



## WINTER/ SPRING 1989

### "Clouds over Pasaquan"

For over thirty years, the late Eddie Owens Martin, a visionary who called himself "St. EOM," painstakingly built his compound, Pasaquan (see *SPACES* newsletter #3). Without equal in the Southeast, the four-acre architectural fantasy is located near Kinchafoonee Swamp on a sloping sandy landscape in rural Marion County, Georgia.

Last year's winter edition of *The Clarion*, the quarterly magazine of the Museum of American Folk Art, spotlighted Pasaquan in an article entitled "St. EOM's Pasaquan: A Promising Future." Author Tom Patterson concluded the article by quoting St. EOM's personal forecast of eventual doom for Pasaquan. In a more optimistic frame of mind, Patterson conjectured that St. EOM's "old friends and other admirers might just prove [EOM] wrong in his prediction" by saving the place.

But now, despite a continuing and growing international interest in the artist and his work, there are, as North Carolina poet Jonathan Williams so aptly put it, "clouds over Pasaquan." During the nearly three years since St. EOM's suicide, the site has been tended by Scottie Steward, a young Marion County resident who was Eddie's personal assistant and friend. Despite Mr. Steward's steadfast guardianship and maintenance efforts, the natural processes of weather and time besides several incidents of vandalism have sporadically damaged Pasaquan. The collection of loose works remains safe, following its removal to the storage vault of the Columbus Museum soon after Eddie's death.

In the 1950's, the late Edward S. Shorter, then director of the Columbus Museum, arranged St. EOM's only one-person museum exhibition during his lifetime. Martin never forgot Shorter's or the Museum's supportive-ness. It was Martin's last wish that



the Columbus Museum would administer his impressive legacy, including elaborately decorated architectural elements and an estimated 3000 handmade objects — paintings, drawings, craft, sculpture, costume and furniture. However, thirty years after the small exhibit was mounted and nearly three years after his death, the fate of St. EOM's artistic legacy remains unsettled.

The burden of funding a soon-to-be-opened \$11 million facility at the Columbus Museum has persuaded the Museum Board executive committee to back away from permanently supervising Pasaquan. Meanwhile, as chief curator of the Columbus Museum and as a liaison between St. EOM and the Museum while he was alive, I have been asked by the Board to oversee "arrangements [that] should be made as soon as practical for those interested in Pasaquan to form an independent organization to whom the Museum could give Pasaquan as soon as Mr. Martin's executor

turns it over to the museum." It is my hope that the Columbus Museum will at least agree to serve as temporary caretakers of Pasaquan for one year, during which time I will try to find a satisfactory way to ensure that the site and collection are saved.

Wayne Jernigan, a Buena Vista attorney who is the executor of the Pasaquan estate, predicts that the property will be turned over to the Columbus Museum "in the next few weeks." A growing effort is underway to convince the Columbus Museum to abide by its stated purpose of "representing all aspects of American Art," but success in that regard seems unlikely. Therein lies the need to explore alternatives.

Approximately \$40,000 annually should ensure that the site and collection are maintained satisfactorily. The timely establishment of a routine conservation program can reverse damaging processes which have begun to adversely affect exterior surfaces.

## "Clouds over Pasaquan" continued from page 1

A small fund already exists, the result of unsolicited donations sent from scholars and others who are simply interested in the site's preservation. A special account has been established to receive contributions to be used in preserving the work of St. EOM. But money alone is not a heal-all.

This site must be preserved as a reminder of the power of the creative spirit and for the benefit of all who seek a greater understanding of the human experience. Please write letters of support or talk with influential people who might not yet understand what a great cultural treasure Pasaquan is to our state and nation. Inform people of the preservation effort now underway. Tell me your thoughts and suggestions as to how we can best proceed. Let the members

of the Board of Trustees at the Columbus Museum hear in your own words that the site and collection are worthy of their care, and that the preservation of the site would serve to increase, rather than diminish, the Museum's credibility as a cultural institution.

