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Sublime Spaces and Visionary Worlds: Built Environments of Vernacular Artists

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The need to personalize our surroundings is a defining human characteristic. For some this need becomes a compulsion to transform their personal surroundings into works of art. The John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, has undertaken the mission to preserve these environments, which are presented for the first time in Sublime Spaces and Visionary Worlds. This colorful and inspiring book features the work of twenty-two vernacular artists whose locales, personal histories, and reasons for art-making vary widely but who all share a powerful connection to home-as-art environments. Featured projects range from art environments that remain intact, such as Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers in California, to sites lost over the years such as Emery Blagdon’s six hundred elaborate "Healing Machines," made of copper, aluminum, tinfoil, magnets, ribbons, farm machinery parts, painted light bulbs, beads, coffee can lids, and more.

Sublime Spaces and Visionary Worlds is the first book to explore these spectacularly offbeat spaces in detail. From the "Original Rhinestone Cowboy" Loy Bowlin’s wall-to-wall glitter-and-foil living room to the concrete bestiary of the "witch of Fox Point" Mary Nohl, each artist and project is described in detail through a wealth of visuals and text. Sublime Spaces and Visionary Worlds reminds us that our decorative choices tell the world not just what we like but who we are.

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