



ARTSGEORGIA
STATE OF THE ARTS™

STATE OF THE ARTS

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SPECIAL EDITION:

ST. EOM'S PASAQUAN

BY DOUG DELOACH



Oratory Pagoda



Pasaquayan Totem Front Wall



Paleolithic humans decorated cave interiors. Egyptian pharaohs decreed the construction of pyramids. The Mayans erected temples all over Mesoamerica. Hindus constructed Angkor Wat in what is now Cambodia. The Rapa Nui sunk Maori statues deep into the volcanic soil on Easter Island. The Incas carved Machu Picchu into an 8,000-foot high Peruvian mountain ridge.

People living in Marion County in southwest Georgia, USA, near the town of Buena Vista, which is about 30 miles southeast of Columbus and the Alabama border, have Pasaquan in their proverbial backyard. Pasaquan is a fantastically modified home and environs, a nearly indescribable and quite incredible art environment conceived, designed and constructed by Eddie Owens Martin with minimal outside help over a period of thirty years.



ST. EOM'S PASAQUAN

“I built this place to have something to identify with, ‘cause there’s nothin’ I see in this society that I identify with or desire to emulate. Here I can be in my own world with my temples and designs, and the spirit of God.”

— St. EOM (Eddie Owens Martin) speaking with Tom Patterson



St. EOM (Eddie Owens Martin)

“Pasaquan is a real homemade marvel in the same league with the most famous architectural works by self-taught ‘outsider artists,’” according to arts writer and curator Tom Patterson, author of the gripping as-told-to biography of Martin, *St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan*. The “league” Patterson mentions includes Simon Rodia’s Watts Towers in Los Angeles, S. P. Dinsmoor’s Garden of Eden in Kansas, Ferdinand Cheval’s Palace Ideal in rural France, and Howard Finster’s Paradise Garden in Summerville, Georgia. While a comparison with globally acknowledged epochal art and architectural sites, such as Angkor Wat and Machu Picchu, is offered mostly for jocular effect, Pasaquan is unquestionably a serious work of modest, yet monumental proportions.

For many years, Pasaquan faced an uncertain future. Despite the best efforts of concerned locals and an organization

dedicated to preserving the site, a dearth of resources left Pasaquan exposed to the deteriorative impact of wind, rain, sun, termites and other hazards. Its long-term survival was in jeopardy.

In 2014, a savior appeared in the Kohler Foundation, a Wisconsin-based philanthropic organization, specializing in the preservation of art environments and collections. Two years later, with the last daub of concrete smoothed over, the last piece of sculpture, jewelry, objet d’art and bric-a-brac repaired and painted, and the last wall, roof and walkway meticulously refurbished to original splendor, a grand celebration on October 22nd will mark the official re-opening of St. EOM’s Pasaquan. The public is invited to make the trek to Buena Vista. On-site festivities include tours of the house and grounds with live music featuring Bruce Hampton and his most recently gathered band of merry pranksters, among others.

WHO HE WAS

Born in 1908, Martin was one of the seven progeny of a cruel sharecropper and an empathetic mother. The family farmed on a small parcel of land in Glen Alta, a tiny, no longer extant, railroad stop community. As an alternatively wired, artistically inclined homosexual, Martin did not easily maneuver through his childhood and young adolescent years. At age 14, he ran away from home, eventually winding up on the streets of New York during the Roaring Twenties.

In 1935, several years after his father had passed away, Martin was back home in Georgia for a brief visit when he fell ill with a prolonged severe fever. In his delirious state, Martin claimed he was visited by a giant spiritual being who proposed a path to healthful recovery and enlightenment. Subsequent visitations, which occurred after he returned to New York, prompted Martin to declare his new identity,



Main Entrance to Pasaquan

St. EOM. Pronounced ohm (with a silent “e”), St. EOM was the chosen emissary of an alien race called the Pasaquayans who advocated for a peaceful world in which human beings lived in harmony with nature, seeking truth through the practice of certain rituals. The term, “Pasaquan,” is derived from a combination of Spanish and Asian words, which roughly translates into “bringing the past and future together.”

In 1957, after decades of more bohemian roustabouting and scrambling to survive in New York City, St. EOM returned to Marion County, resettling in the house near Buena (pronounced byoon-a) Vista on seven acres of densely pined and thicketed outland, bequeathed to the Martin children by their mother when she died in 1950. Within a year of her death, St. EOM began creating Pasaquan and never stopped working on the paradisiacal enclave until the day he took his life in 1986 at age 78.