In 1983, St. EOM predicted that "people will come and deface this when I die. And then everything which I've done will be forgotten." I am not willing to let that happen without resistance. Please join me. Make checks payable to the Columbus Museum and mail contributions, comments, inquiries, or letters of support to me at the Columbus Museum, 1251 Wynnton Road, Columbus, GA 31906. Thank you.  
*Fred C. Fussell, Chief Curator,  
The Columbus Museum*

## You Can Help Preserve Pasaquan: Comments from SPACES

It is our impression that the Columbus Museum Board executive committee's reluctance to supervise St. EOM's Pasaquan stems from two reasons: not only swayed by the impending financial burden of constructing the new museum facility, the Museum Board executive committee also seems to be less than enthusiastic about St. EOM's work. We cannot emphasize enough how urgent is the need to find a caretaker for the site.

Being relatively unfamiliar with the community of Buena Vista and its environs, we can only make limited suggestions, which we have forwarded to Fred Fussell. Clearly, however, enhancing the public character of the site can only benefit preservation efforts. To this end, we suggest that Pasaquan be used in one or several of the following ways: 1.) as a retreat for artists - a competition could be held in which the winners are allotted studio space at the site; 2.) as a library and study center on "Southern Visionary Artists;" 3.) as a tourist attraction; 4.) as an art school facility for the county or local college; 5.) as a state park. 6.) as a facility geared to satisfying locally identified needs. If any of these ideas appeal to you, then perhaps you can incorporate them in your letter to Fred Fussell or to the appropriate political figures who can influence the outcome of preservation efforts.

Besides Fred Fussell, we suggest that you write one or several of the following individuals, and send a copy of your letter to the others:

- 1.) Mr. Barry Vaught, Board President, the Columbus Museum, 1251 Wynnton Road, Columbus, GA 31906;
- 2.) Mr. Frank Ratka, Georgia Council for the Arts & Humanities, 2082 E. Exchange Place, Suite 100, Tucker, GA 30084;
- 3.) Georgia Governor Joe Frank Harris, State Capitol, Atlanta, GA 30334;
- 4.) U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, 275 Peachtree Street N. W., Room 930, Atlanta, GA 30303
- 5.) U.S. Senator Wyche Fowler, Jr., 10 Park Place South, Atlanta, GA 30303;
- 6.) U.S. Representative Third District, Richard B. Ray, 301 15th Street, P.O. Box 2057, Columbus, GA 31902-20577;
- 7.) Honorable Tommy Williams, Mayor of Buena Vista, GA 31803;
- 8.) County of Marion, County Courthouse, Buena Vista, GA 31803;
- 9.) The local weekly is The Patriot Citizen, P. O. Box 108, Buena Vista, GA 31803;
- 10.) Executor Wayne Jerigan, Box 422, Buena Vista, GA 31803.

As of press time we were not able to identify state senators or representatives, but if you can afford the time, please write them.

## Exhibitions and Lectures

Interestingly, two institutions, a college and a major California art museum, are planning events which will demonstrate how visionary folk artists have influenced the work of contemporary artists.

**Black Mountain College**, a new version of the innovative college in North Carolina, will offer both a lecture and course in "outsider art [sic]" during the spring session, March 6 - May 15, 1989. Tom Patterson, formerly of the Jargon Society and now editor of the *Arts Journal* of North Carolina, will speak on "Outsider Art." The full-session course of the same name, taught by David Carpenter, will examine the work of Sam Doyle, "Cedar Creek" Charlie Fields, Howard Finster, James Hampton, Mose Tolliver and Joseph Yoakum. Field trips to such nearby sites as Howard Finster's Paradise Garden and "Cedar Creek" Charlie Fields' House are planned. Also of interest to our readers is Roger Manley's lecture on "Cultural Photography." Roger has extensively researched and photographed folk art environments in the Southeast. The schedule for the lectures became available beginning February 1, 1989. The college is located near Asheville. For further information on the lecture and course, please write Black Mountain College, P.O. Box 455, Black Mountain, NC 28711. *Source: Black Mountain College Spring Session 1989 bulletin*

From January 14 through March 4, 1989, Green Hill Center for North Carolina Art is featuring "Passionate Visions," an exhibition of "outsider" art from the collection of North Carolina Wesleyan College. Roger Manley, Guest Curator of the exhibition, gave a lecture examining the exhibition's artists and their works. The lecture, entitled "Voices Behind the Visions," occurred on February 15, at 7:30 p.m. Partial funding of the exhibition was obtained from the North Carolina Arts Council and the Grass Roots Arts Programs of the United Arts Council of Greensboro. The Green Hill Center for North Carolina Art is located at the Interim Gallery at Greensborough Court, Greensboro, NC 27401.

