

Amy Dempsey. Financial Times. October 21, 2006

Make a trip of it

Destination art is **not** coming to a gallery near you. It is art that you must travel to in order to meet it in its own space and on its own terms. In the words of the pop artist Claes Oldenburg, it is art that "does something other than sit on its ass in a museum".

Much art from earlier eras was created *in situ*, from the cave paintings of Arnhem Land in Australia and Lascaux in France to Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling in Rome. But by the late 19th century the formal gallery reigned supreme, and artists have had to break with that tradition to create and show their work in a different context.

There are examples of this site-specific "destination art" all over the world: massive land and environmental works, extensive sculpture parks, architectural follies, site-specific installations and even whole towns turned over to the display of art. They were created by inspired amateurs and trained artists, by groups and lone individuals, impelled by a variety of motives. Some of this art requires a committed pilgrimage by those who want to encounter it - in deserts, forests and quarries, on farmland and mountains, in ghost towns and nature reserves. Other examples may be hidden gems in a city near you, such as George Frederick Watts' *Memorial to Heroic Sacrifice*, tucked away in a tiny park near St Paul's Cathedral in London, with its plaques by the Arts and Crafts ceramicist William de Morgan commemorating the heroism of ordinary people.

Among the earliest works is *Le Palais Ideal* in Hauterives, southern France, the creation of just one man, postman Ferdinand Cheval, who spent 33 years creating his masterpiece around the turn of the 20th century. The labyrinthine structure of turrets, staircases, corridors and grottoes, ornamented with sculpted figures and animals, became a tourist attraction in Cheval's lifetime and was embraced as a site of pilgrimage by the Surrealists in the 1930s.

Another example of outsider art is the *Wisconsin Concrete Park* bequeathed by Fred Smith, a retired lumberjack, who assembled more than 250 larger-than-life sculptures in concrete, decorated by broken crockery and glass on his woodland property in the 1950s and 1960s.

Most of the works from the first half of the 20th century are - like *Le Palais Ideal* - private initiatives. Meanwhile, private and public organisations have increasingly commissioned and funded art for spaces ranging from city squares to isolated hilltops.

Some of these works have become familiar and iconic, such as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and Antony Gormley's monumental figure *The Angel of the North*, which towers above the A1 at an old pit-head near Gateshead, England. Individual artists have achieved wide recognition for work which both celebrates and interacts with the environment, such as Andy Goldsworthy, or Ian Hamilton Finlay who, over four decades, combined poetry, sculpture, plants, trees and ponds in the creation of *Little Sparta*, a five-acre art garden in the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh.

Among the more ambitious projects currently under way is Canadian artist Claude Simard's reconstruction of his home village of Larouche in rural northern Quebec. He has transported and rebuilt 18 old buildings that faced demolition elsewhere - including a 16th-century mosque and two 18th-century churches from India. Conceived in 2000, Simard's 10-year plan aims to turn the whole village into a living, breathing, work of art - extraordinary in itself, but also a vehicle for social change in the hope that the village would become a "destination" for art travellers.

These photographs come from *Destination Art* by Amy Dempsey (Thames & Hudson £24.95). FT bookshop price: £19.96 plus p&p.