

For Seymour

Seymour made things difficult. To begin with, you really, really wanted to be on good terms with him because there are so few of us – the freaky, devoted grassroots art lovers, the activists for environments, the documentarians, the kind of people who will drive 155 miles out of their way to see a rock studded with mosaic or to taste the best pie in the state of Georgia or Kansas (and later, the best pastries in France, as well as outrageous sculptures in the former Ukraine or in Sicily or some far off, out of the way place—as art sites and their intrepid documenters and saviors began to pop up all over the world, in darkness and in secret, at first, and then tracked and savored, like truffles.) And you wanted to get along with Seymour because he was a pioneer in our little, strange field, and he had put so many sites on the National Register, which was a pretty amazing thing to do. He had written a joyful book, *In Celebration of Ourselves*, with photos of every wondrous thing he had seen in California up to its publication date. That, too, made you want to share stories of the most astonishing places and the people who made them, and sometimes, to fight the good fight to save those places, if we could.

But Seymour had to make things difficult. It came with all the rest of what made Seymour, Seymour – the same guy who ran to hug Watts Towers in the middle of the uprisings, who had gone out of his way to meet Rodia and to praise the little man who wanted no praise after making one of the masterpieces of this world—that same guy, Seymour, was sometimes an obstructionist when it came to working with our merry little band, was sometimes covetous of the wonders he found, and was sometimes just a pain in the ass.

And yet... he was Seymour. He had given his heart to these artist-made places, and sometimes he'd let you catch a glimpse of both.

During a visit to California, after he had given me a mostly worthless, antiquated list of sites in the state –smiling as he did so – he casually took me (and photographer Bob Foster, a fellow traveler) to one of the most mind-blowing indoor art sites we'd ever seen, within easy driving distance of Seymour's home (a.k.a. the SPACES archive.) The destination was not, of course, on the list he'd given me.

We spent hours with the artist, a wonderful, winsome woman Seymour had known for years. We had driven thousands of miles over many years, and documented art environments through interviews, research, and photography, but Bob took no pictures and I took no notes. We sat within the world the artist had made.

When we left, and we found ourselves on a busy L.A. street after a long afternoon in that other world, I felt a little stunned. Exhausted, exhilarated. I wanted to cry, though I was smiling. So how could I not love that puckish, difficult man –Seymour Rosen-- who had taken me there? I turned to Seymour with grateful eyes, and thanked him.

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