## Emery Blagdon and His Healing Machines

Emery Blagdon (1907-1986) was a farmer in the Sandhills region of north central Nebraska near North Platte. At about 48 years of age, not having had any previous artistic experience, Emery began building mixed-media sculptures and painting, activities which occupied him exclusively for his remaining thirty years. Preoccupied with illnesses that had taken the lives of his parents and siblings, he called these works "healing machines" because he believed they could prevent and cure disease.

Emery created nearly one hundred paintings and over six hundred sculptures. During his lifetime he carefully arranged and decoratively displayed his collection in an eight hundred square foot shed in his farmyard. The space was so densely packed with Emery's art works that the individual pieces were obscured and appeared as one gigantic construction. Along the walls flatter pieces were piled on top of each other, sometimes to a thickness of a foot or more with each piece touching the next. Wooden planks on the floor formed a walkway around a center section which contained many free-standing and circular hanging works. The installation was strung with Christmas lights which blinked on and off, while lights on the floor shone upwards into the maze of wire and other materials. With no windows in the shed, the room appeared as a starlit sky of many colors reflecting on the works. Family and friends frequently visited to enjoy the art works, of which he was very proud.

After Emery's death in June 1986, his works were put on the auction block. Dan Dryden, Don Christensen and Trace Rosel bought the pieces and have collected them in the exhibit they are curating, "The Healing Machines," which will be toured by the Mid-America Arts Alliance beginning in September 1989. The touring exhibit offers an unusual opportunity to witness Blagdon's work firsthand. Environmental folk art is rarely saved, much less presented in such an accessible fashion. Lynda Roscoe Hartigan, associate curator of the National Museum of American Art has called Blagdon's works "the single most

important discovery of visionary artists in the past decade." The show requires a gallery with high security and has a \$3000 exhibit fee. For information on booking, contact Judy Kennett at the Mid-America Arts Alliance, 912 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 700, Kansas City, MO 64105.

*Dan Dryden and Don Christensen*

## Video Review

### Howard Finster, Man of Visions: a Portrait of an American Original

Deftly interweaving personal interviews with Reverend Howard Finster and commentary from individuals who are well-acquainted with him, this carefully-crafted video production reveals much about Finster as both a personable, religious man and an artistic phenomenon. His down-to-earth comments nicely complement the laudatory remarks by Yale art critic Jesse Murphy, folk art gallery owner Phyllis Kind, University of Georgia professor/ceramist Andy Nasisse, and Michael Stipe, lead singer with R.E.M.

Like many other untrained visionary artists, Finster is often described as "outside of the mainstream [sic]" (see Editorials, p. 7), a label that Michael Stipe suggests in the video. But much to its credit, this video generally wreaks havoc with such labels.

Reluctantly recruited by God as His painter, Finster realizes that the partnership between his role as God's servant, God and the media is a powerful means for spreading God's word: "when God shows me in a vision then that's it... I work for God Almighty."

Finster is partly an interpreter who translates his mysterious visions into a visual language potentially accessible to almost everyone. Yet the video demonstrates not only the uniqueness of Finster's visions, but also his recombination and incorporation of well-known social concerns into his work.

Perhaps because Finster is better known as a painter than as an environmental folk artist, the producers of the video chose to emphasize his paintings rather than his Paradise Garden. As we are an organization devoted to folk art environments, we would prefer a more balanced appraisal of the range of Finster's work,

of which his Paradise Garden is an important part. A more leisurely pace would have enhanced the video, allowing the viewer sufficient time to linger a bit over Finster's works.

