

APPENDIX D
HISTORICAL RESOURCES REPORTS

TOWER OF WOODEN PALLETS
15357 Magnolia Boulevard

Historic Resources Report

Prepared by

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Summary and Qualifications

The Tower of Wooden Pallets was created in 1951 by Daniel Van Meter. In 1977, City of Los Angeles fire inspectors declared the tower a fire hazard and ordered it torn down. To prevent its demolition, Van Meter nominated it as a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument. It was declared Monument #184 by the Los Angeles City Council on April 19, 1978. After Van Meter passed away, his family inherited the property. They now wish to demolish the Tower so that the property can be developed.

Generally, a lead agency must consider a property an historic resource under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) if it is eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources (California Register). Properties listed in a local register of historic resources are presumed to be historically significant unless a preponderance of evidence demonstrates otherwise. Although the structure does not appear to be eligible for listing in the California Register, it should be treated as an historic resource subject to CEQA as it has been designated a Monument by the City of Los Angeles.

This report includes a description of the environmental setting, an overview of the applicable regulations regarding historic resources, an evaluation of the Tower pursuant to the California Register, and an analysis of project impacts.

Teresa Grimes, principal of Grimes Historic Preservation, was solely responsible for the preparation of this report. With over ten years of experience in the field of historic preservation and a M.A. in Architecture, Ms. Grimes more than fulfills the qualifications for historic preservation professionals outlined in 36 CFR, Part 61. Her experience has included the preparation of numerous environmental review documents for historic resources. Her qualifications are attached.

1.2. Methodology

In conducting the evaluation of historic significance, the following tasks were performed:

1. Inspected the structure from the public right-of-way to determine physical integrity and character-defining features. The property is presently surrounded by a chain link fence; however, the structure is

visible from the public right-of-way. A set of photographs dated May 2003 were also reviewed.

2. Reviewed the Cultural Heritage Commission file on the property, which included the Monument application, Commission meeting minutes, and correspondence from and to the Commission.
3. Researched the history of the structure to establish the potential significance within several historic contexts including the history of folk art environments, creative works, outsider art, and found object art.
4. Reviewed and analyzed ordinances, statutes, regulations, bulletins, and technical materials relating to federal, state, and local historic preservation designations, and assessment processes and programs.
5. Evaluated the historic significance of the structure based upon criteria used by the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register of Historical Resources.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

2.1. Physical Description

The Tower of Wooden Pallets is located in Sherman Oaks at 15357 Magnolia Boulevard between Sepulveda Boulevard and the 405 Freeway. A private school is located at the end of the street. East and west of the property are large, multi-family residential buildings. The south side of the block is an extension of the Sepulveda Dam Recreation Area. A fire station is situated in the approximate center of area.

15257 Magnolia Boulevard is Lot 7 of Tract #1201, which is 210 feet by 297.5 feet. It includes the Tower in the approximate center, a one-story, single-family residence on the west side, and sheds on the rear. The single-family residence was constructed in 1946. The house has been partially demolished. The entire lot, which is overgrown and littered with trash, is surrounded by a chain link fence.

The Tower was constructed of approximately 2,000 wooden fork lift pallets laid on top of one another in a brick-like fashion. The pallets, which measure 3 feet by 4 feet and are 6 inches thick, sit directly on the earth and are not attached to

one another. The structure is approximately 22 feet high with a diameter of 22 feet at the base and 13 feet at the top. The shape of the Tower is conical. An opening at ground level functions as the entrance. In the interior there are steps going to the top, which is open to the sky.

The physical integrity of the Tower has been evaluated by two structural engineers. Both reports are attached. Robert Meyer found that "the wood exposed to the elements is weathered, dry rotted, and termite infested. The wood has diminished or totally lost its structural properties. The wood elements are cracked, split, and broken. Some of the broken pallets are giving way to settling. All elements are essentially loose. The nails and pin rivets are oxidized, loose. The connectors remaining can be removed by hand without any effort. The steps towards the top are leaning with a tendency to slide off."¹

3. IDENTIFICATION OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

Generally, a lead agency must consider a property an historic resource under the California Environmental Quality Act if it is eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources (California Register). The California Register is modeled after the National Register of Historic Places (National Register). Furthermore, a property is presumed to be historically significant if it is listed in a local register of historic resources or has been identified as historically significant in an historic resources survey (provided certain criteria and requirements are satisfied) unless a preponderance of evidence demonstrates that the property is not historically or culturally significant. The National and California Register designation programs are discussed below.

