

August 18th, 2017

Dear Michelle Dean,

Thank you for reaching out to The High Museum. We are thrilled to hear you have acquired Laura Pope Forrester's home and museum and are beginning to explore preservation options for the site. The department of Folk and Self-Taught Art at The High Museum expresses our enthusiastic support of this effort and would like to provide some historical precedents that may help your case in this letter. The practice of artist environments has historic and important roots in and around the Southeast (especially in Georgia). Most notably, there are two sites that have been recently preserved which in their time served as important destinations for artists, enthusiasts, musicians, and curators for decades. They now attract visitors from all over the country:

- Pasaquan in Columbus, GA built by Eddie "St. EOM" Martins
<https://pasaquan.columbusstate.edu/>
- Paradise Garden in Summerville, GA built by Howard Finster
<http://paradisegardenfoundation.org/>
- Ave Maria Grotto in Cullman, AL
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ave_Maria_Grotto

Sadly, sometimes these environments do not survive to be preserved and are dismantled or destroyed often against the artist's will or after their death. This prevents their art from being enjoyed and understood in its original context and scrubs the communities of these unique, invaluable local treasures:

Artist Nellie Mae Rowe's home, which she called The Playhouse, in Vinings, GA was a local treasure and popular destination that was sadly destroyed shortly after her death

<https://www.judithalexander.org/about-nellie-mae-rowe/nellie-s-playhouse-video-parts-i-ii/>

Living Atlanta-based artist and musician, Lonnie Holley had his art environment condemned and destroyed by the Birmingham Airport Authority in 1997. He now works in Atlanta and has found enormous success in both the mainstream and Self-Taught Art Worlds including exhibitions at Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Mass MOCA, and inclusion in forthcoming exhibitions at The Met (New York) and The DeYoung Museum (San Francisco).

https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/26/magazine/lonnie-holley-the-insiders-outsider.html?_r=0

There are tens of other examples of important Folk and Self-Taught Art environments that have been sites of pilgrimage, tourism, praise, and collected by major art institutions such as The Smithsonian Museum of American Art. The Kohler Foundation in Wisconsin has been actively preserving and restoring many of these environments and ensuring their continued stewardship throughout the country. They have published a book about art environments and their preservation efforts which we encourage you to get a copy of:

<http://www.papress.com/html/product.details.dna?isbn=9781568987286>

I also encourage you to look at the Kohler Foundation's website to learn more about their history of preserving artist environments across the country: <http://www.kohlerfoundation.org/preservation/>

Best of luck in your endeavors,



Erin Nelson
Curatorial Assistant | Photography and Folk & Self-Taught Art