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Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments



Notes on America's Folk Art Environments

SUMMER 1991

GOOD NEWS

We have recently heard what sounds like good news about Rolling Thunder's Thunder Mountain Monument. The status of the Monument has been uncertain for a long time, especially since the death of Rolling Thunder. (see NL #9) Thunder's son Dan, however, recognizes the value of the Monument and is trying to assure its preservation. He tells us that the Monument has caretakers on the property and tours are available. You can take a self-guided tour during the week, and they can provide a guided tour on Sundays. Drop in or contact them by writing or calling: Rolling Thunder Monument, c/o Mr. & Mrs. Mike Flansaas, P. O. Box 332, Imlay, Nevada 89418, (708)538-7402 or 538-7514. Imlay is south/west of Winnemucca on highway 170 in north/central, Nevada. The Monument needs a great deal of care and maintenance; we encourage visitors to make generous donations.

John Medica's Castles and Garden, California State Landmark #939 (see NL's 3 & 9) was sold by relatives to a developer in Northern California and is now in escrow. It looks as though part of Medica's elaborate garden of stone castles, grotto, sculpture and plantings will be saved. Restricted in part by the historic designation, the developer's plan, as submitted to the city, calls for the 4 acre site to be divided into seven parcels. 6 of the sites will have luxury homes built on them. The 7th parcel, almost a third of the total site, will be reserved for Medica's garden and will be held in common by the 6 house owners. To accomplish this, Medica's simple house, a garage and some out buildings will be demolished, and some of his stone constructions will be moved. City approval is needed for the plan to



go ahead. We had hoped all of the Medica site would be preserved. This plan, although it violates the integrity of the site, seems to promise the preservation of a large part of Medica's creation.

The Spring 1991 issue of the California Preservation Foundation Newsletter gives a very good summary of the preservation and legal issues that arose with Medica's Garden and how the lack of an Environmental Impact Report can affect a preservation project.

Fears of liability have currently closed the site to the public. We will keep you informed.

Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts was the first folk art environment to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, in 1978, and in December 1990 the Towers finally received the highest accolade the federal government can give when they were declared a National Landmark taking their place with such sites as Mount Vernon, and the Civil War battlefields.

Recently SPACES successfully

nominated the Towers for state landmark status (#993) and they will soon receive a plaque from the state of California marking this designation.

After years of not so subtle nudging the city of Los Angeles has finally designed information kiosks for the Towers which will present a history of Simon's achievement. Also the City of Los Angeles will soon announce that Virginia Kasor, a prominent architectural historian will be the city liaison for the restoration of the Towers.

More good news: The Towers are finally open again to visitors, 10 AM to dusk on Saturdays and at special events. You best call ahead, (213)569-8181 or 485-2433

95 year old Art Beal creator, of Nitt Witt Ridge (NL #s 1, 4, 7-8), is currently in a hospital recovering from a fall. The Art Beal Foundation and Art's friends are taking the opportunity to do some major restoration work on the site. They badly need your donations; Art Beal Foundation, P. O. Box 571, San Luis Obispo 93506.

News

The Lehigh University Art Galleries are offering for sale black and white handprinted lithographs of two drawings by Howard Finster, printed by Tamarind Master printers. Each lithograph was printed in a limited edition of 50 prints, numbered and signed. The drawings were done by Finster when he and his family were in residence at Lehigh University in 1986, during "The Worlds Folk Art Church: Reverend Howard Finster and Family" exhibit (September 5 to October 26, 1986). Along with the lithographs the gallery has copies of the NATURAL SCRIPTURES: Visions of Nature and the Bible catalog for sale. (November 1 -December 28, 1990) (see review p. 7)

For further information contact: Lehigh University Art Galleries/ Museum Operation, Chandler -Ullmann Hall #17, Bethlehem, PA 18015. (215)758-3615

A new museum, devoted to "French naive art" has recently been established in the town of Begles, France in the Bordeaux area. Site de la Creation Franche was inaugurated with an exhibit, "Jardiniers de la Memoire" which opened October 1989. The museum publishes a small, but energetic journal, Creation Franche, which is available by subscription and is published three times a year. The cost is 100 Francs in France; we're sure there is an additional charge for US subscriptions - write for full information. Essays about artists and colorful photographs of art work are laid out with information about the museum. If you want to visit, or send for more information about the journal (and read French), contact: Gerard Sendrey, Site de la Creation Franche, Avenue du Marchal de Lattre de Tassigny, 33130 Begles, France. Telephone: 56 85 81 73. Open every day but Sunday.

Environmental artists whose work appears in recent issues include Marcelo Modrego, Jean Leon Pou, Jean Dominque, and Lucien Faureau, all of whom created fantastic sculptural gardens, and Robert Vasseur, whose house is covered in mosaics and who appeared in NL #10.

News

Fred Fussell sends us news about St. EOM's Pasaquan (see NL #9). The Marion County (Georgia) Historical Society now owns Pasaquan and has hired a caretaker. Those who wish to visit the site may make arrangements with the caretaker, Robert Hendricks, by calling him at (912)649-9444.

A small selection of St. EOM's works are now available for purchase, and their sale directly supports ongoing preservation at Pasaquan. Collectors interested in these pieces should contact Fred Fussell (a leader in the saving of the site) at the Columbus Museum, (404)322-0400.

If you plan to visit Pasaquan, a good time to do so will be July 4, 1991, for the 2nd Annual St. EOM Birthday and Independence Celebration. Blues and watermelons are promised. "Bring your own gnat repellent."

The Orange Show Foundation, Houston, Texas has changed its name to The Orange Show: A Folk Art Foundation. The name change reflects a change in their mission. In addition to preserving Jeff McKissack's Orange Show and making it available to the public, The Orange Show: A Folk Art Foundation will also explore and document other folk expressions of the culturally diverse population in Texas. For information about the Orange Show's activities, contact Susanne Theis, Director, 2402 Munger, Houston, Texas 77023, (713)926-6368.

