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Taking it with you when you go: The Monumentality of Death and Everlasting Life in Artist-built Environments

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Abstract. An introduction to the genre of monumental gravesites and tombs conceived and built by self-taught creators of art environments for their own eventual personal use, illustrated through a presentation of the constructed final resting places of six artist-builders. This article distinguishes these unique constructions from more traditional gravesites that evidence communally recognized motifs and symbols with forms and components that fall within standard parameters. In contrast to these more typical manifestations, the studied genre is both much less widespread and much more idiosyncratic, and reveals a more personal expression of what the builder hopes to encounter in the "beyond", as well as how they want to interpret what they leave behind. Because the majority of these structures are installed in private spaces, studies of heritage tombs and cemeteries have little resonance. Likewise, due to the lack of connection or communication between these artists, it is impossible to posit a thread of confluence that unites these structures in a way that would provide a more generalized understanding of the meaning of life and death or the import of one's journey through the world held by art-environment builders. It is, however, safe to assume that one of their ultimate goals is to have their physical works function as a trigger to bring them a measure of immortality.
Keywords: Visionary Art Environments; Self-taught Artists; "Outsider" Art; Singular Spaces; Tombs; Funerary Architecture.

[es] Llévalo contigo cuando te vayas: la monumentalidad de la muerte y la vida eterna en entornos creados por artistas autodidactas

Resumen. Una introducción al fenómeno de las tumbas que fueron concebidas y construidas por creadores autodidactas para su uso futuro, ilustrado a través de seis ejemplos. Este artículo propone un contraste entre estas construcciones únicas y las tumbas más tradicionales, que muestran los motivos y símbolos que caben dentro de los parámetros estándares de su comunidad y que están compartidos y entendidos por sus miembros. En cambio, las tumbas de este género están, a la vez, menos generalizados y más idiosincrásicos, y revelan una expresión personal de lo que quiere encontrar el constructor en el "más allá", junto con cómo quiere guiar la interpretación de lo que deja después de su fallecimiento. Porque la mayoría de estas tumbas han sido instalados dentro de un ámbito privado, los estudios sobre las tumbas y los cementerios tradicionales tienen poca relación. Igualmente, porque no hay ni conexiones ni comunicaciones entre los artistas, es imposible proponer un hilo entre ellos que nos dé un conocimiento universal de sus creencias sobre la vida y la muerte y cómo navegan su camino en el mundo. Pero sí se puede sugerir que una de las metas debe ser que sus obras tangibles les ofrezcan una forma de inmortalidad.
Palabras clave: Entornos de arte visionario; artistas autodidactas; Arte *outsider*; espacios singulares; tumbas; arquitectura funeraria.

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1. Introduction

Marking a death, the final and one of the most important of life's "rites of passage" identified in 1909 by folklorist Arnold van Gennep[2], provides a compelling opportunity to explore the intersectionality of personal identity with social identity. Even in contemporary post-modern societies, where many traditions have been lost or discarded, death typically evidences a reversion to well-known practices, as individuals take comfort in heritage as well as in family. Special prayers, special songs or dances, special foods, special clothing – or ways of treating and modifying regular clothing – play their roles in time-based protocols that dictate behaviors and actions immediately following the death of a loved one, as they also continue during the first week, the first month, the first year. Specialists – funeral directors, shamans, spiritual leaders – are there to guide the processes and the logistics, to provide solace, and to help those left behind reach acceptance of the finality of this change of state even if, among some communities, the belief is that the departed have moved on to a better place than the one the rest of us still inhabit.

While folklorists and anthropologists have delved deeply into the verbal and behavioral aspects of grieving and marking a death[3], its visual representation is equally important – albeit unequally practiced, although art and death have been linked since prehistory[4]. And with graphic or pictorial depictions, the individual identity of the deceased may take a more predominant role than their social attributes: personal features, likes and dislikes, and even cherished objects assume a new status that they lacked in life.

The stylized yet individualized funeral masks of ancient Egypt[5], memorial paintings or collages (often including a lock of the deceased's hair) of the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth century[6], post-mortem daguerreotypes of the late nineteenth century[7], early twentieth century commercial printings of photographs of the deceased used to illustrate death notices for public postings[8], Mexican altars incorporating the deceased's favorite clothes or beverage[9], colorful painted grave markers of Rumanian villages[10], and elaborate carved and painted coffins of Ghana that illustrate where and how the deceased would want to spend their time in the afterlife[11] are widely dispersed examples – in time and in space. Yet all have one thing in common: they attempt to visually capture the essence of the decedent's personality and character in terms of what was important to them and how they lived their life.

But all of these kinds of representations of the departed still generally fall within the parameters of their social and cultural environment, and the visual vocabulary of their symbols and signs are easily decoded and understood by members of their community[12]. In contrast, the creation of monumental tombs and grave markers by those who will themselves ultimately inhabit those same spaces is both much less widespread and much more idiosyncratic, and reveals a more intimate expression of what the builder hopes to encounter in the "beyond", as well as how they want to interpret what they leave behind. And unlike those more culturally-motivated expressions that fall within well-recognized boundaries, there is no way to predict their shape or components, to assume that their symbols will be understood by the community, or to compare similarities and differences between these unique visual representations: both the built structure and the decoration of each tomb is as unique as the artist-builder him/herself. This essay, therefore, will not attempt to reduce the distinctiveness of this genre to common forms, but will introduce and celebrate the exceptionality of each creator, describing and interpreting the final abodes of six exemplary builders.

1.1. Art Environments

Site-specific artworks—in which an artist chooses or is commissioned to construct a composition whose parameters are circumscribed by the particular physical and geographic setting of the work's location—are not new. Aesthetic critics and commentators have designat-

2 Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites du passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (1909. Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

3 For studies of varied cultural traditions regarding death, see, for example, the chapters in Saramo Samira, Koskinen-Koivisto Eerika, and Snellman Hanna, *Transnational Death* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2019); Candi K. Cann, ed., *Dying to Eat: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Food, Death, and the Afterlife* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018); Charlotte Horlyck and Michael J. Pettid, eds., *Death, Mourning and the Afterlife in Korea: Ancient to Contemporary Times* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014); Salvador Ryan, "Death in an Irish Village the Resilience of Ritual", *The Furrow* 67, no. 11 (2016): 618-622.

4 Allan I. Ludwig, *Graven Images* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), 65.

5 See, for example, Nicola Harrington, *Living with the Dead: Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford-Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2013).

6 For further information on the use of hair in mourning practices, see, for example, Deborah Lutz, "The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture", *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39, no. 1 (2011): 127-142; Geoffrey Batchen, "Ere the Substance Fade: Photography and Hair Jewelry", in *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, eds. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32-46.

7 For general discussions into the use of photography in death practices, see, for example, Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Stanley B. Burns, *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family in Memorial Photography, American & European Traditions* (New York: Burns Archive Press, 2002); Michael J. Steiner, *A Study of the Intellectual and Material Culture of Death in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).

8 Audrey Linkman, *Photography and Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

9 For more on Mexican Day of the Dead observances, see, for example, Joanne Farb Hernández and Samuel R. Hernández, *Day of the Dead: Tradition and Change in Contemporary Mexico* (Santa Clara: Triton Museum of Art, 1979); Regina M. Marchi, *Day of the Dead in the USA: The Migration and Transformation of a Cultural Phenomenon* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

10 For information on the Merry Cemetery, see Marina Cap-Bun, "The Romanian Carnival of Death and the Merry Cemetery of Săpânța", in *The Power of Death: Contemporary Reflections on Death in Western Society*, eds. María-José Blanco and Ricarda Vidal (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 169-182.

