

SPACES

SAVING + PRESERVING ARTS + CULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Madame la Ministre:

As the Director of a nonprofit organization recognized internationally as the largest and most complete archives on art environments, I document and advocate for these sites all over the world. To that end, I wish to bring your attention to the historic art environment known as the *Rochers de Rothéneuf* created by l'abbé Fouré. It is one of the most important art environments extant in all of France, and is renowned worldwide.

L'abbé Fouré's sculptures, created between 1895 and 1907 on the rocky coast east of Saint Malo, have significant and positive public ramifications on a variety of levels and have much to teach us. Yet although the work of nonacademic artists such as Fouré are beginning to be included in an expanded definition of art, these kinds of works still often remain in a more tenuous and often precarious position, subject to a variety of risks. Casual vandalism is always a potential problem, as is incremental damage from the weather or even from those who are enjoying visiting the site without realizing the negative effects of climbing on or near the sculptures; it is clear, in this case, that all of the above have combined to bring the need for conservation and preservation to a critical level. We urgently call on you to consider the patrimony of this site and do everything you can to support preservation efforts.

Art environments often challenge aesthetic and conceptual community values at the same time that they are beset by environmental degradations; this combination can be fatal for their ongoing preservation. Because art works of this nature cannot be hermetically stored and protected, they need continued vigilance and a concerted, long-term effort from a broad base of local community members—backed up by art and preservation professionals internationally—to ensure their survival. And while history is full of unfortunate narratives in which art environments were razed, there are also significant numbers of success stories in which preserved art environments have come to unite their communities, enhancing local identity while bringing widespread recognition from far beyond local borders. One need look no further than Hauterives, where the Palais Idéal of Facteur Cheval has become an economic engine for the village, bringing in thousands of visitors annually from all over the world

Surely in Saint Malo as well, renowned for the creativity of its citizens, the beauty of its environs, and its acknowledgement that art and artists are an important component of the entire French culture, efforts will be made to support, maintain, and preserve L'abbé Fouré's creations, rather than let them be destroyed as a result of neglect and abandon.

These sculptures have brought significant distinction to Saint Malo and France for over a century, and will continue to bring much more positive returns in the years to come if they are cared for properly. We urge you, therefore, to celebrate, rather than recoil from, the challenges this site may provoke, and work to support its preservation. In particular, we respectfully request that the *Rochers de Rothéneuf* be classified as a "monument historique" or a "jardin remarquable" as well as attributing to it the label of "Patrimoine du XXe siècle," thus

opening it up for funding and support. In so doing, you will not only bring positive acclaim to the region as we move toward a greater inclusivity in art historical definition, but you will enable future generations to share in the insouciance and the freedom of expression these works of art extol, and the lessons and joy they impart.

You can find further information about SPACES and about art environments in general on our website, www.spacesarchives.org. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful response to this urgent request for consideration; should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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