Nancy Worden and Friends of the Walker Rock Garden (see NL # 8) announce that private tours of the site may be arranged through Labor Day, by appointment. Tours help raise money for the preservation of this Seattle landmark, built by Milton and Florence Walker from 1959 through 1980 in the yard of their home. The garden consists of towers, miniature mountains, lakes, and fountains built of rocks and glass. For tour information contact Florence and George Walker (ahead of arrival) (206)935-3036, 5407 37th Avenue, S. W. Seattle, Washington, 98126. They could use your support.

News

Recent good news from Marion Blake the enthusiastic artist, preservationist and owner of the Grover Cleveland Thompson Garden in Arizona. She has been told that the city will be considering the site for historic status, which will enhance preservation efforts and keep the specter of street widening from taking part of the site.

A grass-roots organization is under development and once stabilization is achieved they hope to open the property to the public. Watch these columns.

The Nicolaysen Art Museum and the Wyoming Folk Art Program are planing a major joint venture, traveling exhibit in a seven state area in the northwest United States in 1993.

Those having information on lost or existing sites in Nebraska, Utah, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Colorado, or Wyoming please contact SPACES or Patty Kessler, Wyoming Folk Arts Program, University of Wyoming, P. O. Box 4036 Cooper House, Laramie, Wyoming 82071-4036.

Those of you who have been reading these columns for a while know that SPACES is quite concerned with the use of negative, hierarchical terms like "Outsider," "Naive," "Visionary," "Isolated," to label all those not part of the traditional art establishment. Especially frustrating is the fact that few who use this term define exactly what "Outsider artists" are outside of.

We wrote the peripatetic Roger Cardinal, the author of the term "Outsider" in his 1972 book Outsider Art, and the 1979 exhibit "Outsiders," and asked for his current thoughts on the subject. We just received a reply from him.

"Your letter provoked me to draw up the enclosed piece. . . What this is I now realize is a test run for doing a longer piece later in the year when I produce my chapter for THE ARTIST OUTSIDER." (forthcoming 1992)

Too long to print here and too important to summarize, his response is very interesting and we can send you a copy if you send us a SASE.

SYMPOSIUM

The Creative Growth Center in Oakland, California is planning a symposium on "outsider art" (we still don't like the omnibus use of that term when it relates to American artists), April 11, 1992 at the Oakland Museum in Oakland, California. The symposium will be organized by Dr. John MacGregor, writer and historian, author of the Discovery of the Art of the Insane, (Princeton University Press, 1989). MacGregor has selected an important number of presenters who were supporting, acknowledging and promoting this art before the field was a field. Speaking will be artists, teachers Gladys Nilsson and Jim Nutt; writer, curator, and former editor of The Clarion, Museum of American Folk Art, New York, Di Di Barrett; writer and historian of Art Brut and folk art, Alan Weiss; writer, professor and the person who coined and defined the Outsider term, Roger Cardinal; writer, photographer, curator, Roger Manley; and SPACES' Director, Seymour Rosen.

Other events will occur during the weekend, including an exhibition of the work of self-taught artist Dwight Macintosh, whose work can also be seen at the Art Brut Museum, Lausanne, Switzerland. Hopefully a small exhibit of the work of "Old Trapper" John Ehn will be also shown. Representing the museum is Oakland Museum curator, writer, Phil Linhares whose history with this material goes back to his teenage years in California.

The Houston Center for Photography which produced the very important "Reinventing the World: Photography of Folk Art Environments" exhibition, September 7 - November 4, 1990, will be highlighting environments in their Summer 1991 issue of **SPOT**.

Photographers included in the exhibit were Robert Amft, Louis Carlos Bernal, Jon Blumb, Vincent Borrelli, Keith Carter, Ted Degener, Robert Foster, Seymour Rosen, Jim Stone, and J. F. Turner.

For information contact Liz Claud, Houston Center for Photography, 1441 West Alabama, Houston Texas 77006

EXHIBIT

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art will mount an exhibit called "Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art," February 20 - May 17, 1992. The exhibit will explore the connection between what the curators, Maurice Tuchman and Carol S. Eliel, assisted by Barbara Freeman, term "outsider" art and the work of wellknown modern artists. The exhibit includes an incredible list of American and European artists like Paul Klee, Adolf Wölfi, Gaston Chaissac, André Breton, Emil Nolde, Jean Dubuffet, Joseph Yoakum, Martín Ramírez, Howard Finster, Salvador Dalí, Andy Nassise, J. B. Murray, Niki de Saint Phalle, Henry Darger, Max Ernst (you choose the "Outsiders"). The environments of Ferdinand Cheval, Simon Rodia, and Clarence Schmidt will be shown. The expansive catalog will include essays by Roger Cardinal, Dr. John MacGregor, and Alan Weiss among others. A series of events is being developed in conjunction with the exhibit.

A recent press release defines their

terms:" "Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art" continues the investigation of the roots of modernism by examining relationships between the work of modern and contemporary artists and that of compulsive visionaries. Mainstream modern and contemporary artists, or "insiders," work within and are supported by that complex artistic infrastructure of schools, galleries, museums, and publications often called "the art world." By contrast, compulsive visionaries work outside this infrastructure, often in isolation. These "outsiders" are in general mentally disturbed, self-taught, or both. Parallel Visions will demonstrate that insiders since the early 1900s have been not only aware of, but inspired and even influenced by, the artistic creations of outsiders. The exhibition will also reveal that the expressive powers of these outsiders were not only significant in the development of modernism but also demand serious consideration on their own aesthetic merits."



Joseph Laux (1904 - 1991) died March 1, 1991 in a hospital near his Deptford, New Jersey home. Laux is known for his hand-crafted Fairy Garden he built next to his home. Inspired by Walt Disney movies, the retired carpenter began his fairy garden in 1945 and for nine years constructed a miniature land of castles and moats of concrete, glass, shells, bits of china, and a windmill with arms made of venetian blind slats. He is survived by his wife Eva, who will care for the Fairy Garden.

Laux's garden was part of the wonderful Two Arks, A Palace, Some Robots, & Mr. Freedom's Fabulous Fifty Acres: Grassroots Art in Twelve New Jersey Communities catalog and exhibit by writer/historian Holly Metz and photographer Robert Foster in 1989. The photograph above is courtesy of © Robert Foster.

