

## DUKE CAHILL

Duke Cahill was born in California on July 30, 1920. He joined the Merchant Marine as a young man and did a stint as a boxer. After working as a plasterer with his brother for a number of years, he then spent 10 years perfecting the use of fiberglass in the re-construction of swimming pools and successfully established his own business.

In 1966 he began building statues in the yard of his construction business because, he explains, "I always wanted to build a statue." He and his craftsmen, apparently unable not to work, transformed the 2 1/2 acre equipment yard with gigantic statues, extravagant gates, and assemblages whenever the weather or timing of construction jobs prevented them from resurfacing swimming pools. Duke, unwilling to let his skilled craftsmen go when business was slow, encouraged them to build a clubhouse on the lot. They also executed his other designs and built intricate assemblages of welded metal, like the 12 foot filigree screen made only of crescent wrenches, and others made of horseshoes welded into flower patterns. The gates to the equipment yard are fine examples of their work -- boldly and gracefully designed. The yard includes a section of *faux* cobblestone, made by dribbling cement in patterns. The first sculpture to appear in the yard in 1966 was the large Martian-like man. Because he "looked lonely," a dog and cat were added. Soon followed a giant jug which also provides storage for firewood. The alien -looking creatures came from Duke's imagination. All these sculptures are related by common building materials -- resin drums covered with wire and plaster, and later, fiberglass. The wooden signs around the yard are Duke's creations and reflect his humor as well as his love of poetry and songs. Most of the yard, storage sheds, and the surfaces of the buildings and fences are covered with assemblages and advertising art. A community of men, Duke and his workers built a fanciful world for themselves from the objects Duke and his wife Frances, collected and stored neatly about the yard and in the sheds. The collection continues to grow and includes old tools and mechanical equipment, wagons and railroad cars, circus posters and advertising signs.

A number of men worked on the construction of the sculptures and assemblages in the yard during the 25 years it has been in process, but it is not possible now to attribute individual pieces to specific men. This 2 1/2 acre fantasy world was, and continues to be, a collaborative effort, fueled by Duke's encouragement and inspiration, and aided by the skill of his workmen. One man, Larry Torix, has worked for Duke for 10 years, and is responsible for much of the welding in the yard.

This carnival-like world grew out of Duke's collecting impulse, his constructing and design skills, and the comraderie of the men who worked here together. The yard displays a unity of materials and design in spite of the number of different men who participated in its creation. Circle motifs and the colors of weathered metal dominate the yard. The startling juxtaposition of scale -- dogs and cats are as large as storage sheds -- tells first time visitors that they are in a world where the ordinary has been made special. The Cahills continue to maintain and add to the equipment yard and have stated that they will never give it up.