"Howard Finster, Man of Visions: a Portrait of an American Original," is a 20 minute long videotape. Produced by Julie DesRoberts, Dave Carr, and Randy Paskal of No Hands Productions, the video won the Best Documentary prize at the 1988 Redstone Awards in Boston, and was also a finalist in the 1988 Houston Film Festival. To order the videocassette send \$50.00 plus \$3.00 shipping and handling to No Hands Productions, 1331 Olive Drive, Suite C, Los Angeles, CA 90069. *Cynthia Pansing*

## Publications

### Raw Vision Update

The premier issue of *Raw Vision*, the first international journal devoted to Outsider Art, Art Brut, Grassroots Art and Visionary Art, is scheduled to appear in Spring 1989. The premier issue's articles will include: Professor S.S. Bhatti's discussion of Nek Chand and his Rock Garden in Chandigarh, India; Augustin Lesage's work analysed by Michel Thevoz; a survey by Willem Volkerz of American folk art symbols and influences; Roger Cardinal's description and analysis of the meaning of "outsider art;" Jean-Louis Lanoux on Petit Pierre of France; David MacLagan's discussion of art therapy and outsider art; a survey of French folk art environments; Laurent Danchin's musings on the future of Art Brut; and finally, Seymour Rosen's and Cynthia Pansing's discussion of SPACES's work over the past ten years. For subscription information, please write Raw Vision, 42 Llanvanor Road, London NW2, England, phone 0923 856566; or Raw Vision, Dept. 193, 1202 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10028. We will also mail you further information as we receive it. SPACES's members should have already received a mailer describing Raw Vision and the contents of its first two issues. *Raw Vision* will be published two times per year. US subscription rates are as follows: individual subscriptions are \$16.50 per year, institutional subscriptions \$30.00, and postage is \$3.00.



## Passings

Sadly, during the past few months we have lost two great environmental folk artists: Grandma Prisbrey and Chief Rolling Mountain Thunder. Both artists were remarkable for the tenacity of their dreams, which they held despite personal tragedies and community misunderstanding. While their folk art environments remain the best reminders of the artists, and make redundant any attempts at writing obituaries or epitaphs, we have nonetheless provided the following as our way of memorializing two extraordinary individuals.



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### Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey 1896-1988

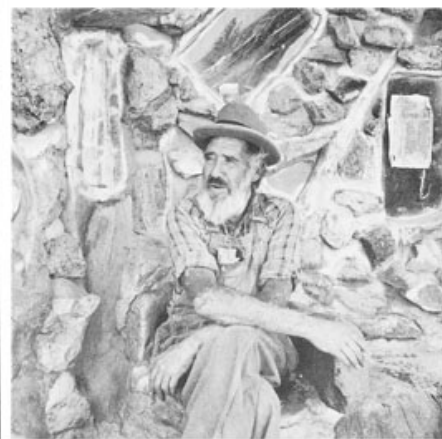
In ill-health for several years, Tressa "Grandma" Prisbrey succumbed on October 8, 1988 to complications from her long-standing illnesses, and died in a San Francisco convalescent hospital. As Joanne Johnson of the Preserve Bottle Village Committee writes, "by building Bottle Village, Grandma created a vision that left us her spirit. Every child dreams of building the ultimate treehouse, a clubhouse, the fort where no adults are allowed. Most of those grand schemes end up as a pile of rubble in the backyard — and your mother says, 'Clean up all that junk and throw it away, it's such a mess!' But Grandma really did it! When she was supposed to be 'old,' she kept that magic dream of childhood and made it real." Yet Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village also remains an honest testimony to her life experiences in all their dimensions, whether of joy or grief. Settling in Santa Susana, Simi Valley after a nomadic life, she transformed trash

into a series of 13 bottle houses visually connected by ceramic mosaic pathways. She remained unafraid of courageously recapturing both joyous and painful experiences in special nooks of her house, like her "Shell House," a shrine to her son. For Grandma, "trash," its low cost making it initially appealing as a building and decorating material, symbolized a vast wealth of discarded memories. But her Village was as much a public expression of her creativity as it was a personal, private one. Responding to the diversity of the public who increasingly visited her Village, Grandma built a mosaic, bead and rhinestone-encrusted shrine as a tribute to the world's major religions. Although listed as a local attraction for visitors to the 1984 Olympic Games, Bottle Village was once almost demolished and replaced with condominiums. The Village now awaits modifications which would satisfy city codes for earthquake standards. Because of its deteriorating condition, it has not been open to the public for a long time. To Joanne, Grandma's indomitable spirit lives on: "if she saw her Village today she'd probably take a deep breath and say, 'Oh, it looks terrible, come on, let's fix it up!' With your help, with our minds and our muscles, with our hands and our hearts, we can." Grandma Prisbrey's Bottle Village, designated California State Landmark #939, needs your letters of support. Please address your letters to Preserve Bottle Village, PO Box 1412, Simi Valley, CA 93062. Contributor: Joanne Johnson, Preserve Bottle Village Committee

