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## **Divine Disorder, Conserving the Chaos: Conference on the Conservation of Folk and Outsider Art**

15-16 February 2012

National Center for Preservation Technology and Training

### **Abstract**

#### **Planning to Stabilize, Document, Conserve and Interpret Howard Finster's Paradise Garden in Summerville, Georgia**

This presentation will illustrate Paradise Gardens in its hay day juxtaposed against current conditions and discuss the philosophical and physical challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the preservation and interpretation of this important visionary environment.

Howard Finster's life experiences in rural Alabama and Georgia converged in the 1960's and 70's in an inspired commitment to construct a Garden of Eden and to paint divinely directed folk art. Over the subsequent quarter of a century Finster produced over 46,000 art objects and created his visionary environment, Paradise Garden, which attracted world-wide interest, recognition and visitation. Paradise Garden is today a two acre site in the Pennville community in northwest Georgia containing 12 wood framed structures, a yet to be quantified number of art objects and constructions produced from a variety of materials and thousands of items collected by Finster.

Howard Finster's international recognition was propelled by associations with musical groups such as R.E.M., Talking Heads and Blackhawk, appearances on national television and coverage in the national and international press. Finster died in 2001 when his fantastic garden was already in a state of decline. While kept significantly intact by a private non-profit group until the fall of 2011, garden features have experienced substantial deterioration that if not arrested in the near future could be lost. The recent initiative to preserve Paradise Gardens is a serious effort linked to larger objectives for community economic development by a diverse group of stakeholders that bodes well for the conservation and interpretation of Paradise Garden and the legacy of Howard Finster for future generations.

**Presenter:**                    **Jack Pyburn, FAIA, Principal & Director**  
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## **Biography:**

Jack Pyburn is a historic preservation architect with experience that spans from the preservation of national landmarks to the conservation of important folk art sites over his 35 year career. Mr. Pyburn was raised in Shreveport, Louisiana, attended Texas A&M University and Washington University in St. Louis and worked for 10 years in St. Louis before coming to Atlanta in 1981. He had his own preservation architectural practice for 25 years before joining Lord Aeck Sargent as Preservation Studio director in 2007. He is a past chair of the AIA/Historic Resources Committee's Advisory Group and a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects. Mr. Pyburn has had the opportunity to work on several important folk art sites in Georgia including Pasaquan, Paradise Gardens and the, until recently, obscure Chesser Williams House.