garden"**  
Mantes-la-Jolie, Ile de France

Once his World War II military service ended, Landreau became a train conductor, collecting pebbles near the train tracks in his spare time. Inspired by the shape and color of the pebbles, Landreau began gluing the pebbles together

circa 1958, in whatever shapes suited his fancy. Some of his stationary figures were modeled after historically prominent men such as Giscard, Pompidou, de Gaulle. The largest sculptures in his garden, the "Church and Wedding" (both about 15" high), are also stationary. Soon realizing the limits of fixed sculptures, he later began to animate a few, such as a parson whose arms move when a string is pulled; other animal and human figures are animated by motors. Landreau's sculptures are not merely fruits of his imagination: several are miniature, visual fables. A drunken man whose son searches for him illustrates the stupefying effects of liquor. In "One Orange Too Many," a man admonishes a child with two oranges in his hand to be pleased with what he has, rather than bemoaning his third that fell to the ground. The site which can be clearly viewed from the street, has recently been vandalized so Landreau is reluctant to permit visitors.



Photo by © Jean Paul Vidal

**"Petit" Pierre Avezard, "Le Manège"**  
Fay-aux-Loges, Loiret

A gentle man with a deformed face and speech impediment, Petit Pierre worked as a cowherd for a large dairy farm near Fay-aux-Loges. In 1937, during his leisure time, he began creating a magical, mobile world on the small plot of land his boss gave him. From discarded tires, pieces of iron and wood, he constructed imaginative mechanical objects, including a merry-go-round (Le Manège), in his backyard. Other unique creations populating his worldly paradise were: an airplane which bombarded Pierre's visitors with sugar beets; dancing cows and chickens; a man dancing with a cow as onlookers gossiped; a cyclist who eternally attempted to catch an autorail. As the invisible hand bringing life to the world he created, Petit Pierre activated a system of pulleys and cylinders in a chamber hidden from his visitors. Petit Pierre was eventually sent to live in a local nursing home after falling ill. Besieged by rust, vandals, and inclement weather, le Manège gradually fell into disrepair. In 1980, the late Emmanuel Clot produced a short film on Petit Pierre, which received a French César (the French equivalent of the American Oscar). As of 1987, according to Laurent Danchin, le Manège was given to la Fabuloserie in Dicy where it has been reinstalled and restored thanks to Pierre Della Giustina and Guy Faussey.



## Biographies: some key players in France

Of the host of French individuals who have enjoyed and researched folk art environments, the following individuals have been among the most knowledgeable and helpful. There is also a legion of photographers who have documented the sites, but our shortage of space does not allow us to list them all.

Now a French teacher at a lycée in Nanterre, **Laurent Danchin** also leads an "atelier of writing" at the "Ecole Emile Cohl," a new art school in Lyon that specializes in illustration, comic strips and animated film. With Philippe Rivière, he is currently preparing a book on the media revolution and a corresponding degeneration of the classic arts. As a freelance writer and art critic he has produced books on linguistics, analyses and biographies of the artists Chomo and Dubuffet and their work, in addition to numerous articles in arts journals and elsewhere. Since he met Chomo in 1976, he has concerned himself with the works of the "Singuliers," the self-taught outsider artists. Danchin has produced several radio and television shows, such as "Naive Art" (October 1984) which showed eight sites of "marginal art," demonstrating his passionate interest in Art Brut and the folk art environments of Pierre Avezard, Picassiette, Cheval, and Fernand Châtelain. He is currently the Chairman of the Chomo Foundation. For the August 1988 edition of *Artension*, the French arts journal, Danchin interviewed Seymour Rosen and wrote an extensive article about SPACES activities.

In the world of Art Brut, many were especially saddened by the death of painter, sculptor and architect **Alain Bourbonnais** (1925-1988), the creator of *la Fabuloserie* in Dicy, France. He is perhaps best known as the major French collector and promoter of Art Brut, as well as a chief architect of French Civil Buildings, Palais Nationaux, and several theaters. During the 1960's, Bourbonnais began to cultivate a secret garden, *la Fabuloserie*. The garden, eventually growing to enormous proportions, blended his original artwork with pieces he had collected from other artists. An encounter with Jean Dubuffet in 1971, around the time when the painter had decided to bequeath his own collection of Art Brut to the Swiss, inspired Bourbonnais to create a similar collection in France. With Dubuffet's blessing, he opened his own Galerie Jacob in Paris and later his own museum, under the condition that he would not use the term "Art Brut," the trademark label and the property of the Dubuffet museum in Lausanne. This turn of events impelled Bourbonnais to invent the terms "art-hors-les-normes" (art outside the norm) or "singuliers de l'art" (idiosyncratic art), which later became the title for a 1978 landmark exhibit in Paris developed with Michel Ragon, Suzanne Page and Michel Thévoz. Leaving Paris in 1982, Bourbonnais then opened *la Fabuloserie* as a private Museum, displaying the best of his collections there. For their hours write *la Fabuloserie*, Dicy 89120, France.

