

FIELD SURVEY FORM - FOLK ART ENVIRONMENTS

This form has been prepared by SPACES as part of a national survey of American folk art environments. It is intended to serve as a basic information sheet on an individual site. Any additional information can be added to this sheet or attached to it. Please send SPACES a copy of this form, along with xeroxes of any photographs or printed materials. Direct any questions to SPACES at the address and phone number listed above.

ARTIST: Name, address and phone                      Is artist still working on site    Yes xx No  
Romano Gabriel

Dates of Birth   c. 1887   Death   1977   Place of birth   Mura, Italy  

ENVIRONMENT: Name of site: Wooden Sculpture Garden

Years of construction: ca. 1940 - 1970

Location: original site at 1415 Pine Street  
Eureka, California

Individual pieces of the original Garden have now been installed in Eureka. The display is open to the public and is located at:  
315 2nd Street  
Eureka, California

Description of site: Using a hand saw, and then later a power circular saw (which he built), Romano fashioned wooden fruit crates into hundreds of flat plant and animal forms. These were placed in his front yard (approx. 30 feet across), behind a picket fence, with the taller pieces at the back and the shorter in front. The Garden was designed to be read from the street, where one would see first the trees and flowers (some moving in the wind), animals (some turning like carousels) and human forms (many of peasants engaged in festive activities). The forms were all painted in bright colors. Some of the wooden flowers were intermingled with living plants. And some of the figures occasionally took on "life"--Romano had mounted them on hidden pulleys and wired the system to a master switch inside the house, where he could start the scenes moving for unsuspecting passersby. The inspiration for the Wooden Sculpture Garden came from Romano's memories of Italy, from ideas in magazines and from his own imagination and sense of humor.

Biographical Information: Born and raised in Italy, Romano worked with his father in making furniture. Romano came to the U.S. in 1913, served in World War I and then moved to Eureka, California. He worked as a carpenter (building 9 houses), also as an employee of a lumberyard and as a gardener. He built his own home, in front of which he placed his Wooden Sculpture Garden.

Quotes: "My idea was just to make these things, I wanted to make something different. I just made up pictures out of wood. I don't buy any materials, I take all the boxes and lumber down in the store, they are all ends of fruit boxes." "I used to be a gardener here in Eureka. Eureka is a bad place for flowers, the salty air and no sun. So I just make this garden." Toward the end of the project, he said: "I have not made things for 4 or 5 years. No more room, no more boxes. Now all boxes, they come in paper, not wood."

Present Owner, Custodian: City of Eureka? Private Foundation?

Local person or group involved with site:

Dolores Vellutini (as of 1976)  
2424 J Street  
Eureka, CA 95501

Romano Gabriel Fund  
c/o Eureka Heritage Society  
P.O. Box 1354  
Eureka, CA 95501

Local attitudes toward site: After period of vandalism, following Romano's death, the Garden became the focus of limited community interest. Money was raised to relocate it in a protective structure in Old Town Eureka.

CONDITION: Present Condition (Check appropriate lines and explain)

- Excellent (structurally sound, well-maintained)
- Good (structurally sound, needs routine maintenance)
- Fair (in need of repairs other than routine maintenance)
- Deteriorating (in need of major repairs)
- Ruins

Destroyed (date) Note: the original site and arrangement of the sculptures have now been destroyed, but parts of the Garden have been relocated, as mentioned above. The new site was dedicated on April 3, 1982.

Threats to Survival

- Weather
- Vandalism
- Deterioration of site or materials
- Inappropriate alteration
- Long range plans for area (e.g. redevelopment)
- Are local attitudes toward the site a threat to its survival?
- Other

SITE PLAN: Sketch map of site with directional arrow showing north. Give overall dimensions of site. Mention any streets that bound site. Give scale used (1/4"=1')

PHOTOGRAPH: We encourage the photodocumentation of the site; a long shot to establish the context of the site and any important details. The photograph should be labeled with the name of the environment and the direction from which it was photographed, i.e. from the south, etc. Also include the photographers name and date of shooting.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: e.g. any awards, newspaper articles, etc.

ABOUT THIS FORM: Prepared by: Name, organization, address and phone

Susan Alderson Hoffmann, SPACES  
Date: June 4, 1984