

Art West Film
Director: Ava Leigh Stewart
www.finsternfilm.com
artwestfilm[at]gmail.com

Filmmakers Resurrect Howard Finster's Paradise Garden

“Paradise Garden” is a feature documentary film that colorfully shows how art can thrive outside of museums and galleries in ordinary places and in everyday objects through the story of Howard Finster's legacy, which is that art is a powerful force for change.

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Art West Film founder Ava Leigh Stewart directed the film that captures Paradise Garden reborn from a place in peril to a viable economic development tool in northern Georgia. Producer Trey Lafave says this passionate story is about “art, religion, and rock ‘n’ roll.” From the project's inception to its recent premiere, it took the documentary crew two years to complete.

Art West Film got involved in April 2012 to assist in raising funds and awareness for Paradise Garden after years of vandalism and neglect. In June 2012, ArtPlace awarded a \$445,000 grant, which allowed for the start of rehabilitation. The Paradise Garden Foundation continued to raise funds from other grants and private funds and it became possible to complete the adaptive renovation, adding a museum space, all while Art West Film cameras were rolling.

Finster was an icon who influenced the music and album covers of R.E.M., The Talking Heads (which he always mistook for “The Peeping Heads”) B-52s, Blackhawk, and the artwork of Keith Haring and Steve Penley.

Talking Heads drummer Chris Frantz puts Finster in classical company, “We got him to do an album cover for ‘Little Creatures’ and I must say it is one of my favorite Talking Heads album covers. He is the Picasso of self-taught artists and maybe even better than Picasso.”

R.E.M. bassist Mike Mills is grateful for the man, “He was part of the discovery by the rest of the country that the South was not all inbred racist hicks.”

They were introduced in front of the cameras.

“I first met Howard Finster when we were shooting a video for our song, Radio Free Europe. Paradise Garden was a combination of going to a museum and just finding something on the ground that was beautiful,” he tells documentary filmmakers.

Finster’s inspired and uncomplicated vision sparked a movement that has attracted visitors from all over the world, quietly urging a creative force for change by taking artful messages to a new dimension. This film captures the spirit of his continuing legacy and takes his messages to a new audience. For the latest about the film or to download our press kit, visit the official website finsterfilm.com.