*Laurent Danchin*

**Bernard Lassus**, a landscape artist and painter, is a professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris. His interests lie in the decorated and ornamented gardens of working-class neighborhoods in the suburbs of major industrial cities. The Centre de Recherche d'Ambiance, that he founded and has headed since 1962, is comprised of a team of research specialists. With the assistance of researchers, he has discovered more than 1000 of these gardens and has studied more than 20 of them in-depth over a three-year period. His studies have focused on the "Habitants-Paysagistes," who prefer to elaborately recombine objects in assemblage, rather than to create the objects themselves. An author as well, among his noteworthy works is "Jardins Imaginaires" that inaugurated the study of "Les Habitants-Paysagistes." In 1989 he will publish a second work. The recipient of numerous design awards, both national and international, he was most recently the subject of an article in the January 1989 issue of *Landscape Architecture*, called "Red Dots and Other Tales." Lassus has also created delightful exhibitions exploring the relationship among art, nature and culture. Some of the exhibits were shown in the United Kingdom.

Photographers and film makers **Claude** and **Clovis Prevost** are the premiere French visual documenters of folk art environments. After Clovis studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, he then turned to film and photography. From 1970 to 1975, Clovis was director of the Maeght Productions Film Department. Together, Claude and Clovis have written books on Gaudí, Dali, Cheval and Picassiette. They have also produced films about *le Facteur Cheval*, *Monsieur G.*, Chomo, Tatin and a short film on graffiti. Their television series, "Les Bâtisseurs de l'Imaginaire," was the first in France to document several outstanding outsider places. The exhibition of the same name, along with "Les Singuliers de l'Art," are considered hallmarks which still have repercussions today. Clovis is presently working with and for Chomo, shooting a 16mm colour film on his work, a mystical retrospective called, "le Débarquement Spirituel" ("Spiritual Landing").

*Laurent Danchin*

In 1984 artists and collectors **Madeleine Lommel**, **Michel Nedjar** and **Claire Teller** created a small non-profit organization, "l'Aracine" ("root-art" - a catch-all word), devoted to the collection and presentation of authentic art brut (a concept which is very difficult to define precisely). Several seminars organized by the trio since then have provided arenas for experts to discuss art brut and related forms of art. Their collection is located in the small, free museum near Paris housed at the Château Guérin, 39 Avenue du Général de Gaulle, Neuilly-sur-Marne, 93330 Paris. They intend to become a parallel to Lausanne's "Collection de l'Art Brut," Dubuffet's gift to Switzerland. L'Aracine's founders refuse to link the museum with folk art, which has different connotations in France than it does in the United States. They also avoid connecting themselves with the work of the "Singuliers," (roughly, "idiosyncratic artists"). Before visiting the museum, please call ahead to verify times and exhibitions.

*Laurent Danchin*

## French Bibliography

Following is a list of books and catalogues relevant to the study of French folk art environments. Most of these books are written in French. Those references marked with \* are in SPACES's archives. While many provide overviews of the environments, some are extensively devoted to one artist. Laurent Danchin, whom we cannot thank enough for his help and enthusiasm, is responsible for compiling and annotating most of this bibliography.

Altmann, Frédéric *La Vérité sur l'Abbé Fouéré l'Ermite de Rothéneuf: le Sculpteur des Rochers de Rothéneuf* Editions A.M. Nice 1985. Many illustrations.

Autrement no. 16: *Flagrants délits d'imaginaire; Cultures populaires aujourd'hui; Qui sont ces créateurs du quotidien?* Le Seuil, Paris, Novembre 1978. Several studies on folk art in France.