11 For further information on the "fantasy coffins" of Ghana, see Roberta Bonetti, "Coffins for Wear and Consumption: Abebuu Adekai as 'Memory Makers' among the Ga of Ghana", *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 61-62 (2012): 262-278; Vivian Burns, "Travel to Heaven: Fantasy Coffins", *African Arts* 7, no. 2 (1974): 25-24.

12 For a study of the communal associations evidenced by constructed tombs and the cemeteries in which they are typically sited, see Mar Loren-Méndez and Ana Quesada-Arce, "[In]Visibility of Death in the Built Environment: [De] Legitimating Traditional Mediterranean Cemeteries in Southern Spain", *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 28, no. 2 (2017): 35-51.

ed such targeted environmental projects as a separate genre of art since the mid-1970s, describing how many of them developed when academically-trained artists began to challenge the spatial and display constrictions imposed by the visually-neutral "white cube" of museums and galleries, and how this resistance empowered these artists to branch out with greater dimensional freedom. Some of these site-specific works were envisioned from the beginning as temporary or ephemeral, either as a result of the evanescent nature of the materials out of which they were fabricated, or due to logistical or temporal constraints related to the availability of the site. Yet even those works that were originally intended to be "permanent" – such as Ant Farm's *Cadillac Ranch* in Amarillo, Texas[13] or Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* on the Great Salt Lake in Utah[14], both in the American West – do not exhibit the same kind of personal link to their creator-builders exhibited by environments constructed by self-taught artists such those I will discuss below[15]. In some cases this results from the diminished experiential interface manifested by the former types of projects, in which an artist conceptualizes and designs a work but contracted laborers fabricate or assemble it. But it is also typical that environmental artworks created by academically-trained artists are built on neutral sites, often far from their homes and studios. They may be impactful, impressive, and visually compelling, but they lack an intimate link revelatory of the creator's essential core.

In contrast, most creators of art environments build on or within their own immediate and personal spaces. Consequently, the private sites where these creations are erected are full of intimate histories, connections, and experiences, and this fusion of art with life becomes a total synthesis, generally unmatched in any other circumstances. Art environments developed by self-taught artists reveal not only complete commitment to the work and a blurring of divisions between art and daily living, but an open reflection of the maker's life and concerns: "at once transform[ing] the stuff of life into art and the stuff of art into life"[16]. Yet although some were conceptualized early on as a monumental undertaking, and others grew, through amassing and accrual, to become powerful and impressive shrines, memorials, homes, gardens, grottoes, or parks, each site bears witness to the life and creativity of its author, opening the most personal or privately-held collection of objects, thoughts, and principles to their family, their friends, and, even, to the anonymous visitor or passerby.

It is important to clarify that most art environment builders do not create a final dwelling for themselves in which they envision they will spend all eternity: the vast majority of these creators are packed into standard graves, crypts, or tombs that provide little, if any, sense of the extravagance of the monumental constructions that absorbed so many of their living breaths[17]. But although interment in a municipal cemetery may promote a collective memory of the departed artist, it seems to also smooth over their idiosyncrasies and diminish their claims to exceptionalism. It thus seems almost an affront that these artists should be encased in such a conventional and utilitarian manner after spending a lifetime so flamboyantly expressing their creativity through often aesthetically-excessive built structures, tackling the years-long processes of bringing their constantly-evolving ideas to fruition with such intensity that it often became not only a goal but a lifestyle.

There has been no scholarly literature to date that analyzes the creation of tombs and gravesites of self-taught builders of visionary art environments, although several such sites have been identified. Most of these constructions are included as a component within the larger art environment itself, but some are separate structures altogether, installed either on the same property as the larger unit or, less commonly, erected on the

13 A public sculpture originally installed in 1974 that consisted of a row of Cadillac automobiles half-buried into a Texas field, with their rear ends and fins protruding outward at the same angle as that used in the Great Pyramid of Giza, Egypt.

14 A monumental earthwork that used black basalt and earth to create a coil fifteen feet wide and fifteen hundred feet long. Smithson's work is now managed by the Dia Art Foundation. For further information, see http://www.diaart.org/sites/main/spiraljetty.

15 The study of the genre of art environments – also known as "folk art environments", "visionary environments", and "yard shows" – created by self-taught creator-builders has blossomed in recent years, although references to individual sites appeared as early as Alfred Barr's *Fantastic Art Dada, Surrealism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936). Resources that discuss or describe such environments include Claude Arz, *Guide de la France Insolite* (Paris: Hachette, 1990); Didi Barrett, "Folk Art Environments", *The Clarion* 13, no. 1 (1988): 44-45; John Beardsley, *Gardens of Revelation: Environments of Visionary Artists* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995); Marc Décimo, *Les jardins de l'art brut* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2007); Gilles Ehrmann, *Les Inspirés et leurs demeures* (Paris: Éditions du Temps, 1962); Martin Friedman et al., *Naïves and Visionaries* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1974); Grey Gundaker and Judith McWillie, *No Space Hidden: The Spirit of African American Yard Work* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005); Gwyn Headley, *Architectural Follies In America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996); Jo Farb Hernández, *Singular Spaces: From the Eccentric to the Extraordinary in Spanish Art Environments* (Watford: Raw Vision, 2013); Caroline Holmes, *Follies of Europe: Architectural Extravaganzas* (Woodbridge-Suffolk: Garden Art Press, 2008); Bernard Lassus, *Jardins imaginaires* (Paris: Presses de la Connaissance, 1977); Marielle Magliozzi, *Art Brut, Architectures Marginales: Un art du bricolage* (Orléans: L'Ecarlate-L'Harmattan, 2008); Roger Manley and Mark Sloan, *Self-Made Worlds: Visionary Folk Art Environments* (New York: Aperture, 1997); Gabriele Mina, *Costruttori de babele* (Milan: Elèuthera, 2011); Bruno Montpied, *Le Gazouillis des Éléphants* (Saint-Loup-de-Naud: Éditions du Sandre, 2017); Matthieu Morin, *Des Pépites dans le Goudron!: Un Roadtrip Brut en Amérique* (Brussels: Knock Outsider, 2019); Jane Owen, *Eccentric Gardens* (London: Villard Books, 1990); Claude Prévost and Clovis Prévost, *Les Bâtisseurs de l'imaginaire* (Jarville-La Malgrange: Editions de l'Est, 1990); Juan Antonio Ramírez, ed., *Escultecturas Margivagantes* (Soria: Siruela, 2006); Deidi von Schaewin and John Maizels, *Fantasy Worlds* (Koln: Taschen, 1999); Michael Schuyt, Joost Elffers and George Roseborough Collins, *Fantastic Architecture: Personal and Eccentric Visions* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980); Colleen Sheehy, *The Flamingo in the Garden: American Yard Art and the Vernacular Landscape* (New York-London: Garland Publishing, 1998); Lisa Stone and Jim Zanzi, *Sacred Spaces and Other Places: A Guide to Grottos and Sculptural Environments in the Upper Midwest* (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1993); *Taking the Road Less Traveled: Built Environments of Vernacular Artists* (Sheboygan, Wisconsin: John Michael Kohler Arts Center and Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2007); Leslie Umberger, ed., *Sublime Spaces and Visionary Worlds: Built Environments of Vernacular Artists* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007); Jacques Verroust and Jacques Lacarrière, *Les Inspirés du bord des routes* (Paris: Seuil, 1978); Jan Wampler, *All Their Own: People and the Places They Build* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1977).