This issue of the newsletter is dedicated to publications — books, magazines, and catalogs — which have come to our attention in the last year, and which we find significant for our continuing research on folk art environments and related areas. Many of the calls that come to us from members and strangers are calls for information. We hope this issue about publications can help you answer some of your research questions, and pique your curiosity to do further reading.

Linda Roscoe Hartigan, Made With Passion: The Hemphill Folk Art Collection in the National Museum of American Art, Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990. \$50.00; 240 pp.

The recent acquisition of the Hemphill collection marks the seriousness with which the National Museum of American Art regards folk art as a legitimate and essential part of American art. This book serves as a catalog to the collection and the collector, Herbert Waide Hemphill, Jr.

Hartigan's intelligent essay (which is 80 pages), interweaves the story of Hemphill's life and collecting passion with information about the artists whose work he searched out and collected. Hartigan documents the growth of the collection and the numerous exhibits Hemphill mounted through the years. In fact she presents a mini-history of the field of American folk art of a certain period by recounting not only Hemphill's activities as a collector, preserver and taste-maker, but those of other collectors, writers, curators and searchers of art by untrained American artists. A few environments are part of this history: James Hampton's Throne of the Third Heaven..., Calvin and Ruby Black's Possum Trot, Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts, and S. P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden, Rev. Howard Finster's Paradise Garden and others are mentioned. The rest of the book is the catalog, and contains photographs and descriptive entries for 199 pieces selected for this publication from the 427 artworks in the Hemphill collection at the National Museum of American Art. This is a very important book. It is scholarly and well-written, vital and great to look at. Great bibliography, index, photographs. Hartigan also lists organizations concerned with these art works.

Robert Farris Thompson. Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy. New York: Vintage Books, 1984. 318 pp.

This is a fascinating book of art history that reads like a storyteller telling tales. Thompson demonstrates in words and pictures how African culture, especially that of the Yoruba, Kongo, Ejagham, Mande and Cross River influenced all the arts of black people in the Americas, Haiti, Cuba, Trinidad. Chapter 2 is absolutely fascinating and deals with the fertilization of black arts in the United States by arts, religion, ideas from the Kongo. In a coda to this chapter, Thompson reinterprets James Hampton's Throne of the Third Heaven..., and Henry Dorsey's sculptural environments by showing the influence of African traditions in the work of these two artists. It is a rich and persuasive argument. The book has many photographs, which are of so-so quality, extensive notes and an index.

Ed. Jean Lipman, Robert Bishop, Elizabeth V. Warren, Sharon L. Eisenstat. New York: Harry Abrams, Inc., in Association with the Museum of American Folk Art, New York, 1990. \$50.00; 176 pp.

Five Star Folk Art: One Hundred American Masterpieces,

In the forward to the book, Jean Lipman addresses the issue of quality in art, including folk-art. She establishes the position of the authors of this book as folk-art historians who believe in the aesthetic quality of the folk-art.

She attacks the opposing view of folklorists who study folk-art as "things" of anthropological, archaeological, historical, and sociological interest and reject the idea of the aesthetic value of folk-art. Thus the title, Five Star Folk Art, indicates the stand these authors are taking in presenting the 100 masterpieces of folk-art shown here in sumptuous pictures. The theme of the book is quality in folk-art.

Lipman also attempts a definition of folk-art, which she articulates in terms of folk-art's opposition to so-called fine art: folk artists, unlike fine art artists, have a purity of intention and originality that is marked by a lack of concern about the art market, publicity, and reputation. As part of her essay, Jean Lipman asked a number of distinguished artists, critics, collectors, as well as non-art friends, to define quality in art. The answers are interesting because they are so personal. Even art experts find quality is no easier to define than folk-art. The folk art is presented in wonderful photos, with concise and informative essays.

The book is divided into three sections (which don"t always make sense): Pictures, Works in wood and metal, and Furnishings. Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts, is the only environmental folk art work included.

Partners for Livable Spaces, The Better Community Catalog: a Sourcebook of Ideas, People and Strategies for Improving the Place Where you Live. Washington, D. C. Acropolis Books, 1989. \$24.95 plus \$1.50 postage; 284 pp.

Partners for Livable Spaces is an organization, or rather a network of organizations, which ought to be declared a national treasure. It promotes a belief in the effectiveness of individuals to improve cities and has an active publishing program to that end. This catalog is full of ideas, sources, brief case studies for community projects ranging from adaptive reuse to building zoos.

Those involved with the preservation of contemporary folk art environments might want to look at this for ideas and contacts. Under each topic are ideas of what to do, where to go for help, and a bibliography. At the back of the book is a state by state list of people and organizations, (including SPACES), who might be useful contacts.

Chuck & Jan Rosenak, Museum of American Folk Art Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists, New York, Abbeville, 1990. \$75.00; 416 pp., 380 Illustrations.

Needless to say, anyone who attempts to do a survey, exhibit or an Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists is in trouble from the beginning. They always leave out something that the critic feels is significant. So I asked a number of people to look at this book and give their impressions. I had trouble with the choice of environments in this book because I think it shows less a conscious decision than a lack of knowledge about the genre and what is out there. Others more knowledgeable about "folk arts" in general suggested to me that there are large gaps in the material presented and wondered why Sylvia Alberts, Patrick Davis, Christine McHorse, Maria Martinez and Elizabeth Layton were included. They felt these artists are hardly "Folk" and should have been described as "Crafts" and "High" artists.

Some of the artists and a goodly number of respondents to our questions were unhappy with the suggestion that the book presents the "Cutting Edge" (the Rosenak's term) since some of the illustrative materials are a decade old and no longer reflective of the artists' current works, nor really the prime examples of their work. A number of collectors I spoke with said some artists who are included did not even know that the book existed.

The choice of artists and illustrations brought up suggestions of this book not being wholly motivated by scholarship but largely by the Rosenaks' own collecting interests or the politics of the field.