3.1. National Register of Historic Places

The National Register is "an authoritative guide to be used by federal, state, and local governments, private groups and citizens to identify the nation's cultural resources and to indicate what properties should be considered for protection from destruction or impairment."²

Criteria

To be eligible for listing in the National Register, a property must be at least fifty years of age and possess significance in American history and culture,

¹ Robert Meyer, May 18, 2003. Attached.

² 36 C.F.R. Part 60.2.

architecture, or archaeology. A property of potential significance must meet one or more of four established criteria: ³

- A. associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. yield, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Physical Integrity

According to National Register Bulletin 15, "to be eligible for listing in the National Register, a property must not only be shown to be significant under National Register criteria, but it also must have integrity." Integrity is defined in National Register Bulletin 15 as "the ability of a property to convey its significance." Within the concept of integrity, the National Register recognizes seven aspects or qualities that in various combinations define integrity. They are feeling, association, workmanship, location, design, setting, and materials.⁴

Context

To be eligible for listing in the National Register, a property must also be significant within an historic context. National Register Bulletin 15 states that the significance of an historic property can be judged only when it is evaluated within its historic context. Historic contexts are "those patterns, themes, or trends in history by which a specific...property or site is understood and its meaning...is made clear."⁵ A property must represent an important aspect of the area's

³ 36 C.F.R. Part 60.4.

⁴ *How to Apply National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Register Bulletin #15, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1995, pp. 44-45.

⁵ National Register Bulletin #15, p. 7.

history or prehistory and possess the requisite integrity to qualify for the National Register.

3.2 California Register of Historical Resources

In 1992, Governor Wilson signed AB 2881 into law establishing the California Register. The California Register is an authoritative guide used by state and local agencies, private groups and citizens to identify historic resources and to indicate what properties are to be protected, to the extent prudent and feasible, from substantial adverse change.

The California Register consists of properties that are listed automatically as well as those that must be nominated through an application and public hearing process. The California Register automatically includes the following:⁶

California properties listed in the National Register and those formally Determined Eligible for the National Register.

California Registered Historical Landmarks from No. 0770 onward.

Those California Points of Historical Interest that have been evaluated by the Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) and have been recommended to the State Historical Resources Commission for inclusion on the California Register.

The criteria for eligibility of listing in the California Register are based upon National Register criteria, but are identified as 1-4 instead of A-D. To be eligible for listing in the California Register, a property must be at least fifty years of age and possess significance at the local, state, or national level, under one or more of the following four criteria:

1. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of local or regional history, or the cultural heritage of California or the United States; or
2. It is associated with the lives of persons important to local, California, or national history; or

⁶ Cal. P.R.C. Section 5024.1.

3. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values; or
4. It has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important in the prehistory or history of the local area, California, or the nation.

Properties eligible for listing in the California Register may include buildings, sites, structures, objects, and historic districts. A property less than fifty years of age may be eligible if it can be demonstrated that sufficient time has passed to understand its historical importance.⁷ While the enabling legislation for the California Register is less rigorous with regard to the issue of integrity, there is the expectation that properties reflect their appearance during their period of significance.

3.3 City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Ordinance

The Cultural Heritage Ordinance was adopted by the Los Angeles City Council in 1962 and amended in 1985 (sections 22.120 et. seq. of the Administrative Code). The Ordinance created a Cultural Heritage Commission and criteria for designating Historic-Cultural Monuments. The Commission is comprised of five citizens, appointed by the Mayor, who have exhibited a knowledge of Los Angeles history, culture and architecture. Section 22.130 of the Ordinance states that a historical or cultural monument:

is any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon), building, or structure of particular historical or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community is reflected or exemplified or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, state, or local history, or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

Unlike the National and California Registers, the Ordinance makes no mention of concepts such as physical integrity or period of significance. Moreover,

⁷ 14 C.C.R. Section 4852.

properties do not have to reach a minimum age requirement, such as fifty years, to be designated as Monuments.