16 Sandra Yolles, "Junk Magic", *Artnews* 83, no. 8 (1989): 27.

17 See, for example, the list of gravesites in the "virtual cemetery" of art environment builders compiled by Larry Harris, https://www.findagrave.com/virtual-cemetery/1072476.

family's plot at the local cemetery, where the extravagance of the construction generally serves as a source of surprise for and, often, disapproval from, neighbors and community members. Unprepared for the edgy audacity, aesthetic liberty, and candid sincerity that these publicly-accessible sites proffer, the community's unease may be based on a perhaps unconscious conservative sense of propriety that upholds the idea that certain aspects of life simply need to be kept more concealed. And, equally importantly, the formalist visual impact the art environments have on neighbors and visitors often creates tensions between a society's recognition of the right of individuals to structure and adorn their living and dying spaces as they see fit, and that same society's right to social order and a certain aesthetic consensus.

It is impossible to posit a thread of confluence that unites these structures in a way that would provide a more generalized understanding of the meaning of life and death or the import of one's journey through the world held by art-environment builders, given the lack of connections or communication between them: there are no "schools" or established lineages linking these artists, no shared classes or studios, no correspondence, no manifestos. It is safe to assume, however, in ways similar to the other culturally-embedded visual representations cited above, that one of the ultimate goals of those artists who choose to build their own personal mausoleum is to have their physical works function as a trigger to bring them a measure of immortality. This is not surprising, given the enhanced visibility they gained during their lifetimes while involved in building their art environment, a direct result of the creation of that environment itself, and typically one many times greater than they had achieved during their pre-building (and, generally, pre-retirement) years. And, like some of the earliest examples of plastic expression, such as temples and grottoes, which were meant to be entered into and responded to on a more spiritual plane, albeit with communally-understood iconography, many of these sites, too, in a more personal and perhaps enigmatic way, reflect the ancient legacy of directly interacting with non-domestic structures that implicitly anticipate an encounter with a special and perhaps otherworldly experience.

Like the larger art environments themselves, whose construction typically preceded the development of the additional component or structure that would ultimately serve as the artist's tomb, the gravesites are developed additively and organically, generally without formal architectural designs, engineering plans – or permissions from local governments that would allow interment. Because of this, therefore, there are several cases in which artists conceived of and painstakingly constructed their final resting places only to have their objective of eternal sleep in their own constructed space thwarted by planning codes and public health restrictions.

Herewith, an introduction to some of the world's most notable gravesites, conceptualized and built by self-taught creators for their own final repose:

2. Ferdinand Cheval (1836 – 1924)[18]

One of the world's oldest and most renowned art environments, the *Palais Idéal*, was constructed by French postal carrier Ferdinand Cheval between 1879 and 1912 in the town of Hauterives, outside of Lyon (Drôme). Cheval's later writings recount that while making his daily rounds, delivering mail to his fellow citizens, his foot caught on a stone that arrested his glance; after he finished his route he returned with a wheelbarrow to pick it up, along with many other such weathered and curiously-shaped rocks. Then, in what was once the space occupied by his vegetable garden, he began the creation of a monument on which he worked, in his free time, for some thirty-three years, despite his lack of any previous training in or practice of art, architecture, or engineering (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Ferdinand Cheval, *Palais Idéal* [detail], 1976. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Cheval's serendipitous stumble over the stone exemplifies the enormous power of the found object to motivate the insightful and visionary artist: an accidental encounter with a fragment of stone or a piece of broken glass can become the incentive to a life's labor. As such, it was celebrated early on by the band of artists who called themselves the Surrealists[19]: they considered this uninhabitable "palace" to be an authentic and intuitive example of the expression of what they termed "automatic creativity", a concept that underlined the importance of remaining receptive to the chance encounter, which became one of their core principles. Thus, as the Surrealists developed into one of the most important movements of early modern art, the fact that Cheval's *Palais* both inspired and validated not only their ideas but those of succeeding generations of mainstream art-

[18] Selected portions of this text about Cheval's *Palais* previously appeared in my writings for SPACES archives, http://spacesarchives.org/explore/search-the-online-collection/palais-ideal/.

[19] Regarding André Breton, Surrealism, and Cheval, see, for example, Katherine Conley, "Surrealism and Outsider Art: From the 'Automatic Message' to André Breton's Collection", *Yale French Studies* 109 (2006): 129-143. For an account of the Situationist ideology and such "outsider architecture" as Cheval's *Palais*, see Bruno Montpied, "Outsider Art, the Situationist Utopia: A Parallel", *Southern Quarterly* 39: no. 1-2 (2000-2001): 19-46.

ists, to the present day[20], is almost as important as the form and iconography of the monument itself.

The *Palais*, in its global mix of different architectural and cultural referents, is among the most extensive and most extraordinary of architectural sculptures, and a virtual encyclopedia of the forms of art environments the world over: architecture, sculpture, grotto, temple, and garden. It is also an index of oft-used themes: religion and patriotism, brotherhood and equality, individual freedom and self-motivated labor. Yet because he could not be buried, as he had hoped, in his *Palais*, Cheval spent the eight years following its completion in the construction of a separate tomb in the local parish cemetery, located a few kilometers outside of the village of Hauterives (the town's unofficial boundaries have expanded since then). He called it the "*Tombeau de silence et du repos sans fin* [tomb of silence and endless rest]", where he would look forward to a well-deserved sleep after over four decades of self-imposed hard labor (Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Ferdinand Cheval, *Tombeau de silence et du repos sans fin*, 1976. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Like the *Palais*, with which it has shared National Historical Monument status since 1969, the tomb is replete with elaborate fantastical sculpted nonrepresentational and luxuriously organic motifs combined with naturally-occurring stones and shells, bound together with a mortar comprised of cement and lime. Although less elaborate and less grandiose than the *Palais*, it displays a more gestural and abstract use of the medium of concrete, as it likewise reveals significantly fewer cultural or religious references. The letters J-M-J (presumed to refer to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph) are inscribed as part of the decoration, and the whole is surmounted by a cross, as is typical for the area, but, otherwise, the motifs were chosen more to reflect the artist's own interests rather than those that might be considered proper for a Catholic tomb in the municipal cemetery of a small town (Fig. 3). (Although Cheval was said to have been inspired by Egyptian funerary architecture, there appear to be no specific motifs or forms that link this construction with those ancient sepulchers.)

Figure 3. Ferdinand Cheval, *Tombeau de silence et du repos sans fin* [detail], 1976. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Ferdinand Cheval died approximately two years following the completion of his mausoleum, and, per his wishes, he is buried within, as are his wife and daughter, both of whom pre-deceased him, and whose remains were transferred from their earlier resting places.

3. Samuel Perry Dinsmoor (1843 – 1932)[21]

Another important art environment builder, Samuel Perry Dinsmoor[22], utilized his constructions on a small side street in Lucas, Kansas, twenty-two miles east of the town of Paradise, and eleven miles north of Hell Creek, in the American Midwest, as an opportunity to voice his populist social and economic views. He called it the *Garden of Eden*.

Born in Coolville, Ohio, Dinsmoor was a Civil War soldier who witnessed the Battle of Gettysburg and the

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20 Numerous other artists, particularly those whose work could be included in the Pop Art genre, from Red Grooms to Niki de Saint-Phalle, were also heavily and specifically influenced by Cheval's *Palais*.