More important however is a universal complaint: "The book has many inaccuracies. There apparently was little fact checking done." Although there is a listing of source materials, from personal knowledge, insufficient effort was made to verify information they took from these sources. For instance Simon Rodia's bio states he had no children and "wife's name unknown." Rodia had at least *two* sons in Northern California who were alive at his death and his wife was named *Lucy*. There are very large gaps in information, which is available, with research. Citing sources should not relieve the authors from the responsibility of doing their own investigations. The *Bibliography* and *Major Exhibitions*, and *Selected Public Collections* sections are adequate — but for an encyclopedia one would hope for more.

The book is well printed and designed. Easy to read information includes *Biographical Data*, *General Background*, *Artistic Background*, *Subjects and Sources*, *Materials and Techniques and Artistic Recognition*. Happily many of the artists have personal quotes in their bios.*

Our thanks to Abbeville for their continued good works in helping promote this genre of American art.

—Seymour Rosen

* JOSEPH FUREY — "I was just trying to make the place [this apartment] look nice.. I did it to kill time, grieving for my wife."

* NELLIE MAE ROWE — "They weren't real drawings, 'til people come and take them away."

Bihalji-Merin, Oto & Nebojsa-Bato Tomasevic, World Encyclopedia of Naive Art, Chartwell Books, Inc., Secaucus, New York, 1984. 735 pp.

For a world view of the field, the monumental 7 1/2 pound World Encyclopedia of Naive Art, highlights some 1,500 plus artists from 52 countries. Contributors include Julia Weissman writing about "Naive Art in the United States." Some 89 American artists including environmentalists Calvin & Ruby Black, S. P. Dinsmoor, James Hampton, Charles Kasling and others are mentioned.

Although not identified as such, you'll discover some European environmental artists who are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the American books we are most familiar with. For the "serious" scholar there seems to be an extraordinary bibliography heavily weighted towards Europe.

This basic book for your library is out of print but currently available from Edward R. Hamilton - Bookseller, Falls Village, CT 06031-5000 for \$24.95 plus \$3.00 postage and handling.

—SR

(See also Bihalji-Merin, Oto, Masters of Naive Art - A History and Worldwide Survey, McGraw Hill, 1970.)

Lynne Adele, Black History / Black Vision: The Visionary Image in Texas. University of Texas Press, Austin, 1989. \$14.95; 94 pp. Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, the University of Texas at Austin.

This is a wonderful book, and a model catalog of how to present the art work of little-known artists. Six self-taught Black artists in Texas are presented here with extended essays and photographs. The artists were chosen for the impact and visionary quality of their art. Visionary artists are defined as "those whose works deal with things unseen or seen only by the artist." Each essay presents a thorough portrait of the artist — his/her life and work. Most of the essays draw on oral histories conducted with the artists, and make clear the close integration between the everyday lives of these artists and their creative work. The essays trace the ordinary events and materials, and the rich African-American traditions which each of these artists use in creating their art. The six artists presented are, John W. Banks, Ezekiel Gibbs, Frank Jones, Naomi Polk, Rev.Jonnie Swearingen, and Willard "The Texas Kid" Watson. Of all of them, only Watson makes environmental pieces, as well as designing his clothes, cars, and everything else. Footnotes and a bibliography attest to the careful and attentive research that was done.

Kevin Starr. Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. \$24.95; 453 pp.

Material Dreams is another narrative history in Starr's series, Americans and the California Dream. The two previous books were, Americans and the California Dream, 1850 - 1915, and Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era. All are compelling narrative histories of the people and places of California. We like Material Dreams especially, partly because this volume concentrates on "the making of Southern California," and especially Los Angeles. Starr is interested in the design of Southern California in all its aspects, and describes the physical fabric and the myths of the area. Especially wonderful is the way Starr "materializes" the history by placing people and events in the landscape and buildings. Starr weaves "Sebastiano" Rodia into the story of Los Angeles' search for an identity. Rodia's extraordinary Watts Towers seems to Starr to be a symbol of Los Angeles, and of the contributions of the many immigrants who lived and worked in Southern California and shaped its landscape.

Kenneth Jackson and Camilo José Vergara Silent Cities: The Evolution of the American Cemetery, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1989. \$29.95 in paper, 129 pp.

We received this great looking book from Camilo Vergara whom you might remember as one of the people leading the fight to try and save **Kea Tewana's Ark** in Newark, New Jersey (NL's #7-9). Camilo is a multi-faceted man interested in urban topics and its seems many other subjects. He is now completing a "Ruins and Revivals" archives, covering a decade of documenting the American Ghetto.

Author Kenneth T. Jackson, Mellon Professor of the Social Sciences and Professor of History and Urban Planning at Columbia University has written clearly and simply about a subject which touches our world of individuals building their special environment.

Although conscious of cemeteries as interesting places to visit I had no sense of how broad the history of cemeteries was and how much has been written. The bibliography contains 163 citations.

For a novice, this is a wonderful introduction to the field. Chapters include The Evolution of the American Cemetery, The Cemetery as a Reflection of Society, Designing for Eternity, The Contemporary Cemetery. Divisions within the main chapters explore Church Graveyards, Veterans Cemeteries, Ethnic Representations, Monuments to Marriage,... Images of Death, and so forth.

The book is well printed and designed, and Camilo's photographs concentrate on the subject. The photographs, captions and text explain and entice the reader to do their own explorations.

—SR

J. F. Turner, **Howard Finster**, **Man of Visions**, **The Life** and **Work of a Self-Taught Artist**, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1989. \$40.00; 244 pp.

Howard Finster, Renaissance Man

One day while tinkering with a bike, Howard discovered something he liked.

He froze like an icicle
Right near that old bicycle
For upon his right finger,
In a dab of paint
(He nearly did faint)
Was a face, shining with grace,
That said "Paint sacred art."

Howard knew he had to do his part, And thousands of works later He had certainly pleased the great Creator.

I like Howard Finster. I have just finished reading a recent book about him, *Howard Finster*, *Man of Visions*, *The Life and Work of a Self-Taught Artist*, by J. F. Turner, and I feel as if I know him quite well. Howard is certainly a remarkable man and Turner's book is a delightful introduction to his many talents.

