

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Ed Galloway's Totem Pole Park
name of property
Rogers, Oklahoma
county and State

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"typical of that in the Midwest and Deep South." Ed Galloway is recognized as Oklahoma's premier historic creator of folk art and folk art environments.(13) Recent scholarship has placed his work squarely within the definition of "visionary art," in that it expresses some ideas or revelations experienced by the artist.(14)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there arose a new kind of folk art, that of folk art environments, or outdoor spaces where sculptural folk art resides, usually placed according to a plan. In his 1995 work Gardens of Revelation, John Beardsley describes the folk art environment as "part architecture, part sculpture, part landscape."(15) The folk art environment is a public place where its creator can objectify fantasies, preach beliefs, teach about subjects deemed worthy of knowing, register a protest against the world or the human condition, or just enjoy building and creating something unusual and interesting for people to view. With his Totem Pole Park, Ed Galloway placed architecturally designed sculptures within a large landscape. He intended his design to educate young people about Native Americans in Oklahoma, despite the fact that, like most folk artists, he did not have or seek precise knowledge of his subject.

Folk art environments are often not consonant (or even conversant) with the formal academic criteria for defining "art," in terms of theories of color, composition, perspective, or the need for an artist to have academic training, and so forth. Because of this, environmental artists' work was scorned by the main-line community of artists and collectors. Yet, legitimate artistic criteria do exist that can be applied equally to academic and folk art: "honest use of materials, consistent craftsmanship, a sound sense of design (in terms of use of color, scale, repetition, balance), and the ability to move the human soul." Instinctively following these criteria, as noted by folk art historians Barbara Brackman and Mary Ann Anders, Ed Galloway and many other folk artists created successful single folk art sculptures and folk art environments in the first half of the twentieth century, and beyond.(16)

In the late 1970s and 1980s the rise of folk art into popular and scholarly consciousness was objectified by the listing of several historic folk art environments on the National Register of Historic Places. As of 1995, the following were on the National Register. Listed in 1976: "Garden of Eden," Lucas, Kansas, 1905-1924, Samuel P. Dinsmoor, concrete sculptures; Listed in 1980: "Desert View Tower," vicinity of Jacumba, California, mid-1920s, Burt Vaughn, stone; Boulder Park Caves, vicinity of Jacumba, California, 1930s, W. T. Radcliffe, stone; Shaffer Hotel and Rancho Bonito, Mountainair and vicinity, New Mexico, 1924, 1930s, concrete, wood, stone. Listed in 1984: Ave Maria Grotto, Cullman, California, 1932-1934, Bro. Joseph Zoetl, various media.(17)

Wrong ↑

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Other nationally known folk art environments, as yet unlisted, include: the Grotto of the Redemption, West Bend, Iowa, 1912-1954, Fr. Paul Dobberstein, stone, various media; Watts Towers, Los Angeles, mid-1920s-1954, Sam Rodia, metal, various media; Wisconsin Concrete Park, Phillips, Wisconsin, 1950-1964, Fred Smith; Paradise Garden, vicinity of Summerville, Georgia, 1960s-1970s, Howard Finster, concrete, various media; and Ed Galloway's Totem Pole Park, vicinity of Foyil, Oklahoma, 1937-1961, Nathan Edward Galloway, steel and concrete. The artistic legitimacy of these works has been established by a considerable body of scholarly publication in the 1980s and 1990s.(18)

Ed Galloway's folk art environment in the Totem Pole Park is exceptionally important within the geographical limits of Oklahoma. Outdoor folk artists' work seems to have first appeared in Oklahoma shortly after the turn of the century. Disregarding isolated examples of "yard art" and "mailbox art," which has always been abundant, in chronological appearance, the major works and artists are: Joe Muhlbacher, an Austrian immigrant who settled near Cheyenne, Oklahoma, in 1905, built a bunker home and decorated it with large figurative sculptures over the ensuing 30 years. Muhlbacher's art was the subject of national publicity in the 1940s, but after his death in 1955 his environment was mostly destroyed or stolen.(19) According to a 1996 Save Outdoor Sculpture survey (conducted by the National Museum of American Art), the earliest extant example of outdoor folk art may be a handmade concrete World War I doughboy, which stands in a public park in Carney, Oklahoma. Dating c. 1919, this work is carved into roughly cast concrete with an internal armature of steel reinforcing bar. It was made by an unknown local craftsman. A similar example is the crudely carved granite life-size statue of Osage chief Ne-ke-wa-she-tan-kah, (by unknown local artist), that was placed over the chief's grave in c. 1926 at Fairfax, Oklahoma (NR 79002012, for historic significance).(20)

Folk artist/wood carver Nathan Edward Galloway arrived in Oklahoma in 1915 and found work as a furniture maker. His outdoor works included a carved-wood merry-go-round in a city park at Sand Springs, where c. 1925 he carved two couchant lions in stone to serve as gateposts. These were moved in the 1960s to another local site, where they have been allowed to deteriorate. Galloway went on to begin his carved-concrete Totem Pole Park, near Foyil, Oklahoma, in 1937, continuing until 1961.(21)

Ted Townsend, who lived near Bison, Oklahoma, in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, decorated his property with fantasy sculpture and built a house that looked like a castle. His numerous metal sculptures included a rocket, a totem, an airplane, and an elaborate fence made of bedsteads, all of which were strung with lights, making his property "a tiny, isolated Coney Island." Most of his work has been dismantled or destroyed.