21 Selected portions of this text about Dinsmoor's *Garden of Eden* previously appeared in my writings for SPACES archives, http://spacesarchives.org/explore/search-the-online-collection/garden-of-eden/.

22 An early but still complete account of Dinsmoor's *Garden of Eden* may be found in Gregg Blasdel and Philip Larson's essay, "S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden", in *Naïves and Visionaries*, Martin Friedman et al. (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974), 33-41; Samuel Perry Dinsmoor, *Pictorial History of the Cabin Home* (Kansas: Self-published, ca. 1927).

surrender of General Lee. Subsequently, he farmed and taught school in Illinois before moving, in 1888, to Lucas with his first wife. (Later, at the age of 80, having been widowed for many years, he married his twenty-year-old housekeeper, and they subsequently had two children). By 1905, Dinsmoor had retired and moved from his farm on the outskirts of town into Lucas proper, where he began construction of a log cabin-style home made out of limestone "logs", a creative adaptation of medium due to the lack of timber on the Kansas plains. When the building was complete, the 66-year-old artist next turned to ornamenting the grounds (Fig. 4).

Figure 4. Samuel Perry Dinsmoor, *Garden of Eden*, 1975. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Eventually sculpting more than 150 concrete figures on his one-half acre plot, his grouped themes explore conflict: good versus evil, real life versus its artificial representation, biblical accounts versus scientific findings, labor versus management. Working alone for 22 years on the *Garden of Eden*, he used simple tools to surround his home with concrete "trees" that rose to 46 feet, and populated them with large-scale, detailed personages chosen as emblematic heralds of his philosophy. The west side of the house displays biblical images, while the north and east sides depict modern civilization, made tangible through allegorical tableaux interpreted through the lens of his political views. Dinsmoor left these sculptures mostly unpainted, save for a red stain used to highlight certain areas, including the stripes on the three American flags. He installed his own electric-light plant underneath the back porch, which allowed him to illuminate the house, his sculptures, and the surrounding grounds, enhancing their power and impact. He was the first to have electricity in the entire town (Fig. 5).

Following the completion of the *Garden* sculptures, Dinsmoor erected a separate mausoleum in the back yard just east of his home, leaving instructions that he be mummified and preserved prior to being laid to rest therein. A 40-foot-high three-story pagoda-shaped structure built using the same "log cabin" block technique as the house, the mausoleum is framed by four huge concrete-covered girders angled such that they meet at the apex and outline the shape of a pyramid. This shape may have been inspired by the form of the compass, depicted open at a 45-degree angle with its fulcrum above, which

Figure 5. Samuel Perry Dinsmoor. Left to right: *Mausoleum*, *Goddess of Liberty Tree* [verso], the *Chain of Life* [detail], 1975. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

is one of the most iconic symbols of the Freemasonry brotherhood, a fraternal organization to which Dinsmoor belonged[23]. The whole is illuminated with lights set at the upper-level corners, floating at the end of spindly concrete forms that appear as insect legs or antennae. A flying "guardian angel" is mounted prone, protruding from the top of the roof, her concrete wings uplifted and arms stretched down to transport him to, in his words, "where the Boss puts me" (Fig. 6).

Figure 6. Samuel Perry Dinsmoor, *Mausoleum*, 1975. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

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23 This secret society originated in the Middle Ages with the stonemasons and cathedral-builders guilds.

Inside is a niche that contains the artist laid out in his coffin, secured behind a plate glass partition; his wife is encased in a closed vault below. Rather cantankerous and mordant until the end, the artist wrote,

> This is where and the way I expect to go….It seems to me that people buried in iron and wooden boxes will be frying and burning up in the resurrection morn. How will they get out when this world is on fire? Cement will not stand fire, the glass will break. This cement lid will fly open and I will sail out like a locust[24].

And, just in case he was directed by "the Boss" to hell rather than heaven, he fabricated a cement water jug to be positioned at his side in the crypt, to quench his thirst along the way. His decaying corpse can still be seen today, a permanent part of the visual representations that define and comprise his artwork. The *Garden of Eden* site is listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places (Fig. 7).

Figure 7. Samuel Perry Dinsmoor and his coffin (double exposure), ca. 1926-7. Source: Courtesy Friends of S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden.

4. Acacio Mateo Pérez Castejón (1905 – 2003)[25]

Little is known about the life of Acacio Mateo Pérez, although one can assume—given the data inscribed on the pantheon in the family's burial plot—that the family had an extensive history in Lorca (Murcia), Spain. It appears that Pérez did his military service in Barcelona and, while there, he encountered the works of Modernista architect Antoni Gaudí, and became so enthused by the ceramic ornamentation on the buildings and parks that he brought tiles from the Catalan capital to his home in Lorca in his suitcase, taking advantage of special permissions available only to the military.

Pérez worked for a time in Barcelona in construction and in the *Comandancía de Ingenieros de Barcelona* [Engineering Command], occupations that provided him with an understanding of the possibilities inherent in various building materials. Upon his return, he designed the decoration of his home's façade, fabricating two curvilinear front balconies as well as rooftop balustrades and Moorish-style arches and window treatments, casting the concrete forms in wooden molds and then installing them vertically. Later, he laid in the tiles by hand. The ornamentation of the house was begun prior to the Spanish Civil War and took more than two decades to complete.

Despite the intricacy of the various fences and balustrades, Pérez's particular genius was primarily manifested not in construction but in adornment and surface treatment: he completely dressed the existing simple two-story house – a house that, in the fashion of many urban centers, is not freestanding, but shares common walls with its neighbors on both sides – with a full sheath of polychrome ceramic *trencadís* fragments that covered not only the façade of the house but numerous interior components as well, including furniture, in addition to the floors and walls (Fig. 8).

Figure 8. Acacio Mateo Pérez, *Pérez Castejón Gravesite*, 2008. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

But even more whimsical and more elaborate than the family home is their burial plot, located some distance away from the home on the outskirts of Lorca in the *Cementerio Parroquial San Cristóbal*. This memorial park is, in many ways, the quintessential Spanish cemetery, a gated enclosure with high whitewashed walls surrounding an assortment of freestanding tombs as well as multi-storied niches housing the final resting places of numerous individuals. The gravesites are sober and rectangular, with inscribed headstones ranging from light grey to black, all set off by white or brick walls. It is therefore even more surprising to turn a corner and be confronted with the lavishly and ornately decorated gravesite of the Pérez Castejón family.

The rectangular plot measures roughly 9.5 x 21 feet, and was built up and developed in 1963 to honor the death of his father on August 16 of that year, and it evolved further with the later deaths of his mother and brother. It includes a small two-story tomb fronted by a patio-like area replete with a variety of structures seemingly more appropriate for a garden than a gravesite, with colors un-

24 Dinsmoor, *Pictorial History…* A reprint of the original undated but contemporaneously-produced pamphlet is available at the site.

25 For a complete narrative about Pérez's life and works, see Jo Farb Hernández, "Acacio Mateo Pérez Castejón", in *Singular Spaces: From the Eccentric to the Extraordinary in Spanish Art Environments* (Watford: Raw Vision, 2013), 374-379. Portions of this text were previously published in that book.

seen in the rest of the cemetery, except for flowers placed in front of graves to honor the departed. It is ornamented not only with colorful, imaginative *trencadís* and tile work, but also with sculpted benches, flowerpots and bas-relief flowers, undulating fences with lacy apertures, and assorted constructions displaying standard religious symbols that reveal Pérez's idiosyncratic and increasingly effervescent creative style. In contrast to the sober tombs and pantheons in the rest of the cemetery, the Pérez Castejón plot bursts with color and with life.