### Chief Rolling Mountain Thunder 1911-1989

Chief Rolling Mountain Thunder decided to end his life on the 8th of January 1989 in Nevada near "The Monument," his hand-built homage to the American Indian. (see NL#2) Chief Thunder, born Frank Van Zant on 11/11/11 in Oklahoma, was at least one-quarter Creek Indian. A man of diverse skills, he was employed in a multitude of odd jobs throughout his life, reportedly serving as a logger, miner, police officer, and minister among other occupations. During his various careers, he remained enamored of the self-reliance

and heritage of the American Indian, qualities which inspired him to build "The Monument" to the American west's earliest inhabitants. Partly assemblage of discarded tools, railroad ties, concrete and rocks, the primary components of the airy Monument and its multiple chambers were also punctuated with freestanding concrete sculptures, tableaux and



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murals. Sculptures of Indians numbering more than 200, glass bottles, and animal bones adorned the exterior, while a staircase of bicycle wheels and handle bars provided interior structural support. Resembling an enormous Indian carrying basket, The Monument was expressly designed with a towering, delicate arch over the building's midsection. The handle-like structure would enable "the great Spirit [to] pick the whole thing up and just carry us all away," as Chief Thunder aptly stated, thereby reuniting all Indians after their deaths. In 1983, Chief Thunder became the first recipient of the Governor's Arts Award in the Folk Arts in Nevada, a category established earlier that year. Unfortunately, in the same year, vandals set fire to The Monument, much of which was destroyed. After the death of the artist, the future of the environment is questionable.

*Editor's note: Grandma Prisbrey and Chief Rolling Mountain Thunder have been the subjects of two wonderful and revealing films by Allie Light and Irving Saraf, which are part of the filmmakers' "Visions of Paradise" series (see SPACES newsletter #2). For further information, please write Light-Saraf Films, 131 Concord Street, San Francisco, CA 94112, or phone (415) 469-0139.*

## Passings

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We are also greatly saddened by the passings of two friends of great import in the fields of arts education and architecture. Their contributions to SPACES's spirit, philosophy and activities have been greatly appreciated.

### Arnold Rubin

Arnold Rubin was a professor of art at UCLA, as well as an expert on African art and popular culture in the United States. His sense of curiosity and delight in the world around him knew no bounds. While some less-inventive professors were teaching the same dry, textbook-focused art history classes, some of Arnold's classes were spending part of the school year examining the Rose Bowl Parade as art. Several students investigated parade floats from concept to construction. A few students pieced together a history of the parade. Some students intimately followed the process of choosing the Rose Queen, observing the nomination of candidates, the selection of the Queen and her role in the parade. Other students became so involved in the pageantry of the Parade that they eventually left college to become float designers. Arnold himself drove a float during one notable parade. For Arnold art was process: the viewer could best understand art by "going native," intimately involving oneself in the process from beginning to end. When Arnold became interested in tattoos, he naturally got inscribed with one, and eventually learned how to tattoo others. Sadly, the exhibit on tattoo art that he planned never happened. Arnold died of cancer in 1988. An old friend, an advisor, a supporter and defender of SPACES's activities, he will always be remembered for his openness to fresh ideas.