Borne, Alain *Le Facteur Cheval* Weber, Paris 1969. \*

Borne, Alain *Le Facteur Cheval* Nouvelle Societe Morel, Paris 1976. \* Basically the same book as above in soft cover

Bouchart, Francois-Xavier and Nadine Beauthéac *Jardins Fantastique* Editions du Moniteur 1982. Sites in France, Italy, Africa, and India among others. \*

Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains de Besançon *Indomptés de l'Art* Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains de Besançon/Médiathèque Pierre Bayle/C.H.S. de Novillars. March 7 - April 28, 1986. Catalogue. Mostly Bourbonnais' collection of Art Brut and folk art, along with Prévost's photographs.

Collection de l'Art Brut *Neuve Invention*, Collection de l'Art Brut. A catalogue which systematically surveys art brut, including the works by Anselme Boix-Vives, Gaston Chaissac, Friedrich Schröder-Sonnenstern, Louis Soutter, among others. The text is by Michel Thévoz.

Collection de l'Art Brut *Publications de la Compagnie de l'Art Brut* (no. 1 to 15), Collection de l'Art Brut. The famous publication started by Jean Dubuffet, and now continued by Michel Thévoz, the curator of the Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne.

Danchin, Laurent *Jean Dubuffet* Editions de la Manufacture 1988. A study of Dubuffet's work, thoughts and writings. The last chapter, "Dubuffet et l'Art Brut," is a survey of the sites, names, organizations, and museums dealing with Art Brut and outsider art in France (including mention of some of the major environmental sites). \*

David, Francis *Guide de l'Art Insolite: Nord/Pas de Calais/Picardie* Herscher 1984. Environments in northern France. \*

Ehrmann, Gilles *Les Inspirés et Leurs Demeures* Editions du Temps, Paris 1962. Environments around France. \*

Friedman, Michel *Les Secrets du Facteur Cheval* Editions Jean-Claude Simoën 1977. This is a small biography of Cheval and an analysis of the site. The book is only available at l'Aracine.

Jakovsky, Anatole *Dämonen und Wunder* Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, Köln 1963. A thorough survey of the most famous European environments, Gaudí's work and the Watts Towers. \*

Jakovsky, Anatole *Les Mystérieux Rochers de Rothéneuf* Encre 1979. Jakovsky had one of the greatest European collections of naive art. \*

Jean, Andre *Le Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval à Hauterives, Drôme* Grenoble 1952.

Jouve, Jean-Pierre, Claude et Clovis Prevost *Le Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval: Quand le Songe Devient la Réalité* Editions du Moniteur 1981. The most complete biography and analysis of le Palais Idéal, it also includes Cheval's poetry. \*

Kloos, Maarten *Le Paradis Terrestre de Picassiette* Collection "Les Banlieues de l'Art," Encre Editions, Paris 1979. Available at l'Aracine. \*

*L'Aracine, Musée d'Art Brut*, 1988. A catalog of their collection. \*

Lassus, Bernard *Jardins Imaginaires*, Collection "Les Habitants Paysagistes," Presses de la Connaissance, Paris 1977. Decorated gardens of ordinary working-class neighborhoods. Includes site plans. This work inaugurated the study of "Les Habitants-Paysagistes." \*

Lassus, Bernard *Une Poétique de Paysage: le Démesurable* Serg/Ivry, Paris-Vancouver 1976. In French and English. Prepared for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. \*

Maison de la Culture de Rennes *Irreguliers de l'Art* Maison de la Culture de Rennes. October 15, 1977 - January 2, 1978. Catalogue. The exhibition was three-fold: the first part dealt with Chaissac, Wolfli, among others; the second comprised "Les Bâisseurs de l'Imaginaire" de Claude et Clovis Prévost; and finally, the third showed photographs by Gilles Ehrmann of "Les Inspirés et Leurs Demeures."

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris *Les Singuliers de l'Art "Des inspirés aux habitants paysagistes"* ARC 2 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. January 19 - March 5, 1978. Curator: Suzanne Pagé. Catalogue. This seminal exhibition, still unmatched in France, displayed the work of dozens of "singular creators," most of whom were completely unknown to the French public.

Musée des Arts Decoratifs *L'Art Brut, Catalogue d'Exposition de la "Selection des Collections de la Compagnie de l'Art*



*Brut*" Musée des Arts Decoratifs, Paris, April 7 through June 5, 1967. Includes a preface by Jean Dubuffet.

Musées de Laval, *Les Bricoleurs de l'Imaginaire* Editions FRAC des Pays de la Loire. Musées de Laval 1984-1985. A small and beautiful catalogue, mostly photographs, on several environments in the Loire.