4. EVALUATION OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The Tower of Wooden Pallets is not eligible for listing in the National or California Registers because it does not appear to meet any of the criteria for significance. There are similar resources throughout United States that have been designated under federal and state landmark programs including the National Historic Landmark, National Register, California Register, and California Historical Landmark, to name a few of the applicable programs. These resources were usually designated under Criterion C for their artistic value. While the debate continues on how to categorize such works, the term folk art environments is the most commonly used term. In 1978, a National Register Multiple Property Nomination was prepared for folk art environments in California. The Tower was not included in that nomination. While there have been several articles in local newspapers about the Tower, it is not identified in any of the scholarly work in the field of folk art environments or related fields such as outsider art, found object art, or fantasy architecture..

While the historic significance of the Tower is dubious, it was in fact designated a Monument by the City of Los Angeles in 1978. The Cultural Heritage Commission file does not include a formal application form, but merely a letter of request from the owner and creator of the Tower, Daniel Van Meter, which stated that it was a unique art form of historical significance. It appears that at no time did the Commission or City Council find that the Tower met the definition of a Monument in the Administrative Code. The records indicate, however, that the Tower was designated "because of its significant social interest in the San Fernando Valley."⁸

4.1 National Register of Historic Places

Criterion A - The Tower is not eligible under Criterion A as it is not associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

Criterion B - The Tower is not eligible under Criterion B as it is not associated with any persons of historic significance. The sole person with which the Tower is

⁸ Wednesday, April 19, 1978, Cultural Heritage Commission meeting.

associated is Daniel Van Meter, its creator. Van Meter was not historically significant in any context.

Criterion C - Properties can be eligible under Criterion C for one of four reasons: as the embodiment of a distinctive type, period, or method of construction; as the work of a master, as a work possessing high artistic value; and as a significant and distinguishable entity.

The only aspect of Criterion C that appears to apply is that of a work possessing high artistic value. As previously stated, folk art environments have been listed in the National Register. There are seventeen in the United States and four in California. The National Register folk art environments in California are: the Watts Towers in Watts, the Underground Garden's in Fresno, the Bottle Village in Simi Valley, and the Desert Sculpture Garden in Joshua Tree. In addition, the Old Trapper's Lodge (relocated to Pierce College) Litto's Hubcap Ranch in Pope Valley, and Nitt Witt Ridge in San Luis Obispo are designated as California Registered Historical Landmarks. Watts Towers has the added distinction of being one of only a dozen National Historic Landmarks in Los Angeles County.

Folk art environments can be found throughout the world. Almost impossible to describe, but a wonder to behold, folk art environments are the handiwork of men and women who have been inspired to remake their personal spaces by combining art, architecture, sculpture, and landscaping, often in wildly imaginative ways. Typically such works are created over long periods of time and involve the use of found objects such as glass bottles, broken tiles, bottle caps, hub caps, and etc.

Folklorists have not much cared for the application of the term folk art to describe such environments. Folk art originally pertained to the indigenous crafts and decorative skills of peasant communities in Europe. The term was later applied to the simply made, practical objects of Colonial American days such as quilts. As folk artists are typically self-taught, do not necessarily consider themselves artists, and create works for their personal pleasure, they are sometimes linked with outsider artists. While outsider art is extremely individual, folk art is typically not one of a kind, but rather part of an established ethnic or religious tradition.

Folk art environments have also been described as outsider art environments. The term outsider art was originally intended to act as an exact English equivalent to the French term art brut. The term art brut was coined by mid-twentieth century, French artist Jean Dubuffet. Dubuffet collected works of

extreme individuality and inventiveness by creators who were not only untrained artists, but often had little concept of an art gallery or even any other forms of art other than their own.

The term outsider art is now used to describe creative works – paintings, drawings, sculptures, assemblages, and idiosyncratic gardens and other outdoors constructions – by people who have had little or no formal training in art and who produce art without any regard to the mainstream art world’s recognition, marketplace or definitions. These are people who make art for themselves or their immediate community, often without recognizing themselves as artists until some collector or expert comes along to inform them that what they are doing is making art.