Turner, who has known Finster for more than a decade, begins his book with Howard's own description of his childhood years, living on a farm in Alabama. Howard goes on to describe how he became a preacher at the age of fifteen and the twenty-two different trades he worked at to supplement his preacher's income. Turner then describes Finster's backyard garden museum, built in the 1940's, that was an impetus for Paradise Garden, the two and a half acre environment built in the 1970's. Finster picks up the narrative and takes the author on a tour of Paradise Garden, describing its creation and the inspiration for its construction. Howard's monologue is interspersed with photographs of the site and a map of the Garden. Later chapters deal with the marketing of Howard Finster's art and the reactions of the residents of Howard's home town, Summerville, Georgia, to Paradise Garden and his art. I particularly enjoyed Howard's conversation with Turner about his working techniques and the reactions of contemporary artists to Howard's art and to Howard himself in Chapters 5 and 6. The last chapter of the book deals with Howard's other creative endeavors; his writings, poetry, stories, inventions, music, songs and books as well as Howard's descriptions of some of his visions. There are many splendid photographs throughout the book of Howard's paintings and of Paradise Garden. Turner has included a biographical summary, a bibliography and a record of Finster exhibitions.

continued on next page

In Issue Number 10 of the SPACES newsletter, Seymour Rosen reviewed Howard Finster, Stranger From Another World: Man of Visions Now on This Earth, by Howard Finster as told to Tom Patterson, Abbeville Press. Both the Turner and the Patterson books are excellent descriptions of Howard Finster. If you'd like an "as-told-to" autobiography, get the Patterson book. If you would like some explanation of Howard's work and some voices other than Howard's, get the Turner book. True Finster fanatics will probably want to get both. In either case, you will probably end up liking Howard too.

—Rick Ripley

NATURAL SCRIPTURES: Visions of Nature and the Bible. Lehigh University, 1990. Curated by Elaine Garfinkle, Adrian Swain, Ricardo Viera. 20 pp. 35th Annual Contemporary American Art Exhibit, November 1 - December 28, 1990.

This small but lively and interestingly designed catalog documents the exhibit of work by folk artists Hugo Spergen, Minnie and Garland Adkins, Jessie and Ronald Cooper, and Rev. Howard Finster. It includes color photographs of some of the art work, a brief bibliography, and an eccentric and poetic essay by Norman J. Girardot. Serious collectors of Finster and folk art books and catalogs will want this catalog, which was published in a limited edition of 1000 copies on the occasion of this exhibit, and is still available from Lehigh. (see p. 2 for address)

(Lehigh has been producing some wonderful shows. They did a major show on Finster, "The Worlds Folk Art Church: Reverend Howard Finster and Family," curated by Ricardo Viera and Norman Girardot in 1986.)

Claud Arz, Guide de la France Insolite, Paris: Guides Hachette, Paris, 1990. (In French) 128,000 Francs; 155 pp.

Although there have been a number of "oddities on the side of the road" books available about America, to our knowledge Claud Arz's **Guide de la France Insolite** (Guide to the strange, bizzarre in France) is the first of this genre about France. It is very interesting.

This smallish, 8 7/8" by 5 1/2" book covers some 60 plus places and is a melange of the work of people untrained in the arts who have decorated their property, professional artists, obvious commercial sites, historical and contemporary museums, galleries and studios as well as what he identifies as follies.

Arz divides them into three groupings -Singuliers de lá Art, Lieux á mysteres et folies, Musées hors norms. Sites are identified on a map of France along with major towns or cities. Arz also rates each place on a scale of one to three, and when possible gives addresses, phone numbers, sometimes directions and hours.

We tried to find the book in French bookstores in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Chicago with no luck. Finally we had to order the book from the publisher through our local French bookstore and due to an extremely poor exchange rate, and horrendous shipping fees, it cost us \$46.00 with pickup at the store. A bit pricey.

Some of the environmental art sites were covered in SPACES's newsletter #10 and in Raw Vision #'s 1 - 4. —SR

Lucy Lippard, Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America. New York: Pantheon, 1990. \$24.95; 280 pp.

In this book, feminist art historian and critic, Lucy Lippard redefines what art is by giving us the words and works of many contemporary artists of color (trained and selftaught) who live in North America. Art, says Lippard, is political, personal, and inseparable from the life and context of the artist. Lippard battles against traditional, and Western European aesthetics and theories of art. Of interest to us, and indicative of Lippard's message, is her denouncement of words like "primitive," and "outsider" to describe the artists (and art) who are not part of the white, academic, museum, gallery world. Her reading is broad and generous. She quotes from literature, myths, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, artists and critics. This is a passionate, challenging, and important book. Many photographs, extensive bibliography, index.

Three of the artists in the book, David Hammons, Alison Saar, and Betye Saar acknowledge a debt to Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts as an inspiration for their own works. Lippard states, "Their glorious colors and patterns have influenced countless contemporary artists, especially artists of color, since Watts became a black neighborhood." (See story on upcoming exhibit at the LA County Museum of Art, p. 3, for a story on other "mainstream artists" influenced by unofficial artists.)

Shelter, Bolinas, California: Shelter Publications, 1973. \$16.95; 176 pp. republished

Shelter, when it was first published in 1973, was the Whole Earth Catalog of architecture and alternative building. In some ways not much has changed in 17 years; alternative building and energy systems have not had much impact on our cities and they are needed now more than ever, so Shelter seems as relevant as it did in 1973. A number of environmental art sites were embraced by the alternative building people, and Art Beal's, Nitt Witt Ridge, Rodia's Watts Towers, Gypsy House trucks, and then some other really unusual architecture are included. Some extraordinary shelters are included in this still most interesting publication.

Lloyd Kahn of Shelter Publications is planning an active publishing life for interesting, alternative ideas about art and building as well as searching for out of print books to republish. You can write to them at Shelter Publications, Box 279, Bolinas, California 94924, to find out what's next.

Another Face of the Diamond: Pathways through the Black Atlantic South. Essays by Robert Farris Thompson, John Mason, Judith McWillie. New York: INFAR Latin American Gallery, 1989. 69 pp.