The pantheon is located beyond two centrally located freestanding ceramic-sheathed sculptures replete with baroque buttresses, lobed shelves, and S-shaped legs. It is fronted with a variety of unique tiled flowerpots and planters on pedestals, also designed and constructed by Pérez, filled with plastic flowers. The façade is faced with tiles and ornamented with a variety of apertures, niches, and arches. Above the roofline of the building proper, the façades of the memorial are ornamented with a balustrade pierced with numerous elaborate apertures, some roughly in the shape of keystone or Moorish arches, others oval or in the shape of ogee or even more elaborate arches, all generally inspired by the motifs of Al-Andalus. The front façade is decorated with checkered light blue and black tiles of two sizes; at the highest point of the middle of this decorative trim, at the center of the building, a large cross also decorated with blue and black tile rises from the top of the undulating roofline. Its second level includes more medium-relief mosaic vases filled with blooms of everlasting mosaic flowers, as well as markers and photographs of Pérez's dead relatives who are interred herein (Fig. 9).

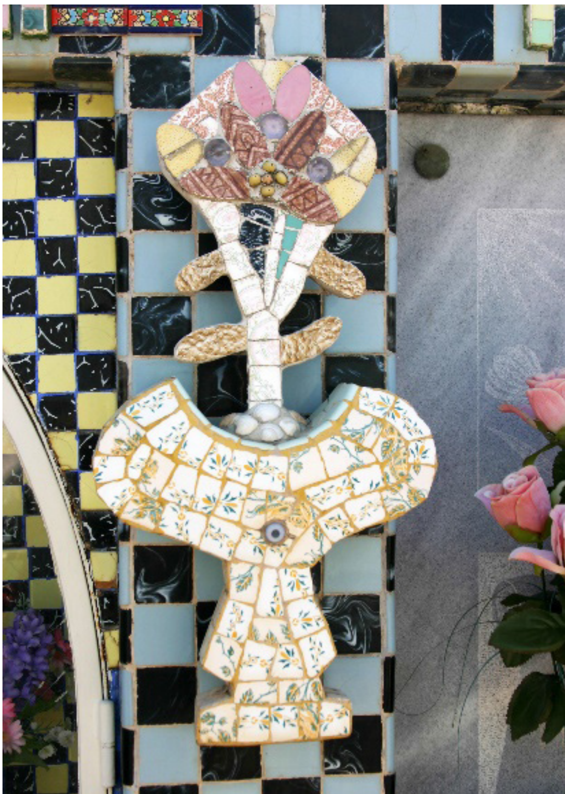

Figure 9. Acacio Mateo Pérez, *Gravesite* [detail], 2008. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

An elaborate fence with a front gate wraps around the front and right side of the entire gravesite. This cement fence, with delicate apertures and organically-wavy top, is aesthetically similar to the rooftop balustrade that follows the shape of the tomb from front to back, as it is also structurally reminiscent of the balconies on the house in the town center. However, rather than colorful *trencadís* and mosaic patterning, the decorative components of this fence are painted in a cheerful palette of light pink, white, and light yellow, seemingly incongruous colors for a gravesite. It is topped with small white sea shells. In contrast, the swinging front gate permitting access to the plot is surfaced with darker yellow square tiles set off by central green tiled crosses, marking the religious significance of the enclosed space (Fig. 10).

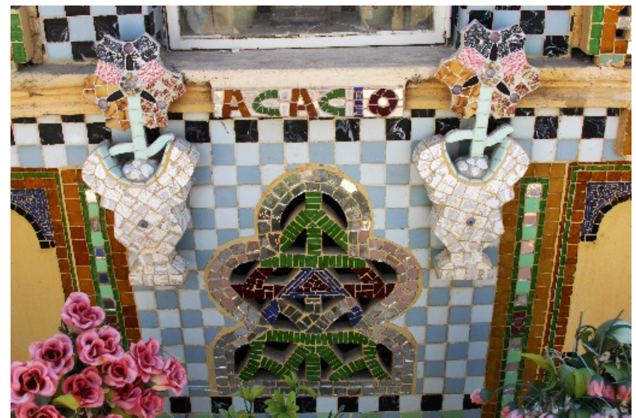

Figure 10. Acacio Mateo Pérez, *Gravesite* [detail], 2008. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Although the first name "Acacio" is spelled out in small tiles on the front and central portion of the sepulcher – presumably inlaid by the artist as he created the ornamentation of the graves – there is no engraved marker for him similar to those that memorialize his parents and brother. Yet with the elaborate work he had completed on this family tomb, it is unlikely that he would have been buried elsewhere, and there was certainly sufficient room within the rectangular two-story vault. Perhaps, as he never married, lived with his parents until they died, and then stayed alone, as the last in his family, there was no one to provide the requisite headstone marking his final resting place. It seems a sad and poignant end for someone who spent so much of his life determined to proclaim his existence in such a personal and artistic way.

5. Julio Basanta López (1933 – 2018)[26]

Julio Basanta was born into a poor family in Zaragoza, Spain, and after his father abandoned him and his ten siblings, the children were sent to be raised in an

[26] For a complete narrative about Basanta's life and works, see Jo Farb Hernández, "Julio Basanta López", in *Singular Spaces: From the Eccentric to the Extraordinary in Spanish Art Environments* (Watford: Raw Vision, 2013), 302-315. Portions of this text were previously published in that book.

orphanage. Basanta later used the training he acquired there to earn his living as an independent laborer and bricklayer although, given the relatively poor quality of his skills, his jobs tended to be those that were either too small or too risky for others to undertake. He and his wife had one son and three daughters, and eventually he saved enough money to purchase a small piece of property in Épila, a village located around twenty miles from Zaragoza; here, he constructed three whitewashed buildings that he called *castillicos*, designed with crenellated rooftops – the stern crowns of medieval military architecture – and an assortment of balustrades, projecting windows, and towers.

During 1977, a politically tumultuous year in Spain, Basanta's brother Vicente was fatally shot by a policeman for scrawling graffiti on a wall. The pain of this tragedy was revived and compounded in 2002, when Basanta's only son was also killed by police under unclear circumstances. At least partially in response to these killings, which he characterized as assassinations, Basanta began ornamenting the exterior of his *castillicos* with roughly-made three-dimensional images of "gods" and "demons". He constructed most of the figures with an infrastructure of milled wooden timbers, recycled metal rods, or salvaged mannequins and garden gnomes, draping this internal support with various cloths that were then covered with a rather lumpy coating of concrete. He used a tubular metal scaffolding with wooden walkways, as necessary, to reach the higher levels of figures that he installed on the rooftops of the *castillicos* or those hovering above and around the front gate, symmetrically balancing them on either side of this front façade. Over time, as he added new characters, Basanta compressed the individual figures together above the entrance into a dense pyramidal tower of terror and alarm. Human-scaled or greater in size, leaning imposingly over viewers, the brightly-painted ghouls, soldiers, and skeletons vie for prominence with religious figures and scenes, including Jesus with his executioners, as well as, added later, villains from throughout centuries of history, including the Roman emperor Nero (37-68 CE) and Germany's Adolf Hitler (Fig. 11).