In the United States, the recognition of Watts Towers as a work of art was the first step in the identification of other folk art environments across the country. Consisting of nine major sculptures constructed of structural steel, and covered with mortar, Watts Towers are the work of Simon Rodia. An Italian immigrant, Rodia purchased a triangular lot in Watts in 1921 and began to construct his masterpiece, which he called “Nuestro Pueblo” meaning “our town.” For 33 years, Rodia worked single-handedly to build his towers with only his ingenuity, tile setting tools, and a window washer’s belt and buckle. He adorned his towers with a diverse mosaic of broken glass, sea shells, generic pottery and tile and many pieces of twentieth century ceramics. In 1954, when Rodia was approaching 75, he deeded the property to a neighbor and moved to Martinez, California to be near his family. Within a few years, the City of Los Angeles ordered the towers demolished. A group of concerned citizens formed the Committee for Simon Rodia’s Towers in Watts and fought successfully to save the towers by proving their structural strength and safety.

Another local example of a folk art environment is Bottle Village. Beginning construction in 1956 at the age of 60, and working until 1981, Tressa “Grandma” Prsbrey transformed her 1/3 acre lot into Bottle Village, and otherworld of shrines, wishing wells, walkways, other random constructions, plus 15 life size structures all made from found objects placed in mortar. The name “Bottle Village” comes from the structures themselves, made of tens of thousands of bottles unearthed via daily visits to the dump for years. Appearances aside, Bottle Village began as two purely practical needs for a cheap building material to build a structure to store her pencil collection, which eventually numbered 17,000 and a bottle wall to keep away the smell and dust of the adjacent turkey farm. Located near the epicenter of the 1994 Northridge earthquake, Bottle Village suffered heavy damage, but many of the structures remain.

Today the increased awareness of places like Watts Tower and Bottle Village has led to a network of small organizations in both Europe and the United States devoted to the preservation of such works and the support of their creators. SPACES (Saving and Preserving Arts and Cultural Environments) is a national preservation and advocacy organization headquartered in Los Angeles. It holds the most extensive public, non-profit archives relating to contemporary folk and outsider art environments in the United States. SPACES has identified approximately 100 folk art environments in California and nearly 1,000 in the United States.

While the Tower of Wooden Pallets has some of the characteristics of an outsider art object, it is not eligible for listing in the National Register for its “high artistic value.” According to its creator, Daniel Van Meter, the Tower was a work of art he created for his personal pleasure. Like many outsider artists, Van Meter was not a trained artist and created the Tower out of recycled material. In this case, fork-lift pallets that had been discarded by a local brewery.

Recycled materials and found objects are almost always incorporated into folk art environments as well. In the aforementioned folk art environments, however, the works encompassed entire sites that were created over a long period of time. While folk art environments take many forms – in some cases existing buildings are modified, new buildings are constructed, objects and sculptures are displayed in yards – they are almost always grand in scale. The Tower is merely a single, albeit large, object. As such, it does not seem as though Van Meter was out to create a unique environment on his property. The Tower should not be categorized as a folk art object or sculpture, as the term implies working within an established ethnic or religious tradition. The Tower is one of a kind.

Assuming that one considers it a work of art at all, the most accurate description of the Tower would be a work of outsider art, be it an assemblage or sculpture. While outsider artists, by definition, do not think of themselves as artists, they create some form of art for long periods of time, if not their entire adult lives. Their work, whether it is a painting or an entire environment, is also defined by its creativity and imagination. In this context, the Tower of Wooden Pallets is not significant. It was the only object Van Meter ever created and it does not demonstrate the inventiveness associated with outsider art.

Criterion D - Criterion D was not considered in this report, as it applies to archeological resources.

4.2 California Register of Historical Resources

The Tower does not appear to be eligible under any of the criteria for significance for the same reasons it is ineligible for listing in the California Register.

