

NEWS RELEASE

MARCH 15, 1982

EUREKA, CA -- The Romano Gabriel Wooden Sculpture Garden, northern California's colorful example of internationally known folk art, is being ^{dedicated} installed in a newly constructed permanent home at 315 Second Street, Eureka, to be dedicated at noon, Saturday, April 3.

Created over a period of thirty years by the late Romano Gabriel, the garden had its origin in decorative flowers and figures made of wood which Gabriel painted bright colors and "planted" in front of his house. As his ability and enthusiasm increased, the figures became a fantastic forest, with trees and towers growing to a height of thirty feet; some were complex structures moving and turning in the wind. Figures of people appeared in profusion, many in exotic costume, including caricatures of celebrities and friends, with commentaries on politics and religion. Today, the garden has become famous through more than a dozen publications on folk art and architecture. Selections from the garden have been included in exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and elsewhere. A travelling exhibition sponsored by the U. S. State Department included five pieces from the garden in a tour of Eastern European countries in 1979/80.

The garden has been recognized in recent years for its importance as a work of folk art by the California Arts Council, by the Committee for the Preservation of Art of the College Art Association of America, and was designated as a structure of national significance in the Eureka Heritage Society's survey done in cooperation with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

A carpenter who emigrated from Italy in 1913, Gabriel built the garden chiefly from scrap lumber and grocery store crates. At his death in 1977, his house was vacant and the garden, subject to rapid deterioration from wind and weather, was in disrepair. To prevent further damage from vandalism and neglect, Ray and Dolores Vellutini of Eureka purchased the garden from Gabriel's estate. After careful

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consideration, the decision was made to move it to a protected site. This was followed by ten months of renovation and restoration of the garden to an approximation of its original appearance. The garden was then donated to the Eureka Heritage Society, a local organization for historic preservation.

The Society undertook the formidable task of raising funds to build a structure to house the garden in an area where it could be shared by everyone. The City of Eureka provided financial support, and made available a city-owned lot in the Old Town district. The Humboldt Area Foundation, a northern California philanthropic organization, contributed a total of \$25,000. Perhaps the most gratifying support came from people of the local community who contributed money and held a variety of benefit programs, including a "telethon" with the aid of a local television station. Nearly \$100,000 was raised; a final grant from the James Irvine Foundation of San Francisco provided an endowment for the care of the garden and its permanent structure.

The building was designed by the architectural firm of Trump and Sauble of Eureka; the installation of the garden was supervised by Ted Cohen, exhibition designer at the Oakland Museum.

The dedication program will include tributes to Romano Gabriel, and to the many contributors of time, labor, and money who made the project a success. The garden will be on exhibition daily at no charge.

Arrangements for the garden's preservation are handled by the Romano Gabriel Foundation, Box 1354, Eureka, CA 95501.

---Article by Ted Wimmer.

Ranked by ^{art} critics (or compared by many) to Simon Rodia's Watts' Towers of Los Angeles.