### Bernard Rudofsky

I was first introduced to Bernard Rudofsky, when a friend handed me a copy of a book called, *Are Clothes Modern*. If someone hadn't permanently borrowed the book from me, it would have been the first thing I grabbed in the event of a fire. Quite simply, the book changed my life. Mr. Rudofsky had the gift of showing you everyday objects and activities, and making you see them as if they were

fresh or new. His other books *Architecture without Architects*, *Streets for People*, now *I lay me down to eat*, *Behind the Picture Window*, *In Praise of Stairs*, and *The Kimono Mind* are still as thought-provoking as they were when they were first published. A multi-talented man, he was an engineer, professor of art, an architect, critic, and the recipient of Ford, Fulbright, and Guggenheim Fellowships. Just before his death, he was a scholar in residence for the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum. I had the impression he was frustrated in his efforts, waiting endlessly for the necessary others to give his ideas their due, and unable to work at the pace he was capable of. Unfortunately, he never got the proper credit or acknowledgement for the long series of wonderful things that he accomplished. I will be forever grateful for the hospitality and graciousness that he and his wife Bertha showed me when I visited them. A supporter of SPACES, Mr. Rudofsky will always remain a personal hero of mine. If anybody has a copy of *Are Clothes Modern* please let me know. SR

### Mary Young

Although I did not know John Giudici's daughter Mary Young very well, I will remember her as a generous and warm woman who "forced" me to take away jars of jam and other fattening foods whenever I came to visit. Mary, as a child, helped collect some of the objects John incorporated in his environment. Capedro, a series of concrete walls, niches and arches, was embedded with pebbles, shells, small statues and toys. As an adult, she took care of her father during his last years and maintained the property after his death. It was Mary more than anyone who kept John's dream alive. Mary had the biggest smile when John Giudici's Garden (see SPACES newsletter #1) was accepted as one of the sites designated California State Landmark #939. Mary, while confined to a hospital bed, was the proudest of anyone when Tony May's class at San Jose State University developed an exhibition on her father's work. SR

NOTE: as far as we are aware, the family intends to keep the site as is. We will keep you informed in future newsletters.

## SPACES's T-Shirt:

As you know, for years we have been diligently collecting labels for these handmade personal places. The list of "what to call them" has grown to 79 different possibilities, and it gets more difficult to rattle them off on command. To relieve our minds and hopefully yours, we have produced SPACES's first T-shirt listing all of the titles gathered thus far. The alphabetized list includes "Anomalies" to "Monumental" on the front of the shirt, continuing on the back with "Naive" to "Visionary," while "Bricolage," "Enisled," "Spiritual," "Site Specific," and more are peppered in between.

So don't be "Out of the Mainstream" or an "Isolate" or an "Outsider." You can be the first "Compulsive" (especially if you buy more than one) or "Maverick" on your block with the latest "Hegemonic Icon," a well-designed, "Non-traditional" SPACES's T-shirt which will confuse and amuse your friends, loved ones and colleagues.

The 100% cotton shirt are grey with dark blue type, and come in large and extra large. The \$12.00 + \$1.00 postage will get you a great "Autodidactic" T-shirt (by return mail) and will help support SPACES's activities.

## Our Next Newsletter

We had hoped that this current newsletter would contain substantive information about the range of wonderful environmental art in France. However, due to a mail strike in France, the problems of translation, necessary intercontinental fact-checking and a crises or two here in America, we were not able to meet our deadlines.

So newsletter #10 will be our French issue, with information about environmental art, an introduction to some of the people involved, films, books on the French sites, our long-awaited newsletter index and more.

Please consider submitting articles, sharing documents, photographs and information with SPACES's archives. We will only use this information in accordance with the wishes of the donor and the artist. Enjoy!

## News on the Environments Update on Kea's Ark

Kea's Ark was built of lumber that formerly supported homes in Old Newark, furnaces and radiators that warmed them, organs that filled churches with music, bottles, and thousands of everyday objects. It was the museum of the Central Ward at a time when the city wanted to forget all about this decayed, burned-out section and to rebuild it with shiny blue, grey and maroon colonial homes.

This past Spring, Kea Tawana took an electric chainsaw to the upper deck and wheelhouse of the Ark she had built on a church parking lot in Newark's Central Ward. By diminishing the Ark's height, Kea hoped to ease the monumental vessel's passage through city streets and beneath telephone wires to a new site.

By summer, it became clear, however, that relocation was impossible: no new sites were forthcoming. The court advised Kea that it would no longer issue restraining orders preventing demolition by city representatives. Working alone in blistering heat, Kea reduced the freighter-shaped Ark to firewood. The expense of carting away its remains bankrupted the 53 year-old builder.