This is a catalog for an exhibition from 1989, organized by the INTAR Latin American Gallery in New York, which presented the work of eleven Black folk artists from the American South: Archie Byron, Hawkins Bolden, Thornton Dial, Minnie Evans, Ralph Griffin, Dilmus Hall, Lonnie Holly, Joe Light, Charles Lucas, J. B. Murray, Mary T. Smith. The theme of the catalog is the African traditions which were brought to the United States by slaves, particularly from the Kongo, the area of present-day Zaire and Angola. The essays are scholarly without being dry, partly because many of the artists were interviewed and so they seem to be present in the essays. There are photographs, biographies of and quotes from each artist. This catalog is a welcome addition to the literature. We have not yet seen, but hope to see the catalog of another Black folk art exhibit: Black Art-Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African-American art, from the Dallas Museum of Art. The point made in both these catalogs is that for the most part, Black art has been outside the mainstream market, whether it is folk art or not.

Gavin Younge, **Art of the South African Townships**. New York: Rizzoli, 1988. \$17.95; 96 pp.

The term "Township art," which Younge uses in this book, does not indicate a style grouping, but the political reality of the lives of Black artists in South Africa. The term is used to put the art in its urban, community-based, political context.

Younge does not distinguish between folk artists and trained artists, but presents work of both: sculptors, painters, political artists and wall painters. He spent a year gathering artists to include in this book, and because they are not recognized by any official art bodies in South Africa, he searched through the townships, often following word of mouth reputations.

We found the wall painters particularly intriguing. This seems to be an art that women do and pass on to their daughters. The abundant color photographs of the walls and houses, usually highly stylized, sometimes geometric, patterns, are lovely. There are biographies of the artists at the end of the book, and quite a lot of social and political history about the treatment and training of Black artists.

Arnold Rubin, Art As Technology: The Arts of Africa, Oceania, Native America, Southern California, Ed. Zena Pearlstone, Beverly Hills, Hillcrest Press, 1989. \$19.95

Arnold Rubin was an art historian who taught at UCLA and this book is the result of his field research and his inter-disciplinary art history courses. He died in 1988 (see NL # 9) and we can thank Zena Pearlstone for editing and

completing this book for publication.

Rubin's argument is that environment and technology determine the art of a people. Rubin proposes a universal theory of art which does not make distinctions between socalled primitive and advanced art, and he teaches us to try to avoid ethnocentrism in our opinions or definitions of art. Rubin's approach to art is anthropological, unlike the curators and art historians of other books which approach folk art for its aesthetic values. His work is based largely on field work and the other literature of the field. Zena Pearlstone includes an essay which explores Rubin's research in American pop art and its culture. Her essay documents his research in Southern California on murals by Hispanic artists, light and card stunts at football games, low-rider culture, tattooing, and rituals like the Pasadena Tournament of Roses parade, its satiric counterpart, the Doo Dah parade, and Forest Lawn cemetery. By extending his approach of non-Western art to our own pop art culture, Rubin (and Pearlstone) makes a good point about the importance of seeing without prejudging what art is. Bibliography. (Some great photographs.)

Public Art Review, published by FORECAST Public Artworks, Minneapolis, MN. \$10.00 per year (\$8.00 for artists). Published twice a year. Public Art Review, 2955 Bloomington Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55507.

Vol 2. , #2 is devoted to Public Art and Multiculturalism. An article by Seitu Jones, "Public Art That Inspires: Public Art That Informs," discusses public work by black artists, mostly, and includes the "yard art" of artists Derrick Webster, Chicago, and Tyree Guyton, Detroit.

Derrick Webster has created sculptural forms — figures, geometric shapes, whirligigs — all around his home on the south side of Chicago, which remind some people of West African ancestral shrines. Tyree Guyton, who has some art training, uses vacant houses, and lots, and trees in his environmental art. Gallery artists and self-taught artists are treated with equal seriousness and respect in this article.

The Spring/Summer, 1991 issue has an article about SPACES and its preservation activities, written by Elaine Wintman, former SPACES Assistant Director. The editors are open for other stories about environmental art.

Ramona Lampell, Millard Lampell, David Larkin. O' Appalachia: Artists of the Southern Mountains, New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1989. 256 pp.

Dealers and collectors Ramona and Millard Lampell sought out self-taught artists in this relatively isolated region of the U.S.. Of the twenty artists presented here in gorgeous color photographs and brief but informative essays, several do work which falls into the environmental scale, including Rev. Benjamin Franklin Perkins, Clyde Whiteside, James Harold Jennings and Charlie Lucas. This is a lovingly produced, coffee table book, designed to be looked at, then read, then looked at some more.

"From the top of the tallest of the Watts

Towers..... Power pylons march across the

middle distance to the north, their silvery

spires mimicking the slender potency and

glitter like beetles in the blurred sunshine.

A horn sounds in the hot afternoon, a dog

grace of the tower beneath you..... Cars

barks, a women shouts for her child."

Leon Whiteson, **The Watts Towers of Los Angeles**, Mosaic Press, Oakville, Ontario, Canada, 1989. \$29.95; 96 pp. Photos by Marvin Rand, Foreword by Tom Bradley, essays by Bud & Arloa Goldstone, Rochelle Nicholas, Christopher Knight, Mikal Gilmore and a poem by John Outterbridge.

Before I had this eagerly awaited book in my hand, four people who had already seen it used words like "tacky," "slap dash," "unprofessional," and "layout makes no sense" to describe it to me.

However, a long look at the book makes those descriptions sound like praise. Add plagiarism, selective scholarship or lack of scholarship, lack of fact checking, lack of proof reading, copyright infringement, misrepresentation, inventing history, self serving and you're getting close.

Just a cursory review by another person associated with the Towers and me, found some dozens of mistakes within the text, chronology and bibliography. You might have guessed by this time that I have some trouble with the book.

While this book has a copyright of 1989 the *Chronology* stops in 1986. The *Bibliography - Books* stops in 1979, the *Bibliography - Background Material* stops in 1980, *Magazines - Articles* really stops with one title in 1976 (with the exception of three articles involving two of the essayists - 1978, 1979). Some extraordi-

nary events and books are left out. Whiteson, a writer on Architecture should of known about a major book like Fantastic Architecture which is not listed.