THE VISIONARY

“When people ask me how to categorize St. EOM as an artist, it’s easy but not really accurate to say he was a ‘folk artist,’” says Fred C. Fussell, former (and founding) director of the Pasaquan Preservation Society, a private non-profit corporation, established soon after Martin’s death.

“I’ve also never been fond of the term ‘outsider’ art,” says Fussell, a resident of Buena Vista who serves as Director of the Chattahoochee Folklife Project and who remains very much involved with chronicling, preserving and proselytizing on behalf St. EOM and his work. “I prefer referring to Eddie Martin and his work as ‘visionary.’ Essentially, everything he did was based on a series of personal visions he experienced, which he described very explicitly in Tom’s book and in other interviews.”

Many locals perceived St. EOM as a combination of artist, oracle, charlatan and town kook. The sharing of fantastic myths and strange tales rendered his character palatable to his somewhat isolated, rural community. Many residents had a hard enough time conceiving of, much less comprehending, the motivation and inspiration that compelled Martin to dress in brightly colored, flowing robes and capes; pile his unshorn hair atop his head; and talk in a dialect that was a mongrel mix of South Georgia hayseed, Harlem hep cat, and psychedelic New Ager.

“The best part of this job has been hearing myths from different people,” says Michael McFalls, Associate Professor of Art at CSU, who served as university liaison during the preservation project and is now charged with ongoing maintenance and operation of the historic site and championing the significance of Pasaquan to his fellow earthlings.



Meditation Room Well House Pagoda

“Rumors swirled around devil dogs and demons at Pasaquan,” McFalls says, noting that Martin did, in fact, have two pet German shepherds, Boo and Nina, who were protective of their benefactor and territory. “One college student who was with a group visiting Pasaquan said he and his friends from high school used to come out here at night and see how long someone could stand inside the gate. The one who stood there the longest was considered the bravest.”

For his part, St. EOM usually welcomed and sometimes fueled the persistence of his personal mythology because it served as a protective shield and provided evidence of metaphysical powers. He could charm snakes and herd cats. He could predict the future. He could predict your future.

“The first time I visited Eddie, he was giving séances, exorcisms, and psychic readings,” recalls the iconoclastic Atlanta-based musician and actor Bruce Hampton. “There were fifty cars lined up in front of the place. I saw people from Iowa waiting to have their fortunes told. There was a car-full of folks from St. Louis who drove down to get lottery numbers.”



Dance Circle Below Well House Pagoda



Drone View of Pasaquan



Interior of Oratory Pagoda

Hampton is perhaps best known as the leader of numerous progressive jazz/rock fusion bands including the Aquarium Rescue Unit, Fiji Mariners and Madrid Express. He gave voice to a potted shrubbery in a 1998 episode of the Cartoon Network's *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*. His most memorable cinematic role was Morris, the mad poet and band manager in Billy Bob Thornton's 1996 film, *Sling Blade*.

A significant portion of the funds to construct Pasaquan came from St. EOM's fortune-telling trade, which he had honed to a fine art in New York. "He could see through anybody," remarks Hampton. "He could walk into a room and immediately tell you everything about the situation." An errant, willful soul with a wild imagination, transplanted by choice from the

hardscrabble southern backwoods to the northern territory's densest concrete jungle, the young, resourceful Martin quickly learned how to shape-shift his way through whatever circumstances were presented to him. In Patterson's book, Martin unabashedly describes doing what it took to survive including bartering his body on the street, escorting drag queens and selling pot, a transgression for which he eventually did a stint in a federal narcotics prison in Lexington, Kentucky. He heard Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Billie Holiday and Thelonious Monk, not on the radio or a record player, but performing downstairs underneath the room where he ran poker games or jamming next door to the nightclub where he waited tables. "Eddie was about the most unique character I'd ever met at the time," states

Hampton who made the first of many pilgrimages to Pasaquan in 1968. "I put him in the same category as Moon Dog and Sun Ra — they're all mystics on the same plateau and from the same generation."

Martin never made a lot of money, but he knew how to splurge and when to save a dollar. He occasionally used, but never trusted, banks. After he died, rumor has it, tens of thousands of dollars were found in his bedroom mattress, which were used to pay for his funeral and settle finances.

"He always said, 'If there is no past, there is no problem and the future is the crux,'" Hampton says. "He said he was from 200 years in the future and had never been in the past. This was his second incarnation."