Figure 11. Julio Basanta, *Casa de Dios*, 2009.
Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Working alone, Basanta modified his work on the site with great regularity, rearranging groupings, adding new figures, and repainting older ones, so that over time these changes imparted the sensation of a slow-motion kinetic performance to the static display. He paid less attention to the quality of his craftsmanship than to his narrative of death and doom, but the shoddiness of the construction actually amplifies the terrifying aspect of the figures, as the craggy faces, awkward stances, and dripping paint emphasize the other-worldly nature of their personas. So, too, do the found objects that he added to enhance his narratives, including dead branches, rusty chains, and assorted implements of violence, including hatchets, nooses, and guns fabricated from garden hose nozzles or plastic toys (Fig. 12).

Figure 12. Julio Basanta, *Casa de Dios* [detail], 2018.
Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Basanta constructed a tomb for his brother as an integral part of his site out of large stones; it was flanked by a sculpted column and, at its most elaborate, was guarded over by two full-scale high-relief guards, painted white, with molded crescent moon-shaped heads – no doubt found objects that Basanta incorporated – and hands that grasped tall metal spears. The incongruously bright colors and rough and textural application of paint used on the tomb, as well as on the other components of the site, challenge, with whimsy and absurdity, the depth of the artist's pain, as they likewise function to underscore

it. Basanta buried his brother in this tomb, although he was later required to remove the body that once lay inside and relocate the remains in the local cemetery, after the entombment was discovered by the authorities; then, he secretly devised a means by which he himself could later take advantage of the space, but neither was he, in the end, able to do so (Fig. 13).

Basanta's works are aggressive yet poignant markers of his own experiences, and of the difficulties he confronted throughout his life. With no training in art, architecture, or engineering, nor familiarity with any of the trends or techniques manifested by mainstream art, he parlayed his meager construction skills into an extraordinary art complex that reveals no artistic nor technical links to any other creator. Even those works that recount biblical narratives were manipulated such that they placed greater emphasis on their relation to Basanta's own story than to those originally recounted in the sacred texts.

Given the location of the property on the outskirts of town, he was not restricted or restrained from expressing his creativity, and thus enjoyed free rein to realize his works as he conceptualized them, without the kind of social or governmental pressure many artists in this genre have faced. His works demonstrate the same strength of other masterpieces of art that combine aesthetic power with a call to action, whether intended to change the behavior of those in power or that of the individual. In this case, with the dense placement of mythical or legendary figures that illustrate scenes of denunciation and death, as well as of historical characters that figured prominently in the murder of their opponents or imagined enemies, Basanta's message, posted high above the front gate, is "*No Matarás* – Thou Shall Not Kill" (Fig. 14).

At times Basanta said his work should be maintained as a museum, and that he would donate it to the municipality so it could be preserved as a three-dimensional educational manual about suffering. Other times he was dismissive, noting that his remaining children were terrorized by his work and would not live there or maintain the property, so he claimed that he expected at some point he would douse it all with gasoline and blow it all up. But, in fact, Julio Basanta died in July 2018 without a plan for the future of the work, which as of this writing remains uncertain.

6. Fernando Gallego Herrera (1901 – 1973)

The elaborate tomb designed by Fernando Gallego Herrera stands alone in Logroño's (La Rioja) large municipal cemetery, an unexpected and colorful extravagance among the rows of conventional concrete or stone markers. Gallego, born in the small village of Villoria in Salamanca province, was a brilliant child, albeit atypical, who grew up to become a prodigious inventor and

Figure 13. Julio Basanta, *Casa de Dios Gravesite* [detail], 2010. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Figure 14. Julio Basanta, *Casa de Dios* [detail], 2008. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

designer. Years ahead of his contemporaries – and, in some cases, ahead of the kinds of materials that would assure the success of his designs – he was lauded for his work on Barcelona's Estació de França and its Metro system, and he created innovative plans for such ambitious projects as an underwater tube that would provide passage for trains, cars, and pedestrians under the Strait of Gibraltar (1928). He also designed a military aircraft, dubbed the *Aerogenio*, which would take off vertically, powered by a system of compressed air (1933-35). But his works and public funding were undercut by the Civil War, and he was forced abroad to explore possibilities for realizing his inventions in other countries. Among projects that he completed were underwater tunnels linking Brooklyn to Staten Island in New York, and England to France over the Channel; too, he worked on the sluice gates for Egypt's Aswan Dam and the modernization of the Panama Canal.

During the last decade or so of his life, however, this globally-important engineer, pilot, and inventor returned to Spain and spent his remaining years in Logroño, his wife's natal home. There, beginning in 1959 with the idea of refurbishing the family gravesite after the death of his in-laws, he amplified and expanded the construction until it became both the most unusual, and also the most visited, tomb in Logroño's municipal cemetery. Despite his illustrious academic studies, he had never studied art, yet his travels had helped him to expand his aesthetic horizons beyond the classicist angels and saints, and the Neo-Gothic skulls and crossed bones, which were the visual standard in Logroño's graveyard. Reaching over eight meters high and thus dwarfing all neighboring gravesites, Gallego's tomb – which also holds his in-laws, cousin, and wife – is most remarkable both for its surface sheathing of ceramic tile fragments (*trencadís*), made popular by Antoni Gaudí and his colleagues, a technique with which Gallego would have become familiar during his stay in Barcelona, and for its imagery, in which Pharaonic figures in elaborate headdresses far overwhelm standard Catholic iconography (Fig. 15).

Built with a variety of materials, including gifts he brought back from his worldwide travels, the aesthetics of this structure challenge and contrast with the more conventional scale and imagery of the surrounding gravesites. He used the ornamentation of the tomb to record some of the most important influences, markers, and interests of his life, without concern as to any conflict regarding their contiguity or relation to each other over time and space. Complex and sometimes enigmatic inscriptions, poems, and quotations draw not only from religious texts but from his own poetry, which, even when the apparent subject is elsewhere (*e.g.*, his mother-in-law or the life of Christ), he related back to himself with specific references to his travels and inventions. There is also text drawn from the thirteenth-century *Dies Irae* [Day of Wrath], a Latin hymn used in the Catholic Mass for the Dead that describes the Last Judgement and the saving or condemning of human souls, a clear indication of his concerns as he faced his later years and ultimate death.

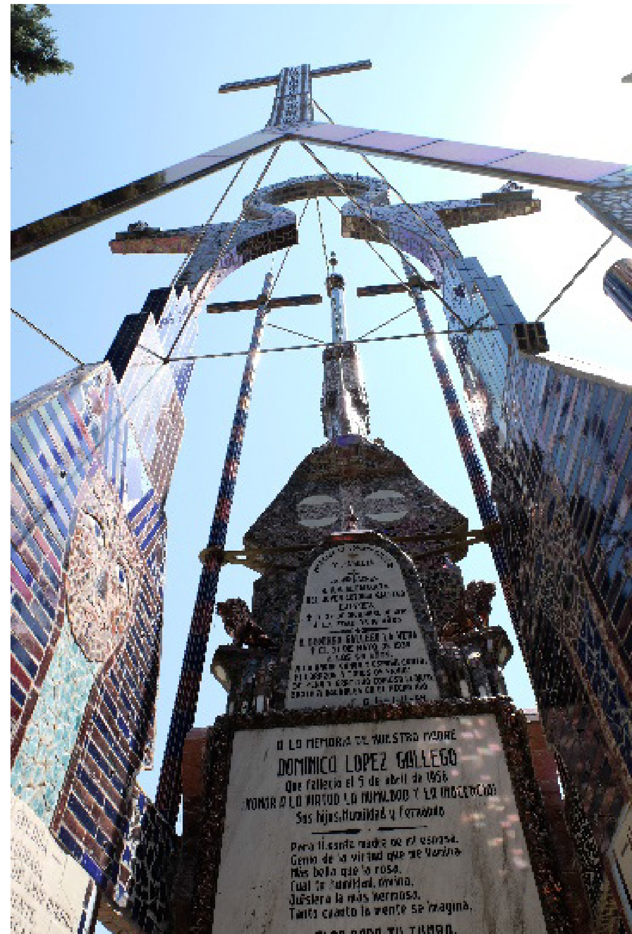

Figure 15. Fernando Gallego Herrera, *Tomb* [detail], 2018. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

