

## *Being Nice is Easy* Janna van Hasselt, 2015

In the spring of 2014, I was fortunate to travel around a number of environments created by artists working outside the mainstream art world. Having previously studied the works purely through slides and writings, it was a joy to be able to experience the works and their unique settings in the flesh. These ceramic works were created on my return to Christchurch based on photographs and drawings from my trip.

### *Tenth Wonder of the World*

Los Angeles, California, USA

Dianne and Lew Harris (begun 1981)

While appearing to be a random conglomeration of objects installed outside, their home, the Harris's dense construction is made up of carefully selected and scavenged items including industrial fans, tall steel tubes, plastic clumps and a giant painted eyeball. This is a true collaboration by the pair; Lew once worked in the recycling business and Dianne creates black and white drawings and writes poetry. Their colour palette of deep red, black and white unifies the environment. A zebra poised on the roof keeps a watchful eye over the site, enforcing the message to trespassers to 'keep out'.

### *Watts Towers*

Los Angeles, California, USA

Sabato (Simon) Rodia (created 1921–1954)

Italian-born labourer Simon Rodia worked for 34 years to create his series of towers on the triangular section he lived on. Without any welding or bolts he created these exquisite and mesmerizing pillars by hand-bending and overlapping steel beams using the nearby railway tracks as a giant vice. His wire-wrapped towers are mostly coated in concrete and are surprisingly colourful on closer inspection; they are carefully adorned with a highly detailed and colourful mosaic of found tiles, glass and shells. Evidence of Sam's fierce independence, back-breaking labour and devotion to his creation is everywhere; to accomplish what he did using only hand tools is inspirational.

### *Noah Purifoy, Outdoor Desert Art Museum*

Joshua Tree, California, USA

Noah Purifoy (created 1989 – 2004)

Noah Purifoy chose to spend the last years of his life in the harsh Joshua Tree Desert, beginning this series of large-scale assemblage sculptures when he was 72. Despite many opportunities for success within the mainstream art world, he repeatedly turned his back on the confines of the institutional art world, living a simple life and immersing himself in this mammoth final project set on 10 acres of land. The Desert Art Museum is comprised of pieces made of salvaged materials as varied as bowling balls, toilet seats and vacuum cleaners. Despite being man-made of discarded objects, the pieces appear at one with the environment. Noah embraced the idea of his works decaying naturally; dried-out and faded by the baking sun and weathered by the relentless wind and extreme temperature variations.

### *Salvation Mountain*

Niland, California, USA

Leonard Knight (created c.1985 – 2011)

Words cannot describe the intense visual impact of Salvation Mountain as you approach it along a dusty road close to the US/Mexican border. Leonard Knight worked tirelessly for almost 30 years to create his three-storey masterpiece and his message is clear: "God is Love". He chose to use adobe cement to sculpt rivers, waterfalls, flowers and trees to illustrate his point and worked in the scorching desert heat to embellish his mountainside and adjoining annex made of hay-bales and tree-trunks. He worked with a palette reminiscent of a cheerful sweet-shop using lead-free paints which were often donated by visitors to the site. The resulting work can be scaled and explored and is completely honest; mirroring Leonard himself. "*Being nice is easy, they're nice to me so I wanna be nice back – make nice get bigger, all over the world.*" Leonard Knight

### *La Maison Arc en Ciel*

Lens Lestang, France

Christian Guillaud (begun c. 2001)

Once a sailor, then a second-hand dealer, Christian Guillaud focused on creating an environment in and around his home when he retired. Apparently, his fascination started by painting an unassuming object in vivid colours and he was at once hooked; gradually painting and adhering bright stickers on anything and everything (toys, flags, rocks, poles, branches) and then arranging them on the exterior and interior of his home. While Christian makes use of a wide array of colours, the French red, white and blue colour scheme is consistent and unifies the general bric à brac. The installation of these objects is changed often and has expanded to an extra patch of land across the road, making for a head-turning and all-encompassing environment you can't miss as you drive through the tiny French village on the road to Hauterives.

### *Palais Idéal*

Hauterives, France

Ferdinand Cheval (1879-1912)

Sparked by a daydream of building a fantastical palace and the chance discovery of an odd-shaped stone during his daily 28km delivery route, postman Ferdinand Cheval's *Palais Ideal* is truly a life's labour. He spent 34 years collecting stones with only a wheelbarrow and his pockets while delivering letters on foot, returning to his home in Hauterives to build by night. He embedded the stones into concrete and reinforced the structure with wire, perfecting his unique relief sculpting technique over the years. The resulting palace forms a densely detailed visionary encyclopedia. It can be navigated and features four distinctly themed facades bursting with grottos, towers, chambers, waterfalls and flora and fauna. The palace is completely consistent despite being built over so many decades; Facteur Cheval's energy and dedication to his endeavor is mind-blowing.

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