Chimney of Main House with Pasaquayan



Oratory-Exterior Back Wall

WHAT IT IS

Despite the notion that St. EOM had never visited the past, in New York Eddie Owens Martin spent a considerable amount of time in art museums and galleries, frequently visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Natural History, studying cultural history. He was fascinated by the art of Southwest Native American, Aztec, Mayan, Polynesian, African, Indian and mythical cultures. He was particularly enthralled by a theoretical Shangri-La akin to Atlantis called the “lost world of Mu,” popularized by James Churchward in the 1920s and ‘30s. All of these influences are vividly manifested in Pasaquan.

“The [Pasaquan] site itself...is just the first part of the immense amount of work that [Martin] created,” writes Victoria Lauren Cantrell in a study of Pasaquan’s symbolism, part of her master’s thesis at Columbus State University. “He spent his first twenty to thirty years as an artist creating textiles, drawings, paintings, jewelry, and written works that exemplify this same influence of non-Western culture. Essentially, when looking at his early work, one encounters an outline or even a plan of what was to occur at the site later on. For St. EOM, Pasaquan became a tangible reality to this conceptual plane of existence that had been brewing for several decades.”

Spread over slightly more than two acres, the centerpiece of the Pasaquan compound is an expanded single-story frame house originally constructed in 1885. The house contains countless murals and paintings, sculptures, and other artifacts fashioned by Martin’s hands. A carport with second-story storage extends from the house. Three pagoda-style buildings are roughly situated at corners. A large, approximately 30-foot diameter, circular sand pit is connected to the largest pagoda by a short curving sidewalk and a flight of stairs sweeping up to a second-story landing. The major structures are casually enclosed and loosely conjoined by hundreds of feet of colorfully ornamented concrete masonry walls.

Interior and exterior surfaces of every structure are painted in brightly contrasting tropical colors, that pop from whitewashed and dark-hued backgrounds like cartoon landscapes. Adorning the surfaces are faces, figures and recognizable objects, abstract designs, and vaguely religious iconography. The mix is simultaneously wacky and engaging: lightning bolts, flying saucers, human genitalia, sunbursts and moon crescents, crosses and Buddha eyes, bamboo forests, flower petals, wave curls and mountain peaks.

Inside the house, most floors are covered in checkerboard or unusually patterned, color-contrasted linoleum tile. Some walls incorporate bas-relief and embossed nude and clothed figures; some are graced with the Taiji (yin-yang) symbol, others with dizzyingly colorful circular mandalas. In one of the larger “meditation rooms,” on a curved panoramic wall, is a mural depicting the Pasaquan muses of poetry, music and art. On another wall, Martin painted figures wearing Pasaquayan “power suits,” which endow the wearer with the power of levitation.

Outside, imposing yet welcoming totem figures are placed at strategic points along three-foot high, six-inch thick concrete walls, capped by carved undulating snakes serving as handrails. Other totems stand guard along the taller (six-foot high), thicker, outer walls. Roofs, entranceways, doors and sections of interior trim are covered by hand-dapped sheets of thin tin (similar to “flashing,” the roofing material), cut in circles and half-circles and tacked on with roofing nails. The rows of shiny, uniform scallops produce a highly reflective, shimmering effect like a metallic cake frosting.



Before and After Restoration



Propane Shed Pagoda – Back of Site

RESTORATION

The restoration of Pasaquan was the largest art environment preservation projects ever launched by the Kohler Foundation. John Salhus from Parma Conservation in Chicago headed up the paint conservation effort. Shane Winter from International Artifacts in Houston supervised the restoration of concrete walls and sculptural forms. Local trade workers under the general contractor T.G. Gregory were responsible for structural refurbishing and restoring functionality to the house and outlying buildings. Dozens of Columbus State University interns assisted conservators along the way and continue to document and archive an enormous amount of art works (including paintings and drawings) and artifacts (including clothes, curtains and jewelry) handcrafted by Martin.

“Folk artists use whatever materials they have on hand and build in whatever way

they know how, which might not be ‘to code,’” says Erika Nelson, an art conservator, educator and working artist based in Lucas, Kansas. “When you’re restoring a folk art environment, you have to use a lot of creative problem-solving because you run into things that break or deteriorate in ways nobody ever expected.”

Nelson, who previously worked on other Kohler preservation projects, states that most conservators are guided by the operating premise, “You restore to the spirit of the person who made it, maintaining artistic integrity and doing the least wrong.” When different materials are required to correct a failure or refurbish a dilapidated structure or object, the restorer takes pains to minimize the appearance of intervention. “All of us are committed to the idea that you do the work so nobody can tell you did it,” Nelson notes with casual pride.