Eight rectangular marble plaques include texts that mix religious references and family sentiments with allusions to Gallego's work, particularly the *Aerogenio*; these inscriptions may serve as a kind of review of major lifetime markers (Fig. 16). Within these poems, he intermingled the life of the suffering Christ with his own as he remembers the Civil War ("*mientras el mundo ardía/ la luz agonizaba* [as the world burned/the light faded]"), the campaign of political lies and slander he suffered and the subsequent personal and professional retribution that was visited upon him ("*el rugir calumnioso me azotaba* [the slanderous roar whipped me]"), and how this destroyed his ability to earn a living, plunging he and his wife into poverty ("*tu refugio amado/en choza de pastores convertido* [your beloved refuge/converted into a shepherd's hut]").

The incongruity of Gallego's fame, such as it is, is that despite his manifest successes in early engineering projects, he is primarily known for inventions that were never fully realized: in particular, the underwater tunnel that would have facilitated traffic between the coasts of Europe and Africa through the Strait of Gibraltar, and the *Aerogenio*, the airplane with vertical liftoff. These designs did, however, anticipate and support the efforts of later scientists and inventors, ensuring that his works ultimately served to improve the ease in transportation and communication between the constituent elements

Figure 16. Fernando Gallego Herrera, *Tomb* [verso], 2018. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

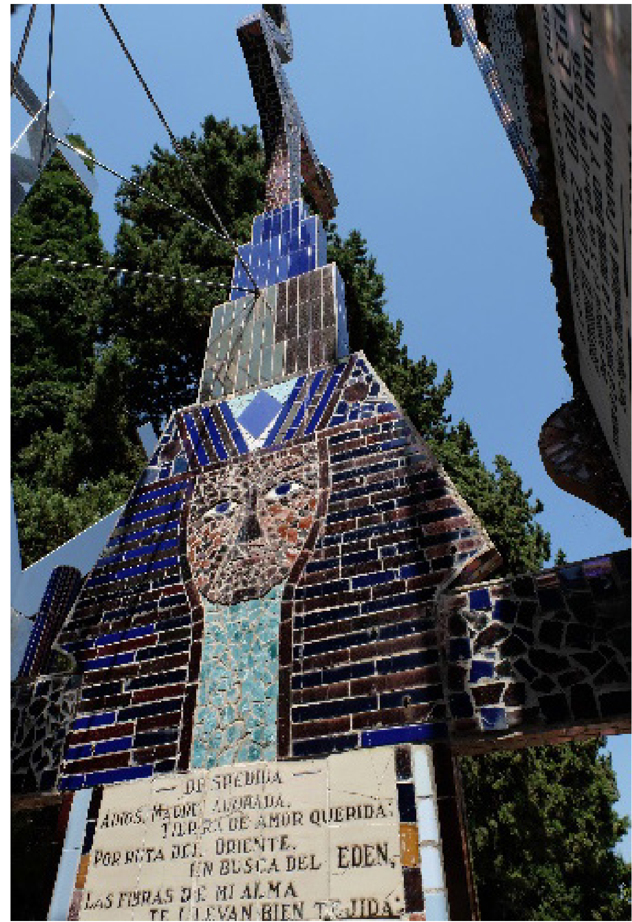

Figure 17. Fernando Gallego Herrera, *Tomb* [detail], 2018. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

of our world. Perhaps in a final effort to self-promote further recognition and acclaim, Gallego designed a tomb that far outstripped his earlier works in terms of the eccentricity of its juxtaposition of widely disparate and foreign motifs; its materials and techniques – such as that of ceramic *trencadís* – that was atypical not only in a region unaccustomed to its use, but made even more remarkable due to its application on a gravesite; and for the extended literary texts mounted on the three inward-facing "walls" of the tomb, which simultaneously vaunted his achievements, referenced biblical trials and aspirations, and solicited forgiveness for his arrogance (Fig. 17).

This gravesite became Gallego's only art environment, the sole venue where the extravagance and eccentricity of this taciturn inventor's creativity was given free rein. Liberated from the need to calculate the kinds of precise measurements for scale, resistance, and strength that had been necessary for his engineering projects, the tomb in Logroño's municipal cemetery instead reflects the impact of his travels, the breadth of his readings, and, ultimately, both his pride in his work and his worry that, in the face of death and ultimate judgement, this may have led him down a sinful path. But for visitors from near and far who appreciate the idiosyncrasy of the structure, its inherent whimsy, its conceptual contradictions, and its aesthetic challenge to the typically rather staid and conventional imagery of this generally conservative area of La Rioja, Fernando Gallego Herrera's mausoleum is indeed a delight.

7. Josep Pujiula i Vila (1937-2016)[27]

Josep Pujiula i Vila was a factory worker who spent some 45 years creating four separate and consecutive incarnations of a series of wooden towers, cabins, passageways, ladders, bridges, shelters, and labyrinths that he assembled from the flexible curved branches he collected from saplings growing on the banks of the nearby Fluvià river. Nestled among the medieval villages of Catalunya's La Garrotxa region, this fantastic, sprawling construction at once harmonized and collided with the well-worn stones, deep valleys, and verdant dormant volcanic cones of its surroundings. Locally known as a *parc salvatge* (wild park) or *poblat salvatge* (wild village), Josep Pujiula's constructions became the world's

[27] For an earlier accounting of Pujiula's works, see Jo Farb Hernández, "Josep Pujiula i Vila", in *Forms of Tradition in Contemporary Spain* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 137-169; for a more complete accounting of his life and constructions, see Jo Farb Hernández, "Josep Pujiula i Vila", in *Singular Spaces: From the Eccentric to the Extraordinary in Spanish Art Environments* (Watford: Raw Vision, 2013), 540-573. Portions of this text were previously published in these books. Pujiula also penned and self-published his own autobiography, *L'home de les cabanes* (Argelaguer: Self-published, 2001); another autobiographical document remained incomplete at the time of his death.

best jungle gym, the most unaffected open-air sanctuary, the most devilishly enjoyable maze, the "Sagrada Familia of Art Brut", in a Madrid newspaper's appropriate aesthetic and conceptual reference to one of Spain's most recognizable architectural treasures, Antoni Gaudí's basilica in Barcelona (Fig. 18).

Figure 18. Josep Pujiula i Vila, *Poblat Salvatge* [detail], 2002. Source: Carlos Vila.

Over the course of his active production, however, Pujiula was forced to completely dismantle his work three times, despite outcries from both local community members and global aficionados of this genre. But he could not stop working: his interaction with the public, as they visited his site and physically interacted with it by climbing the towers and exploring the labyrinthine passageways, became one of the most important inspirations for his continued work. And the impact was reciprocal: "*Gracias por hacernos sentir como niños* [Thanks for making us feel like children]" read one anonymous note left by a visitor, referencing a liberating and therapeutic revitalization that is rarely achieved by adults, although often desired (Fig. 19).

