

Jo Farb Hernandez
Eulogy for Seymour Rosen
Los Angeles County Museum of Art - October 13, 2006

I don't really remember when or how I met Seymour—he was kind of one of those people I felt I'd always known. I was born and raised in Chicago, as was he; but I didn't meet him there. I got my master's degree here at UCLA in 1975, and my master's project was on art environments, but I didn't meet him at that time, either. Yet somehow we met—in the late '70s or early '80s, I would guess—and in 1985 we worked together for the first time as we co-curated an exhibition on California art environments at the Triton Museum of Art in Santa Clara, where I was then Director. I worked with him off and on over the next several years, and by 1994 had become his principal grant-writer, project director, and finally, member of the Board of Trustees of SPACES.

By phone, email, and periodic visits we fed each other's insatiable delight at the varieties of personal and idiosyncratic human expression. Spending time with Seymour refueled my ambitions to get out from behind my desk, to do more of my own primary fieldwork, to see more of this art with my own eyes, to speak to more of the artists myself. As my husband Sam and my daughter Larissa will attest, nothing makes me happier than chancing upon an extraordinary creation where one least might expect an art masterpiece, brazenly out there for all the world to see. We've traveled thousands of miles, here and abroad, to enter the worlds of these proud and creative artists.

This past spring I came down here to LA twice to discuss the future of SPACES with Seymour at his request—OK, really, at his demand. We spoke for long hours and my friend Katie and I took notes about what he wanted to do, both in terms of institutional organization and recognition, and in terms of programming. There wasn't really anything new, from what I'd written in all those grant applications, but I'm so glad we had those discussions nevertheless, because in them he clearly articulated his dreams.

And now, no longer at his side—albeit often from afar—I've stepped into Seymour's shoes. As the new Director of SPACES, I will meet with the Board again tomorrow, and we will continue the conversations that Seymour had held with so many of us over so many years. We will discuss options and strategies, weigh proposals, and grapple with legal and financial issues.

But you can all be assured that we will do the right thing—to carry on Seymour’s vision, and to perpetuate the preservation, documentation, and research on art environments as best we can.

Seymour could be crotchety and sarcastic, condescending and bossy, but he did an extraordinary thing with his life. Although not alone, he truly can be credited as one of the very few people who defined and clarified an entire genre of art. He celebrated the idiosyncrasy and the obsession, the boundary-breaking, paradigm-ignoring, wonderful excesses of these artists, and for this we celebrate him today.

On behalf of his family, the SPACES Board of Trustees, and all of us who admired his creativity, his eye, his humor, and his passion, thank you for coming today.

Introduce myself

Thanks to people that helped organize this celebration and make it happen:

Michael Govan, Director, LACMA, and his able staff, including Terry Bradshaw and Jessica Randel

Seymour's brother Jerry and sister-in-law Caryl Rosen, from Chicago, and their son Steve

The self-styled "Celebration SWAT Team," made up of Bud Goldstone, Allen Porter, J. Michael Walker, Howard Bilow, and Larry Harris

John Blaine, former director of the Watts Towers Art Center, Seymour's friend and executor

Members of the Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts, particularly Michael Cornwell

Steven Sprung and Michael Bershada, who are videotaping this event for our archives

Brigitte Kueppers, Jay Platt, and Kristine McKenna for putting together the slide program that you will see, gathered from Seymour's photos in the SPACES archives

And to all the speakers who will share their thoughts with us today.

SPEAKERS

Jfh for Jerry and Caryl Rosen

Marvin Rand, photographer

Allen Porter

Bud Goldstone, retired aeronautical engineer and author of the book *The Los Angeles Watts Towers* published by the Getty Museum

Rodney Punt, former Assistant General Manager and Historic Preservation Officer, City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs

Tom Meyer, retired Graphic Artist for the City of Los Angeles' Cultural Affairs Department

Michael Cornwell, Vice Chair, Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in
Watts and Member, Mayor's Committee for the Watts Towers
Jfh for Holly Metz, art historian and former member, Board of Trustees,
SPACES

Lisa Stone, Curator of the Roger Brown Study Collection at the School of
the Art Institute of Chicago

John Blaine

Jfh

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SPACES BOARD MOURNS FOUNDING DIRECTOR ROSEN; NAMES NEW DIRECTOR

The Board of Trustees of the international art archives Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments (SPACES), based in Los Angeles, announced that curator and author Jo Farb Hernandez has been appointed Director, following the passing of Founding Director Seymour Rosen on September 20, 2006 at the age of 71.

Founded in 1978, SPACES was an outgrowth of the Committee for Simon Rodia's Towers in Watts, an ad-hoc group of artists and community members who came together to save the famous Watts Towers from the City of Los Angeles's wrecking ball in 1959.

Rosen worked tirelessly to document, raise awareness for, and preserve the idiosyncratic genre of works now known as art environments. His photographs of the Watts Towers were first featured in William Seitz's book *The Art of Assemblage* (1961) and in a solo exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1962. He advised and advocated for other community groups to help them save their local treasures, including the Preserve Bottle Village Committee (Simi Valley, CA), the Kansas Grass-Roots Art Association, and the Friends of Fred Smith's Wisconsin Concrete Park. He was instrumental in securing a place on the National Register of Historic Places for the Watts Towers, as well as placing a dozen more art environments on state or local artistic or historic registries.

Jo Farb Hernandez, Director of the Natalie and James Thompson Art Gallery in San Jose State University's School of Art and Design, has worked with Rosen since 1985. She earlier served as Director of the Monterey Museum of Art (1985-93), and concurrently as President of the statewide California Association of Museums. She is a member of the International Editorial Board for *Raw Vision* magazine, the Executive Board of the Alliance for California Traditional Arts, the International Advisory Board for the Fred Smith art environment, and has been a Project Director for SPACES archives. Hernandez has been particularly involved with the aesthetic genre of "outsider" or "self-taught" art since 1974, and has done primary fieldwork on art environments across the U.S. and in Western Europe; and on Mexican, Spanish, and Balkan folk arts and performance events. She has authored or co-authored over thirty exhibition catalogues and books, and has published articles for a variety of international art journals; juried numerous national, statewide, and regional exhibitions, and lectured widely at museums and universities internationally. Hernandez has also recently completed the award-winning book *Forms of Tradition in Contemporary Spain*, published by the University Press of Mississippi.

Addressing a crowd at a memorial celebration for Rosen at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Hernandez pledged to carry on Rosen's vision for the preservation and documentation of these important, albeit idiosyncratic, works of art.

For further information: Jo Farb Hernandez.
408-924-4328. jfh@cruzio.com