Masonry Wall with Decoration



Kitchen with Pasaquayans in Levitation Suits



Professor Michael McFalls with Columbus State University Interns

Few people in the preservation industry are willing to tackle a folk art site, according to Nelson, "Because it's 'weird' and the conditions are usually gross and grubby. It's nothing like doing beautiful Victorian house preservation." At one point during the Pasaquan preservation, an outside contractor, who was helping the regular construction crew rebuild a well house on the property, insisted on using a square and level to ensure the accuracy of his work. Nelson recounts a dialogue, which occurred on more than one occasion:

"I can't get anything to line up."

"In response, one of us would say, 'Put away the square and level. Just line it up and nail it on.'"

"But what if it's not square?"

"Don't worry; it's gonna look great."

Almost exclusively, Martin used standard house paint purchased from the local hardware store in Buena Vista where contemporary visitors can now find cans discarded by the town's eccentric son prominently displayed on the shelves. In some cases, preservationists discovered, Martin used paints that did not contain a binder. "They were pure distilled pigment, which easily rubs off of any surface," Salhus says.

For repainting concrete surfaces, the preservation team used a special weatherproof paint. According to the manufacturer, the siloxane-based product exhibits superior resistance to water, airborne dust and dirt, salt, acid rain, efflorescence, alkali, and freeze and thaw damage. "The paint and concrete bond together to form a top coat, which is durable and breathes, passing as much as 80 percent of the moisture in and out as needed," says Salhus.

During our visit to Pasaquan in August, percussive clicking cicadas provide counterpoint to an otherwise languid late summer soundtrack. Pasaquan stands resplendent in the partly sunny morning's light as Patterson contemplates his first return to the property since the restoration.

"These figures are amazing and so typical of Eddie's vision," Patterson says, pointing to a series of male and female forms. Some are sitting in the lotus position, some are dancing. Some stare directly at the viewer, eyes affixed in meditational repose. Some are nude, some are clothed. All were originally incised into the concrete walls with a trowel by Martin, and then covered with the artist's signature glossy house paint. During the preservation, workers were careful not to let paint drip into the incisions.

Patterson stops at a full-bodied female figure, which stands out from the rest of her colorful counterparts, unpainted and situated on a raw section of concrete. "That had to be somebody important, maybe his mother," says Patterson who

first met Martin almost 40 years ago. "Most of these images are based on street hustlers Eddie knew when he was in New York and friends he made during his travels." Pointing to figurehead with a manic expression, Patterson explains, "I think this one is a biker who was here a few times. Eddie could walk around and name all these people: 'Oh, there's Tilly the Toiler and here's Stella Dallas.'"

Pausing for a moment, he continues, "It's wonderful how Eddie would make these functional structures and then transform them into exquisite works of art."

Arguably the largest manifestation of visionary art in late twentieth century American culture, Pasaquan is a cogently expressive, terrestrial habitation of otherworldly yearning and chimerical content. Spawnd by a misfit artist's utopian fever dreams, Pasaquan represents the personal made epochal.

Based in Atlanta, Georgia, Doug DeLoach has been writing about performing and static arts since the early 1980s. In addition to ArtsGeorgia, he is a regular contributor to ArtsATL.com, Creative Loafing, Songlines and Georgia Music.



Tom Patterson and Doug DeLoach, August 2016

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SAVE THE DATE
 Pasaquan Grand Opening
 Saturday, Oct. 22
 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY PASAQUAN

PASAQUAN

Opening celebration: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. October 22, 2016. Free. Park in downtown Buena Vista and catch a free shuttle.

Visiting hours, after October 22: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays (closed in December and July).

