

(Oct. 1990)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Chinese Sunken Garden Gate
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Japanese Sunken Garden Gate

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: Brackenridge Park, 400 N. St. Mary's Street
CITY OR TOWN: San Antonio
STATE: Texas **CODE:** TX **COUNTY:** Bexar **CODE:** 029
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
VICINITY: N/A
ZIP CODE: 78205

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this (x nomination) (___ request for determination of eligibility) meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property (x meets) (___ does not meet) the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant (___ nationally) (___ statewide) (x locally). (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date
State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___meets ___does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
___ entered in the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
___ determined eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
___ See continuation sheet		
___ determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
___ removed from the National Register	_____	_____
___ other (explain): _____	_____	_____

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Public - local

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Object

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	0	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	1	0 OBJECTS
	1	0 TOTAL

NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER: 0

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: *The Sculpture of Dionicio Rodriguez in Texas*

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: Recreation and Culture / Work of Art

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: Recreation and Culture / Work of Art

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: OTHER: Faux bois sculpture

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION
WALLS
ROOF
OTHER CONCRETE

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheet 5).

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Art

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1942

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1942

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Dionicio Rodriguez

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheet 5)

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 6).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
1.	14	550691	3259170

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The gate is at the west central section of Brackenridge Park, San Antonio, Texas. The nomination encompasses only the gate and the ground upon which it stands, an area approximately 15 feet wide and 6 feet deep.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION: The nomination boundary is drawn to include only the gate itself. Although the park itself may be eligible, it has not yet been evaluated due to the specific focus of this theme (*Sculpture of Dionicio Rodriguez*).

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Patsy Light and Maria Pfeiffer

ORGANIZATION:

DATE: January 2003

STREET & NUMBER: 300 Argyle

TELEPHONE: (210) 824-5914

CITY OR TOWN: San Antonio

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 78209

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet 6)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: City of San Antonio, Parks and Recreation Dept. (ATTN: Malcolm Matthews, Director)

STREET & NUMBER: 115 Plaza de Armas

TELEPHONE: (210) 207-8480

CITY OR TOWN: San Antonio

STATE: Texas

ZIP CODE: 78205

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National Park Service

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Chinese Sunken Garden Gate
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

DESCRIPTION

Rodriguez's extant work for the City of San Antonio includes installations in Brackenridge Park, in the patio of the Spanish Governor's Palace, Buckeye Park, and one that was originally in Alamo Plaza (now awaiting installation in Brackenridge Park).

The entrance portal to the Chinese Tea Garden (now known as the Japanese Sunken Garden) sited off St. Mary's Street in Brackenridge Park was a collaboration by Maximo Cortes and Dionicio Rodriguez, although Rodriguez's signature, "Made by D. Rodriguez" is carved into the front left handrail. Four sturdy vertical "tree trunks" with "branches" as brackets support lentils and a palapa-style roof, with four upturned corners, reminiscent of a Torii gate. A second, smaller palapa roof, also with the curved detail is built on top of the main roof, and third, smaller roof of the same design caps it. At strategic joints, "wooden wedges" are inserted. Two front lentils bear the inscription "Entrance Chinese Tea Garden." The vertical supporting "logs" and attached curved horizontal handrails (on both front and rear) have "worm holes," crevices, patches of "lichen" and exaggerated "knot holes." At critical points, Rodriguez inserted his "pyramid headed bolts." Relief sculpted Chinese calligraphy adorns the right-hand post, and the reverse side of the largest lentil. A translation of the writing is "China Garden." The colors, mainly rich tans and yellows remain very strong, in comparison to other pieces in the San Antonio area. The gate opening measures 7'3" wide and its height is 6'5" tall. The overall height of the entrance gate is 16'3", and the width (including the handrails) is 14'3". The gate is in good condition.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Dionicio Rodriguez-designed gate at the entrance to the Chinese Sunken Garden (also known as the Japanese Sunken Garden) in Brackenridge Park, San Antonio, is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, in the area of Art, as a unique and significant work of art by the noted San Antonio sculptor. The gate, along with other works for the City of San Antonio, are the only known Rodriguez projects commissioned by a municipality.

Rodriguez's client Dr. Aureliano Urrutia (see Miraflores Park nomination) apparently introduced Rodriguez to Charles Baumberger, founder of Alamo Portland Cement Company. Like Urrutia, Baumberger commissioned Rodriguez to complete multiple works for him including pieces for the City of Alamo Heights, his company headquarters, and his personal residence (Schmidt to Light). The Alamo Portland and Roman Cement Company (later renamed Alamo Cement Company) began excavations at the City of San Antonio's quarry north of downtown in 1880. As the quarry operations grew and railroad connections were required, the company moved farther north in 1908, remaining at that location for 77 years. The old quarry was incorporated into Brackenridge Park, and in 1917, City Parks Commissioner, Ray Lambert, used prison laborers to transform the area into the Japanese Tea Garden (Texas Historic Civil Engineering Landmark, 1979; Texas Historical Commission marker, 1991).

The oriental-style entrance gate to the Japanese Tea Garden is one of Rodriguez's most exuberant works. At the time of the gate's completion in 1942, the garden was known as the Chinese Tea Garden, a response to anti-Japanese discrimination during World War II. (The name was changed back to Japanese Tea Garden in 1983). Carlos Cortes relates that his father, Maximo Cortes, designed the entrance gate, which was then built by Dionicio Rodriguez, whose signature is etched into the left handrail. It is known that both Cortes and Rodriguez collaborated on its construction. Rodriguez had sculpted a smaller version of the gate, along with numerous other pieces in Clayton, New Mexico in 1933

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Chinese Sunken Garden Gate
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barker, W.E. "Beauty in Concrete Wood," *Popular Mechanics*, October 1927: pp. 585-587.

Bechtol, Ron. "Home is Where the Art Is." *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, Texas: April 1, 1984, pp. 29-33.

St. Louis Missouri, Kansas Texas Railroad. *San Antonio, As Seen by a Northern Visitor*, 1930, pp. 14, 21.

Tyler, Ron. ed.et.al. *New Handbook of Texas History, Vol. 5*: Austin: The Texas Historical Association, 1996. pp. 652-653.

Vertical files of Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio, Texas

PHOTOGRAPH LOG

Chinese Tea Garden gate by Dionicio Rodriguez in Brackenridge Park
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Photographs by Patsy Light (except as noted)
July 1996 (except as noted)
Negatives on file with Patsy Light (except as noted)

Chinese Tea Garden entrance gate
Camera facing west
Photo 1 of 3

"Made by Dionicio Rodriguez" signature on gate
Camera facing southwest
Photo 2 of 3

SUPPLEMENTAL HISTORIC PHOTO

Rosalinda Elizondo at Chinese Tea Garden gate
Camera facing west
March 13, 1944
Photograph by Oscar Elizondo
The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio
Photo 3 of 3