Even a person unfamiliar with Simon's Towers has to notice the inordinate number of typos, but they might not know about the mingling of events years apart but combined in one sentence. Whiteson says city Historic Cultural Monument status and inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places both happened in 1963 (page 83)—although national acknowledgement was actually given 14 years later. Rodia dies twice: July 25 (page 21), and July 16 (page 84). Jacob Bronowski becomes Joseph Bronowski (page 24). ARTSFORUM becomes Architectural Forum in the citation for Kate Steintz's article (page 93). Robert Bryan's script for a rock musical on the Towers becomes a published book. A 1965 catalog of the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art which contains only one picture of the Towers exhibit installation (of 1962) is titled as the Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts catalog, while the real exhibition catalog is mistitled (page 87).

Whiteson states "Pilgrims beat a path to Rodia's door...
after a surprise appearance at a 1961 conference on the
Towers at UC Berkeley." There was no conference but Sam
did come to two lectures given by Ed Farrell and myself one was at the University of California Berkeley and the
other at the San Francisco Museum of Art. (Bud Goldstone,
one of the identified essayists in the book was there and
could have caught the error had he been asked.) True,

people did beat a path to Sam's door after 1961 but they also did so after original Committee members like Kate Steinitz, Mae and Sol Babitz and Jean Morgan "discovered" Sam in Martinez at least a year before the lectures.

There are a number of other possible confusions but they are too complicated for me to explain. Let me state here, that so far, I am only commenting on those factual incidents in which I could be considered a first person resource or on those other incidents I checked with other first person resources. This is something Whiteson never did although (as mentioned above) people like Bud Goldstone (the man who designed the test that proved the Towers safe) and others were readily available.

Interestingly (with some research) you can trace some of Whiteson's errors back to the original mistakes made in the Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts' bibliography which was then used by the preservation architects the Ehrenkrantz Group, who added more bibliographic errors in their report, which was then copied by Whiteson.

Amazingly, Ojai is spelled Djai (page 87) exactly the way the Ehrenkrantz Group spelled it. It seems no one never read the material they appropriated and published.

You are lead to believe that the International Forum for the Future of Sam Rodia's Towers in Watts is an ongoing activity

(page 78, "Future Plans") but in a newspaper story before the book came out (Chicago Tribune May 4, 1990, "Assignment: Los Angeles" by Jorge Casuso), Whiteson admitted that the Trust folded shortly after its 1985 meeting.

Sadly, even the limited photographs are laid out in such a confused manner you never know when you're inside or outside the Towers or what details belong to what object.

Especially telling is the lack of any acknowledgements or credits in this book. It might appear that, beyond the essayists, Whiteson did it all by himself. This is absolutely not the case.

- Photographic sources identified but whose work is included without their knowledge or permission are Mabel Boyd, Willie Middlebrook, D. J. Robinson.
- Photographic sources not identified and photographs used without permission or knowledge of the photographers include those by Bruce Bonner, Nicholas King, Seymour Rosen as well as the Los Angeles Times. Basic Rodia research used without his permission or knowledge belongs to Simon's nephew, Brad Byer.

Even if the above is of little concern to you—does the book give the information you need to acquaint yourself with the Towers? The answer is —limited at best. The book is a hodge podge of stories with mistakes, vast areas of information and history left out. Simon, the Towers, the Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts, the City of Los Angeles, others who helped save and protected the sculpture, and the public deserve better. —Seymour Rosen

Yard Art, Curated by Sandy Harthorn, Boise Art Museum, Boise, Idaho 1991. \$19.95 plus \$3.00 postage; 32 pp. Boise Art Museum, 670 South Julia Davis Drive, Boise, Idaho 83702

For those who don't know, the Boise Art Museum (directed by ex-Californian Dennis O'Leary) is a real gem which has been producing important high class shows for years."The Yard Art"exhibit is a great amalgam of works by 28 academic and non-academic artists from all over the Northwest and California with some 85 objects and photographs. From the catalog: "By combining a diversity of artifacts made for the domestic garden together with sculpture based on the theme of the yard environment, we hope to spur an interest in a variety of unexpected possibilities and inspire the audience to reconsider pink flamingos and garden gnomes in favor of objects generated by a fertile imagination." Of special interest to the hardcore contemporary folk art environment folks are the works of Emil Gehrke, and Lee and Dee Steen. Many nice photographs, biographies, statements about the artists, a small, good bibliography; a well designed catalog.

Mildred Brooke Hoover, et al. **Historic Spots in California** Revised by Douglas E. Kyle. 4th ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990 (1st ed. published 1932 - 1937). \$49.50; 617 pp.

This hefty book is a wonderful introduction to the history of California through its landmarks. It begins with an overview of the discovery and settling of the west coast by the Spanish, and continues through the territorial period and U. S. annexation. The rest of the book is organized alphabetically by county. Within each county section is a gracefully written and interesting history of the settling of the county and some of its cities. The state historical landmarks are woven into these histories.

The introduction states that the text includes all California State Registered Landmarks, and many places listed on the National Register of Historic Places. We found Baldasare Forestiere's Underground Garden in Fresno, and Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts, but no mention of National Register Landmark, Desert View Tower, or some 9 other sites listed on the state register as California State Landmark #939.

There are photographs, small black and white, but no plans, and no maps. A fairly extensive bibliography, and index are included.

Garbage, The Practical Journal for the Environment. P. O. Box 51647, Boulder, CO 80321. A bi-monthly journal published by the Old House Journal Corp., Brooklyn, N. Y. \$21 per year.

The November/December 1990 issue has a profile of John and Mary Milkovisch's beer can house in Houston.

The writer describes it as "an unparalleled recycling feat." Clearly the writer hasn't seen very many contemporary folk art environments. Nonetheless, we are going to keep our eyes on this magazine.

We've talked to a representative of the magazine and they are interested in more material showing recycling.

We get a lot of requests about murals around Los Angeles and the following book can give you some great information about "Mexican-American" murals in the state.

Signs from the Heart: California Chicano Murals, Ed. by Eva Speerling Cockcroft and Holly Barnet-Sanchez, Venice, CA, Social and Public Art Resource Center, 1990. 105 pp. It may be ordered from SPARC, 685 Venice Blvd., Venice, CA 90291 \$14.95 plus \$ 3.00 postage and handling.