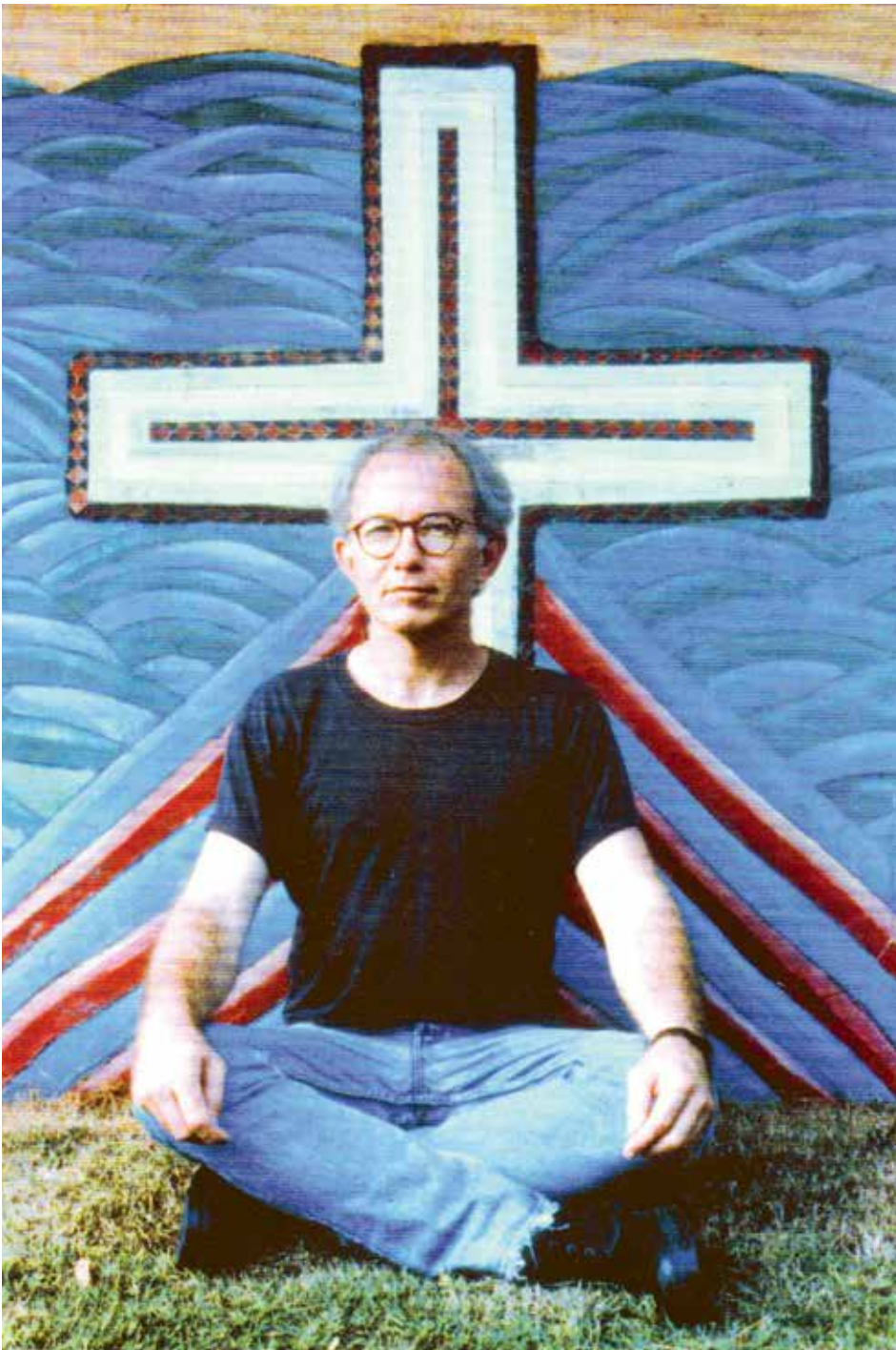
Suggested contribution: \$5, \$3 seniors, \$2 students. **Phone:** 706.507.8306, art.columbusstate.edu/pasaquan.php, pasaquan.blogspot.com

Directions: From the Buena Vista town square drive north 1.4 miles on Ga. 41, then take a slight left onto Ga. 137. Go west 4.4 miles and turn right onto Eddie Martin Road. Drive 0.4 miles north to 238 Eddie Martin Road. Pasaquan will appear brightly on your right.



VISION MADE REAL

TOM PATTERSON AT PASAQUAN



When I first met him in 1980, St. EOM (Eddie Owens Martin) was already a well-known Georgia character, typically portrayed in regional news articles as a flamboyantly eccentric, self-advertised psychic who lived in an outrageously decorated rural compound somewhere southeast of Columbus. While that characterization was accurate as far as it went, it overlooked what to me seemed most obvious and interesting about Martin and his environment: this man was a brilliant artist who had created a remarkable, world-class masterpiece of visionary architecture, “Pasaquan,” as he called it.

Why, I wondered, was this marvel evidently so little-known and unheralded among my art-world friends in Atlanta where I then lived and in the larger world? To say that St. EOM and his phantasmagoric wonderland captured my imagination is understatement. Despite his intense skepticism about outsiders and their intentions, I managed to befriend him; and I soon conducted my first interview with him, ostensibly for an article in *Brown’s Guide to Georgia* magazine where I was a staff writer. I also served as an intermediary in securing a \$5,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to help finance continued work on Pasaquan, an effort initiated by North Carolina poet and publisher Jonathan Williams who made that first visit with me.

