



hello from SPACES / questions re: Cleveland Turner

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To: Annalise Flynn <vernacularartservices@gmail.com>

Tue,

Annalise, it is really great to hear from you, and from SPACES, with which I am indeed very familiar. Y'all are doing such important work.

I am also glad for any opportunity to talk about the Flower Man, who was so kind to me and gave me hours of his time while I was writing the book. I miss him so much.

It is true that there was a lot of careful deliberation about how to approach with sensitivity the demolition of the Flower Man house. Some people argued that it should have been preserved in its original state, but that the place was deteriorating fast, even while Cleveland was still alive and living there. There was a hole in the ceiling that let animals and the weather in. And if you know Cleveland's work, he discarded wood and stuffed animals and things that don't absorb the elements particularly well. As he got older, his yard became dominated by trash and scraps of things that weren't really or way. At the end, the house was hidden behind a plywood wall to discourage intruders. In my opinion, the Flower Man was the art, and once he was gone, there was no point in trying to preserve an ever-changing social sculpture. I really don't think Cleveland would have wanted the house to remain, though I certainly didn't think to ask him about what his posthumous wishes were, and as a journalist. The house is now gone, but luckily we have tons of photographs and other documentation.

I was part of a 'task force' organized by Project Row Houses to try to figure out what to do about preserving objects from the property, and my colleague Amy Evans and I donned hazmat suits to go into the house and try to rescue important artifacts. I looked for things like photographs, letters, and books (though Cleveland couldn't read), as well as discrete items that resembled artwork, like a decorative peacock scarf I'd seen repeatedly in photographs of the interior of his house going back to the '80s. Cleveland had a whole wall of photos and notes from well-wishers, and I tried to see if I could find from that wall so it could be re-created later on somewhere. We probably packed up four or five boxes of material, I can't quite remember. Cleveland always told me he had things from a family farm in Mississippi, but we never found them.

Alas, they subsequently did some more mold testing and the place was off the charts. I think they were told to destroy everything removed from the house as a severe health hazard. Wish we had the chance to cull and rescue a few really crucial items (like a drawing of Cleveland as a young man made by a street artist in the 1960s that you can see in PTTO), but who knows, maybe the PR people were smart enough to save that one.

I'm attaching a photo of a painting I presume to have been made by Cleveland that was nailed to his fence for years. I actually pulled it out of the mud weeks after the house had been bulldozed home with me. This might be one of the few things from the house that's left. I just donated a small sculpture that I bought from Cleveland circa 2011 to a summer fundraising auction for a nonprofit called Nameless Sound (improv music classes for at-risk youth) if you know anyone who might be interested.

Sending a few other images as well, showing the wall I'm talking about above, and a picture of me and Cleveland from 9/25/11.

Let me know if you need anything else. Warm wishes from Texas!
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