The demise of "Kea's Ark" did not end Kea Tawana's battle with the city bureaucrats. Demolition orders also covered the handmade houses she had built on top of trucks and moved to the church lot. When wrecking crews arrived on December 8 to destroy her home, Kea refused to leave. She barricaded herself inside, and told city officials that she would torch the buildings herself if they tried to evict her. "I would rather die defending my home, than to be robbed of all I have left and freeze to death sleeping in someone's doorway this winter," she stated.

The eviction attempt was well-publicized, and city representatives withdrew. Just before Christmas, local supporters from the Orchard Street Block Association towed Kea's houses to their street. Threats from the Demolition Department have continued, but the Block Association - an established neighborhood group that runs a recycling center, afterschool children's programs and a puppet

circus - is backing Kea. More battles are undoubtedly in store, however, since the City plans to "re-develop" the Orchard Street area.

Kea's work remains a symbol that one sensitive individual possessing guts, intelligence and determination can strike a chord in masses of people.

*Contributors: Camilo J. Vergara & Holly Metz*



Friends Suzanne Palmer and Carol Bengel help John Medica celebrate the unveiling of an California historic plaque honoring his work.  
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## John Medica's Castles and Garden

Eighty-nine year old John Medica, the man who created the northern California environment known as "John Medica's Castles and Garden," California State Landmark # 939 (see SPACES newsletter #3), has decided he is no longer capable of maintaining the site. Over a 12 year period on this site, John created a fairy-tale world of miniature castles, arches, bridges, planters, and meandering pathways of discarded chiprock. Originally, the land John owned encompassed 103 acres, most of which was parceled and sold. The remaining four-acres, now surrounded by a very large housing development, have just recently been put up for sale.

Certain interested parties are considering developing part of the site for additional housing, giving to the City of Santa Rosa either easement or title to a central section of the property containing most of the sculpture. The site would remain publicly accessible, but only on a limited basis.

John has not yet responded to these offers. Similarly, the City has not yet evaluated the terms of the gift.

## S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden

Some time ago, we received a call from Wayne Naegele, the current owner of S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden in Lucas, Kansas. Because they wish to retire soon, Mr. Naegele and his wife have decided to sell the Garden. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977, the Garden was constructed in the early 20th Century, and soon became a tourist attraction. An acerbic social critic, S.P. Dinsmoor built concrete statues which provided commentaries about political and social ills of his day. The Naegeles are concerned that the next owner will treat the site with respect and not convert it into an over-commercialized roadside attraction.



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Since federal and local government bear some responsibility towards National Register Monuments, SPACES wrote the Governor and various historic preservation agencies urging that they assist Mr. Naegele in finding a sympathetic buyer.

Mr. Naegele has mentioned that several concerned individuals have expressed interest in the site.

## After 11 Years, Watts Towers Open for Limited Hours

The Cultural Affairs Department of the City of Los Angeles has announced that the Watts Towers, still under restoration, will have limited public access on Saturdays from 10 am until dusk. Prospective visitors should check with the Department to verify visiting hours. Phone (213) 485-2433. If you send SPACES a stamped, self-addressed envelope, we will send you a brand new brochure on the Towers.



## Editorials:

### What Not to Call It Who Are the Insiders?

At the request of Seymour Rosen, I have tried to reconstruct the answer I gave last fall at a symposium to a question about the term "outsider" art. For starters, let me explain that I prefer not to obsess over definitions. I am fairly clear about the art that interests me; I am less interested in what people choose to call it. I have, however, never embraced the term "outsider" to describe contemporary American self-taught art because I have always felt it muddies, rather than clarifies the issues. "Outsider" art, as much as "folk" art, comes loaded with its own baggage. The term, coined by Roger Cardinal in England has a definite, and somewhat long-standing, European usage which is related to the French expression "l'art brut." It refers to social and psychological, as well as artistic, outsiders. Although those psychosocial overtones are negated by many who have used the term to describe American self-taught art, the implication has always lingered.

Further, the very word "outsider" suggests an alienation or disenfranchisement that is offensive to those of us who know the artists. Indeed, I have yet to discover who the "insiders" are.