4.3 Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monuments

While the Tower does not meet the definition of a Historic-Cultural Monument, the entire property was in fact designated as such by the City of Los Angeles in 1978. A Monument is defined as:

any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon), building, or structure of particular historical or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, or community is reflected or exemplified or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, state, or local history, or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

Although Van Meter requested that the Tower be designated as a unique form of art, the Commission recognized it for "its significant social interest in the San Fernando Valley." There was no material or information about its role or significance in the social history of the San Fernando Valley.

5. PROJECT IMPACTS

5.1 Determining the Significance of Impacts on Historical Resources

In enacting the California Register, the Legislature amended CEQA to clarify which properties are significant, as well as which project impacts are considered to be significantly adverse.

A project with an effect that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an historic resource is a project that may have a significant effect on the environment.

A substantial adverse change in the significance of an historic resource means demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of an historical resource would be materially impaired.

The significance of an historic resource is materially impaired when a project demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics that convey its significance and that justify its inclusion in or eligibility for inclusion in the California Register, local register, or its identification in an historic resources survey.

Although the State CEQA Guidelines makes not mention of relocated historic resources, the California Register recognizes that the relocation of an historic resource is sometimes necessary to prevent its destruction. Relocated historic resources are eligible for listing in the California Register, provided that the new location is compatible with the original character and use.

5.2 Impacts of Proposed Project

As the Tower is a designated Monument under the City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Ordinance, it is an historic resource subject to CEQA. Demolition of the Tower would result in a negative effect on the environment. The significance of the historic resource would be materially impaired by its demolition. The demolition of historic resources cannot be mitigated to a less than significant level.

5.3 Project Alternatives

State CEQA Guidelines requires lead agencies to investigate a range of alternatives to a proposed project which would attain most of the basic objectives of the project, but would avoid or substantially lessen any of its significant effects. In some cases, the impact on an historic resource can be mitigated to a less than significant level by moving it to a new site. That alternative is not feasible in this case due to the nature and physical integrity of the Tower. Under certain conditions, houses, structures, and objects can sometimes be relocated in one or more pieces and reassembled exactly..... The pallets which form the Tower are not connected to each other. As such, the Tower could not simply be picked up and moved someplace else. If the Tower were taken apart piece by piece, it could not be reassembled precisely as it was

because the physical integrity of the pallets have deteriorated due to termite infestation and dry wrought.

5.4 Mitigation Measures

If the Tower is demolished, the following mitigation measure will reduce the significant adverse impacts on the historic resource, but not to a point where clearly no significant effect on the environment would occur. The mitigation measure is nonetheless important for providing the opportunity for the relocation of the historic resource, or at least the recordation of its loss for posterity.

The demolished historic resource shall be documented in a report consistent with Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) standards. It shall document the significance and physical condition of the historic resources proposed for demolition, both historic and current, photographs, written data, and text. The documentation shall include:

1. A site plan on 8" x 11" paper showing the location of the Tower should be included. This site plan shall include a photo-key.
2. Large format (4" x 5" or larger negative size) photographs in accordance with HABS guidelines. Views shall include several contextual views, exterior and interior elevations.
3. The report shall include copies or prints of any available original plans and historic photographs.
4. Archival copies of the documentation shall be submitted to the City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission.

6. SOURCES

Web sites

www.jane'saddictions.com – Web site features database of folk art environments in the United States.

www.interestingideas.com – Web site created by Bill Swislow includes links to folk and outsider art pages.

www.rawvision.com – Web site for English magazine, Raw Vision, that covers outsider art.

www.outsiderart.org – Web site for Intuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art.

Books

Kitchener, Amy, The Holiday Yards of Florencio Morales. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1994

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Rosen, Seymour, In Celebration of Ourselves. San Francisco: California Living Books, 1979.

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Spencer, Dorothy, Found Object Art. Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2002.

Schuyt, Michael, Jost Elffers and George Collins, Fantastic Architecture. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1980.

Von Schaewen, Deidi, Eccentric Style. New York: Taschen, 2002.

Von Schaewen, Deidi and John Maizels, Fantasy Worlds, New York: Taschen, 1999.

Whiteson, Leon, The Watts Towers. Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1989.



Tower of Wooden Pallets, looking north from the sidewalk



Single-Family Residence, looking northeast from the sidewalk

ATTACHMENTS