Figure 19. Josep Pujiula i Vila, *Font*, 2007. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

The mandate to repeatedly dismantle his work and start anew brought with it changes in medium as it likewise allowed Pujiula to employ his increasing technical skills and showcase his refined aesthetic. When a new freeway was planned to cut through the site in 2002, necessitating the demolition of all his constructions, by 2003 he had moved to a slightly different spot, and had begun to solicit "extra" concrete and steel from the road workers. With these new materials he sculpted a cascading fountain with organically-shaped ponds, flanked by rows of stone and steel sculptures, some of which are kinetically powered by the water flowing from the drainage pipe that had been installed underneath the new freeway. And, after 2013, when the local government demanded that he destroy the third incarnation of the wooden structures, and neighbors from all walks of life banded together with international art historians, artists, and journalists to strategize about ways to save what was left of the towers and labyrinth and to maintain the fountain and sculptures near the spring, Pujiula left it for them to fight the fight, as he – like most artists, more interested in the work that lay ahead rather than the work he had already completed – began to tackle a new project: hollowing out a labyrinthine cave with hand pick and shovel. He ornamented the cliff face with bas-relief pictographs representing his life, and conceptualized this cavern as his final resting place (Fig. 20).

Figure 20. Josep Pujiula i Vila, *La Tomba Faraònica del Garrell*, 2014. Source: Jo Farb Hernández.

He dubbed the cave, replete with personal symbols that were graphically emphasized by painting automobile oil into the crevices left by his hand chisels, his "*Tomba Faraònica* [Pharaonic tomb]", despite its lack of visual relationship to either the shape or the motifs utilized in those faraway (and never visited) Egyptian monuments; it is likely that he conceptualized his engraved motifs as hieroglyphics. Among the images he incised on both the exterior and interior included his pet goat (deceased years earlier), simple outlines of the local birds and small water insects with which he came into daily contact as he worked near the spring and river, fish, snails, a variety of faces, stick figures, skulls, and, despite his generally atheistic stance, crosses, accompanied by the blessing to "*Descansi en Pau* [Rest in Peace]". He gleefully incised his own epitaph, "*EL*

+ *TOSSUT* [the most stubborn]" on the front cliff face, touting his tenacity and the drive to keep building despite the repeated need to dismantle and demolish his work over more than four decades. A further takeaway is that his efforts stubbornly forced his local community to re-examine the very definition of Art, as, over time, Pujiula himself began to realize that this would be the best word to define his creations (an identification he rejected for years), and as he challenged the prevailing artistic and social norms of the community and the limits of their tolerance.

Finally, after decades fighting the authorities, in October 2014, the municipality and county government announced that they would take over the guardianship of the fountain area, and they officially designated Pujiula's environment as a local heritage site (*Bé Cultural de Interès Local*), a worthy recipient of county funding and support. In the summer of 2015 this self-taught creator was a finalist for the International Award for Public Art, representing all of Europe including the Russian Federation, and he was flown down to New Zealand for the award ceremony, his first major trip beyond Catalunya, in a remarkable recognition of the essential nature of his work – for himself, for his community, and for the world at large. It underscored the appeal of such work, which began as a private mission but which developed into a quintessential public venture. It also illustrated the need to avoid the default tendency to create artificial distinctions between art genres, as it served to promote the liberating sensation of opening ourselves up to a much more expansive view of the nature of Art and the relationship between artist and community. Following his unexpected death in May 2016, while working on yet another new high wooden tower, part of the fourth incarnation of his constructions on the expanded site, his ashes were interred within his carved-out and ornamented tomb, as he had desired.

8. Conclusions

These kinds of alternative eternal resting places, built by self-taught creators who have made noteworthy contributions to the genre of marking their own deaths with singular architecture, are a global phenomenon. While most display a direct physical and aesthetic link between the larger art environment that they created earlier and their ultimate resting places, in some cases the artist's final "home" may have superseded or was geographically separated from the former. But in every case, it is not surprising that those creators for whom life became their artwork and their artwork became their life would likewise desire being enveloped by both in death.

These graves function in direct contrast to the standard outcome of making art, in which the creation is objectified as the artist distances him/herself from the experience that is being conceived, realized, and presented. Rather than using the physical representation to separate him/herself from the cognitive, aesthetic, and psychological impulses that inspired that work, enabling the artist to move away and move on, art environments in general, and the creation of tombs in particular, instead strengthen and reinforce that link, that experience, that inspiration, as they publicly emphasize the unbreakable connection between art and the private trajectory of life and death.

While Julio Basanta's art environment and tomb is uncommon, as it reiterated the decades-long pain he felt after the "assassinations" of his brother and only son through the construction of figures representing tyranny and death, and the tools used to forcefully achieve those outcomes, the majority of tombs made by such self-taught art environment creators use a vocabulary of life rather than that of death. Skulls and crossed bones, weeping angels, hourglasses, candles, and animals typically associated with death such as owls or crows rarely appear: the images that tend to be represented on artist-built tombs are not *memento mori*, used to remind us that we all face an impending death, as they suggest that we should seek to detach ourselves from worldly goods in order to reflect more expansively on the temporality of life and our own mortality. Nor do they join together to create a didactic and socially-comprehensible text: in contrast, they bypass the artist's social and even specifically religious identity[28], as well as culturally-shared and communally-understood designs, as they instead focus on the personal. They strive to transfer the narrative of their lives via a bridge of specific motifs, sayings, objects, and images, which conjoins their current existence with the anticipated, albeit more abstract, reality of death.

Fear and apprehension play a significantly lesser role than one might expect in these tombs, yet neither is there a palpable sense of joy that these artists would soon be released from this earthly "veil of tears": they were too busy with their current work to consider the emotional ramifications of their death. Neither are their constructions typically designed to promote the idea of the artist's ultimate union with the divine or the supernatural and the existence of an afterlife, or are they replete with symbols that might assuage the grief of those who were left behind. They are, rather, a celebration of this individual life, with few cultural links and without regrets.

Designing and erecting their own tombs simply continued a different form of the same autobiographical assemblage in which these artists had already been involved for the previous decades. And as their constructions, in general, reveal a compelling presence that, at the very least, mixes the intelligible with the ineffable, it should not be expected that any attempted "reading" of the tomb's adornments will necessarily lead to a clear and systematic understanding of the artist's history and experience. Rather, each viewer's comprehension of the site, inexorably colored by our own experiences, meshes with the layers of the artist's life story, ensuring that the reality for each viewer is distinct, sensory-based, and multi-vocal.

[28] While crosses appear on the graves of five of the six artists whose work is featured here (Dinsmoor is the exception), the structures as a whole are not denominationally specific, and seem to display the cross primarily as a cultural shorthand for a standard – and perhaps expected – gravesite symbol.

The gravesites, mausoleums, and tombs of these self-taught artists, like the larger art environments most of them created, and like the work of other artists of this genre, challenge our conventional aesthetic and social norms, but by so doing, they help us to amplify the very definition of what Art can be. Each environment is unique and idiosyncratic, and reflects the world and the concerns of each artist. And while most confronted issues of some kind during their lives – as we all do – they confronted death not only with hard work, equanimity, and calm, but often with humor, and with an effervescence and a liveliness that brings not sorrow but admiration, and celebration of a life well lived.

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