Tom Patterson – Front Wall at Pasaquan 1993



Over the next several years, I returned countless times, often with artists and other interested friends in tow. The place became a kind of home-away-from-home for me as I extended our interview sessions for a book he asked me to help him write. The resulting as-told-to autobiography eventually formed the core of *St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan*, my color-illustrated, 260-page book published by Williams' Jargon Society press in 1987. By that time I had relocated to North Carolina, where I still live. No matter how many times I wandered the grounds and explored the interior spaces at Pasaquan, the initial thrill of seeing it never wore off. Every visit I discovered details and aspects of this remarkable built environment that I'd somehow previously missed.

I had just completed the manuscript when, in April 1986, Martin shocked his neighbors and friends by taking his life, an irretrievable loss to say the least. Pasaquan's fate was uncertain for years after his suicide, although his will named the local Marion County Historical Society as heir. Lacking the resources to care for the site, that group offered it to the Columbus Museum of Arts and Sciences in nearby Columbus, which declined due to its potential financial burden. Martin also left personal funds amounting to about \$90,000, eventually depleted through payment of back taxes and penalties, ongoing utility bills, a part-time caretaker's fee, and an executor's fee paid to Martin's former attorney.

Soon after inheriting the property, the historical society formed an ancillary organization to oversee it, the Pasaquan Preservation Society. Credit for the site's continued survival goes largely to the latter group, incorporated as a separate non-profit by the early 1990s. The PPS did what it could to care for and promote the site; and in 2003 became its sole owner through a property transfer from the historical society. The PPS financed work on the buildings and grounds with grants, contributions and membership fees, but these funds were never sufficient to prevent Pasaquan's continued deterioration.

Fortunately, three years ago the Wisconsin-based Kohler Foundation focused its attention on the site. Internationally known for its success in preserving American art environments, vernacular architecture, and entire bodies of work created by self-taught artists, the foundation agreed to pay for and oversee a full-scale restoration of *St. EOM's* visionary masterpiece. It would prove to be the foundation's largest preservation project ever to date. After several years of absence, I returned to Pasaquan in the spring 2014, just as the foundation was beginning work. Its hand-picked team of national experts hired local craftsmen, solicited additional volunteer assistants, and devoted the next two and a half years to the project. The restoration was almost complete when I finally made it back to Pasaquan this summer.

Having followed the project through photographs and brief updates posted on social media, I thought I knew roughly what to expect when I visited the site in August with my friend and colleague Doug DeLoach. I was wrong. Fred Fussell, who met us on arrival, led us on a comprehensive tour, and pointed out key details of the completed work. The rest, especially the meticulously thorough repainting of the walls and built-in sculptural features, was obvious to me, as it would have been to anyone who had seen Pasaquan in various pre-restoration stages. I was stunned and amazed. For me, it was a dream come true, a feeling shared with many other longtime Pasaquan supporters. *St. EOM*, a man who'd seen it all, was not easily surprised or impressed, but if he were still on the scene to witness it himself, even he would likely be shaking his head in delighted disbelief.

It's the beginning of a new era for Pasaquan. Thanks to the Pasaquan Preservation Society, the Kohler Foundation, and the property's new owner-to-be, Columbus State University, *St. EOM's* creative legacy appears secured for generations to come.





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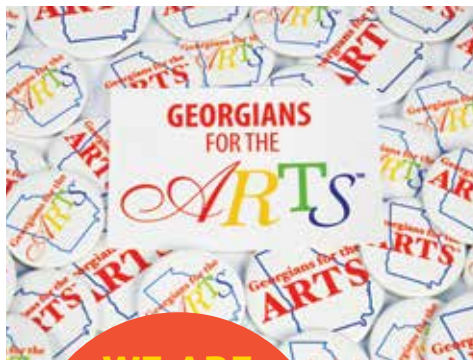
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**GEORGIANS FOR THE ARTS
MONTH — OCTOBER 2016**

ArtsGeorgia continues Georgians for the Arts Month. In October, we are all Georgians for the Arts. Cuts to the state's arts budget should be restored to support the arts, arts education and to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Georgia Council for the Arts in 2018.

What can you do? Sign a Petition or call the Governor, your Senator or House member requesting Georgia invest in the arts. For Georgians for the Arts buttons & stickers email: artsga@artsgeorgia.net