*Didi Barrett, Director of Publications,  
Museum of American Folk Art*

*Editor's note: as we recollect, Didi also equated "outsider" and other pejorative terms with parochial, elitist, colonial or provincial thinking in her talk at the Bard College symposium..... but not exactly in that order.*

*Director's comments: unlike Didi Barrett, SPACES by mandate is professionally responsible to be obsessed over definitions. Derogatory labels like "outsider" hinder the preservation process. Already fearful of taking risks, many museums, program officers, foundations and corporations are reluctant to make positive decisions to help protect some sites in their locale. Since there are plenty of "mainstream" cultural organizations tugging at their heels, why should they consider supporting something "out of the mainstream?" We hear this over and over again.*

### Not in My Mainstream You Don't

Whenever I have participated in "Arts in Education" conferences, someone would always say, "this is a conference on the role of ART in education, but where is the ART, where are the artists, where are the students? The people here are all administrators, talking to politicians, talking to teachers." Yet no one seems to have taken the initiative to correct the situation and involve artists from the beginning.

When discussions of what to call personal, handmade places built by self-taught artists arise in conferences,

**"If a man [or woman] who has not labeled himself an artist happens to produce a work of art, he [or she] is likely to cause a lot of confusion and inconvenience" - Calvin Trillin**

I feel a sense of *deja vu*. It is as if I am in a board meeting of the American Medical Association or a Union meeting. The questions about an artist now become, "Where is their license? Where did they train? What are their credentials?....But they're unsophisticated!"

A bureaucratic group of non-artists is still trying to define the parameters of ART, narrowly defining artists on the basis of a specific kind of institutional training, a specific look, and adherence to European traditions. To some, these features characterize "mainstream" art. What happened to an interest in individual creativity, vision, whimsy, inventiveness or, in some cases genius, in helping make judgments about art? Art is supposed to change and go in new directions. Isn't any new invention, any new thought outside of the "mainstream," outside of an institutional group or academy, at least initially? Contemporary academies found the work of Van Gogh and Duchamp to be outside of the mainstream; now, however, "In" and "Out" seem to be a matter of time, trend, fashion and familiarity.

What most confuses me is this: how do you propose to define an exciting, very human activity by telling us what it is not? Outside the Mainstream = Outsider. What mainstream? Whose mainstream? Outsiders, according to Roget's Thesaurus, are akin to "strangers, foreigners, outlanders and aliens." But one person's outsider is another's insider. The artists and builders of folk art environments consider themselves part of a mainstream, and definitely not outsiders.

Folk art environments were produced without pretensions by people who made an object or an environment within the context, and generally within the mores, of their community. Artists like S.P. Dinsmoor adhered to traditional values, but recombined them in novel ways. The outsider, as far as I am concerned, is the person who removes the artist's material from its original environment, takes it to an alien place, uses it in a different manner than intended, and then accuses the artist of producing something outside of THE "Art Mainstream," as if there really is a universal art mainstream agreed upon or accepted by us all. An igloo moved to the Sahara for use as a shelter is obviously inappropriate, but this does not mean that the original Eskimo builder is either an outsider or unsophisticated in the building of a shelter.

Some protest, "But EVERYBODY is using Outsider! Why shouldn't we do the same?" That no one has yet come up with a title, definition or explanation which has universal acceptance reflects our lack of imagination and various vested interests. It is no reason to insult the people whose work we all obviously admire. In that respect, "outsider" is especially repugnant. If you think everybody is using the term, then most likely you have not done your homework. Out of the host of labels available, surely there is one that is more appropriate and less derogatory.

Read our T Shirt: (see page 5).

*Seymour Rosen*

*Editor's note: we invite your comments to the preceding editorials.*

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### **Contributors**

Didi Barrett,  
Dan Dryden & Don Christensen  
Fred Fussell, Joanne Johnson,  
Susan Richter,  
Camilo Vergara & Holly Metz,  
Cover photograph by unknown  
photographer

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SPACES is a membership organization which depends on a national constituency to advocate for the preservation of contemporary large scale sculptural folk/art environments. Annual membership includes a subscription to the newsletter. Individual memberships of \$30 or more receive a copy of *In Celebration of Ourselves*, a book by Seymour Rosen which documents popular culture and includes 34 folk/art environments in California

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Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments  
1804 North Van Ness  
Los Angeles, California 90028  
(213)463-1629