Prévost, Claude et Clovis *Picassiette*, Editions du Chêne, 1978. Great photographs and a site plan with some text written by Claude. \*

Racine, Michel *Architecture Rustique des Rocailleurs* Editions du Moniteur, Paris 1981. Art of self-taught stoneworkers.\*

Ragon, Michel *La Fabuloserie* 1983. The catalogue of La Fabuloserie.

Random, Michel *L'Art Visionnaire* Fernand Nathan 1979. A book on all forms of visionary art from every period and country. Includes the work of Augustin Lesage, Séraphine de Senlis, le Facteur Cheval, Wölfli, and l'Abbé Fouré.

Rosa Esman Gallery *European Outsiders* Rosa Esman Gallery, New York, October 9 - November 15, 1986. Contains essays by Roger Cardinal, Léo Navratil, Michel Thévoz. Although it does not give specific information on environments, it provides a thematic context for understanding Art Brut and related forms of art. \*

Sainmont, Jean-Hugues, *Camille Renault, Créateur du Monde* Renault's famous environment in northern France was eventually destroyed by vandals. Some parts of the sculptures were saved. A concrete head is still visible at l'Aracine.

Bizarre no. 11 Octobre 1955. This issue contains an article on Camille Renault's environment. \* l'Aracine has some copies

Thévoz, Michel *L'Art Brut* Skira, Geneva 1975 and soft cover reprint 1980.\* "The" reference in French. Also published by Skira/Rizzoli in English. 1976.\*

Verroust, Jacques *Les Inspirés du Bord des Routes* Editions du Seuil, Lyon 1978 \*

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## New Journal

According to Laurent Danchin, the Association Ozenda announced in its last newsletter that it intends to create a new French magazine, the French counterpart to Raw Vision. The planned journal, like Raw Vision, will be devoted to "art brut" and the art of other "outsiders." More explicitly, those individuals who support this kind of art in France are expected to be involved with the journal. The newsletter will provide the most up-to-date information possible on art brut.

A book about "bizarre" places in France by Claude Arz is also due out in 1990.

## Update

SPACES' newsletter #9 carried two transitional stories about sites in California and Kansas - here is the most current information we have on those stories.

After 21 years of careful guardianship of S. P. Dinsmoor's **Garden of Eden**, Wayne and Louella Naegele have sold the property to a number of sympathetic people, all members of the Kansas Grassroots Arts Association, who joined together as Garden of Eden, Inc.

According to John Hachmeister, President of the organization, the property will be restored and maintained, respecting the integrity of the site. Future plans include a "grassroots" art museum on the adjoining property.

**John Medica**, creator of John Medica's Castles and Garden died earlier this year. Because of concerns of liability, the site was immediately closed to the public and the entire four acres is now up for a probate sale by closed bid.

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## Howard Finster:

### Stranger From Another World: Man of Visions Now on this Earth

I was first introduced to the work of Howard Finster in the 70's through slides of his assemblages of car and bike parts. Many years later I became aware of his fame as a painter and later still did I learn about Paradise Garden. Numerous exhibitions and stories on Finster's work emphasized Rev. Finster the painter. It was therefore easy to overlook the environment he has been building since the 1940's.

What a joy this book is for those who are especially enamored of environmental artists.

Tom Patterson, who wrote the splendid book on the life of Eddie O. Martin (St. EOM), has sharpened his skills with this book on Finster. Patterson, armed with a bottomless bag of audiotape, pencils and paper visited Finster over a nine-year period, recording and taking copious notes. What you read in the book is Finster culled and edited from miles of tape "To give a sense of the artist's distinctive accent speech rhythms, and naturally poetic, good-ol'boy conversational style." It works.

Those historical facts missing in Finster's spoken chronology are presented in Patterson's introduction, a selected Bibliography and a Chronology section.

The enjoyable and readable layout, showing photographs of what seems to be hundreds of Finster's art works, also reflects the sense of the man. There are many good, clean, explanatory photographs of the site to give you a sense of this wonderful place. The high quality printing shows off some great photographs by the increasingly ubiquitous Roger Manley, Victor Faccinto and other friends of Howard Finster.

And bless them, they have a comprehensive site plan of the 2 1/2 acre site, a legend and a key to spot the principal pieces.

Seymour Rosen

*Howard Finster: Stranger From Another World: Man of Visions Now on this Earth*, by Howard Finster as told to Tom Patterson, Abbeville Press. \$35.00 cloth

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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*, a book by Seymour Rosen which documents popular culture and includes 34 folk/art environments in California

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