SPARC, founded and directed by the muralist Judy Baca, has been a major center for the production of murals in Southern California since 1976 and a major center for mural documentation. This book grew out of the photo documentation of murals, world-wide, collected by SPARC. SPARC's special expertise and interest has always been the Mexican-American mural movement which has its roots in the Mexican mural tradition and in the use of public art as political intervention.

Six essays by art historians and art writers interpret the Chicano mural movement in California within the context of the rise in political and cultural consciousness among Chicano artists. Many color photographs, bibliographic notes and a small selected reading list makes this an important contribution to a vital urban art form which needs more study and documentation. We hope SPARC will soon cover the rest of the extensive mural movement in California which owes a large debt to the people documented in this book.

Michael Wallis, Route 66: The Mother Road, New York: St. Martins Press, 1990. \$29.95; 243 pp.

Wallis uses postcards, roadside signs, oral histories and photographs to construct this colorful history of the myth and reality of Route 66, the Main Street of America. We begin the trip, at the beginning of the highway, in Chicago, travel through Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, and end in California, at the end of the highway, on the beaches of Santa Monica. It is a colorful ride. Many of the roadside sites he documents look to us like candidates for folk art environments and might have in fact influenced some of the many people who drove West to build their own "attractions" once they settled.

The book will bring back pleasant memories for those who have made the trip on Route 66. This book is an important document of what is disappearing. Those inspired will be able to locate organizations of enthusiasts like Wallis did in this major work of research. A good read.

Not Outside/ Not Inside/ Not This Side

In response to a Letter To The Editor written by SPACES's Director to Arts and Antiques Magazine, we received correspondence from Barbara Falk, a "self-taught artist" who agreed with our objection to the way "outsider" was used in the article. What follows are excerpts from her letter to the Editor and her letter to SPACES.

Dear Mr. Schaire:

"Yesterday I had the good fortune to read in the October 1990 issue of Art & Antiques Seymour Rosen's letter regarding Eleanor Gaver's article "Inside the Outsiders."

I am a self taught painter. Because I am also a member of the middle class, the honesty and originality of my work is being questioned. As a result of the presumptions of certain influential art professionals, the standing of self-taught artists is now viewed with skepticism unless they fit the poor, naive and/or alienated eligibility requirements. The erroneous inference, is that your style is selfconscious, influenced by folk art of the past and motivated by the profits in the marketplace. The work, its inception and the established reputation of the artists in question are not considered, only their social status and personality. It is unfortunate that the flood of pseudo 'folk' art in recent years has tended to obscure the serious work being done by self-taught artists who are not 'Outsiders' but not doing work like that in the 'mainstream."

Mr. Rosen's letter is the first thing I have come across that addresses this problem."

Dear Mr. Rosen:

"Last week I came across your informed letter... I am a self-taught painter who has never been influenced by folk art. During the 1970s my paintings were exhibited beside works done by 'mainstream' artists. I was classified as a 'folk ' artist by the professionals who organized these shows, and during the 1980s was represented by a New York gallery specializing in contemporary American 'folk' art. When 'folk' became a home decorating trend my dealer began to focus on

What SPACES can or cannot do for you......

SPACES was formally set up in 1978 to identify, protect, honor and preserve a phenomenon then little known by the broad public and even less acknowledged by the arts establishment. Another goal was to alert the public to the magic of these works.

The artists who we deal with are now mostly in their 80s and 90s. Therefore the need and rush to save these sites are an even higher priority than ever before. The families or community members who approach us for help in the preservation of the sites generally tend to reach SPACES after the crises have started.

Although many of our activities are supported by grants, donations and memberships, nothing could have been done without an incredible number of volunteer hours.

Lately, available grants, donations and volunteer hours have become extremely scarce so what little time there is available goes into preservation.

We can support the preservation efforts of those who wish to save a site. We can write letters and encourage others to do so. We can suggest techniques that have saved sites, sometimes we can put you in touch with bureaucrats or others who could be useful. SPACES can act as an authority to interact with the media or a governmental agency and quote precedents, try to explain how preservation of a site can enhance the neighborhood. We might be able to suggest some fund-raising schemes.

We can try to verify some information you are unsure about, be interviewed by the press, suggest a book or two, put you in touch with a kindred spirit (if they are willing), and give your name to picture editors or curators, if we know you have material of quality, that they need.

SPACES has supplied articles and photographs to magazines and journals and we can give lectures on sites in America and France or suggest others who can do so. Also, as you will see further in this issue, we can keep you up on the latest gossip or information on sites, upcoming exhibits, symposia, books and publications, or notices of importance.

We also most certainly will support your grant application if it will help preserve a site or enhance or encourage acknowledgement of America's contemporary folk art environments.

What we can't do is to respond to the literally hundreds of requests we get each year for gross amounts of information. "Please send us a list of every site in the world, or the U.S., or the South." We can't respond to, "We are going to Europe and Africa for a year ...and we are interested in ...native cultures, in their arts, jewelry, adornments, child development, family systems, rituals and celebrations, and agricultural techniques." We feel bad about it, but because of the limitations on our time and money, and in the interest of saving the sites from raiders, we just can't give out all the information we have about these fragile art works. We also have a responsibility to the artists and their families not to give out their addresses without their permission.

nostalgia, I decided to look for another gallery in New York. The response to my inquires came as something of a shock. I learned (notwithstanding the apparent absence of any serious investigation of the field let alone familiarity with my background) that I had been placed in a category of artists who, to paraphrase one of the dealers I contacted, work self-consciously in a style that did not come naturally, for commercial reasons. I am still looking for a gallery."

From a 1980 story on Barbara Falk in Americana Magazine - "...I consider myself a folk artist because I was self taught... But to be a true American folk artist, I was told, one must live in total isolation, untouched by the mainstream of modern life. I grew up in Los Angeles, attended college, and was a member of the middle class. Clearly I was disqualified."

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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.

Membership levels are Individual \$15, Individual Sponsor \$25, Institution \$25, Individual Patron \$50, Individual Benefactor \$100, Corporate \$250.

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