



CORNUDAS MOUNTAIN FOUNDATION

The Hill of James Magee

*“... magnificent achievement comparable in quality to Smithson’s Spiral Jetty,  
Heizer’s Complex I and Complex II, Turrell’s Roden Crater and De Maria’s Lightning Field.”*

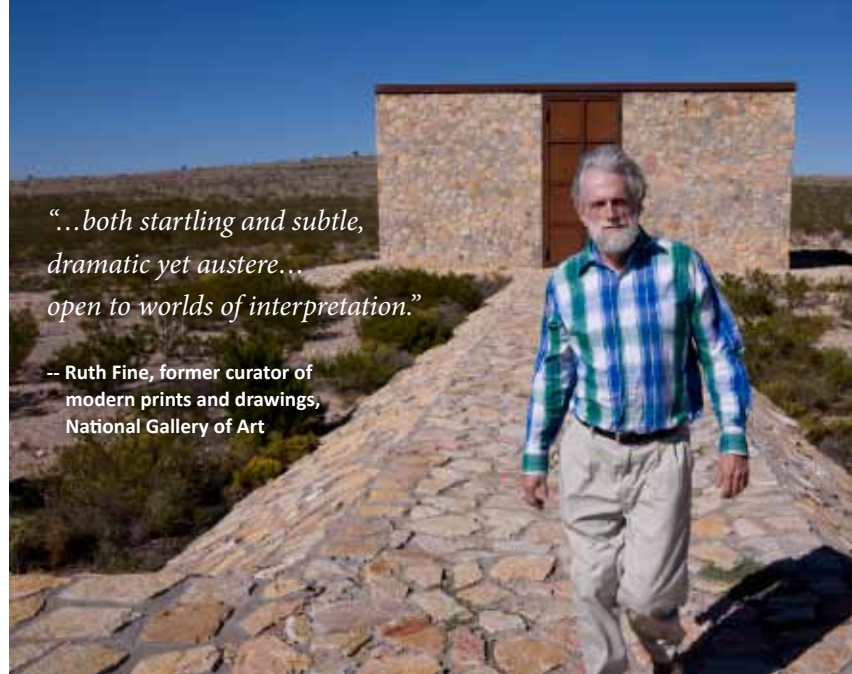
*-- Walter Hopps, 20th Century Curator, The Menil Collection*



Silence underlies the Hill, which is still in the delicate process of self-discovery. In order for others to understand the Hill and its relationship to the larger world as I have understood it, they should think contrarily: whereas the world about us clamors for more and more attention, the Hill seeks to remain as reposed as a country cemetery (indeed, the ashes of several people are scattered over its grounds); and whereas success is often defined as the greatest number of anything, the Hill seeks to interface with the few as intimately as possible at any given time.

The Hill was not originally conceived as a “work of art” nor should it be thought of as merely a configuration of four buildings holding artwork within. Instead the Hill in its entirety, as I believe it to be, is one single sculpture or spiritual ornament laid out in the form of a cross and configured with doors opening up into doors opening up into doors opening up into doors, reflecting, looking back on it now, intermittent Cistercian and Quaker experiences during an earlier part of my adult life, when I found myself haplessly entangled between those self-enriching moments on the New York piers and bars and the short-lived, albeit serious thought at the time of converting to Catholicism.

I permanently moved to El Paso in the fall of 1980 to begin the construction of the Hill, having discovered West Texas while working on oil rigs during the winter of 1979-80. As the decade of the 1970’s wore on, I increasingly had felt the need to break free from the confines of my Catskill chicken coop and nearby New York City and to actually begin constructing, one step at a time, a home for the floor piece and future pieces in the form of a large cross, not an earthen sculpture, as such, but a more traditional structure placed upon the land. Although this move to Texas had the regrettable affect at the time of cutting me off from my New York



*“...both startling and subtle,  
dramatic yet austere...  
open to worlds of interpretation.”*


**– Ruth Fine, former curator of  
modern prints and drawings,  
National Gallery of Art**

Catholic Worker and Quaker friends and from my own involvement at the United Nations, I nonetheless felt relief, once situated in El Paso, that I had now only one real ambition before me, that being the creation of the Hill.

I began the Hill in earnest in 1981, when I bought my first 100 acres in Cornudas, Texas, and started construction on the first of four buildings. But in someways the Hill actually began a number of years earlier outside of Woodridge, New York, in a converted chicken coop, where in

*continued...*



A photograph of a building with a wall made of irregular, light-colored stones. A large window with a dark frame is visible on the left side of the wall. The sky is clear and blue.

1977 I finished a large portion of the “floor piece”, which is now permanently installed in the east or Third Building; and yet having said that, I probably should go back even further to 1972, when, upon returning from Paris, I finished a three-arm, stainless steel crucifix in a junkyard on Staten Island, which two years earlier I had first doodled in the margins of my textbook during a not so interesting law school lecture; and it is this same crucifix, which ultimately will be installed in the Fourth Building, that has dogged me ever since.

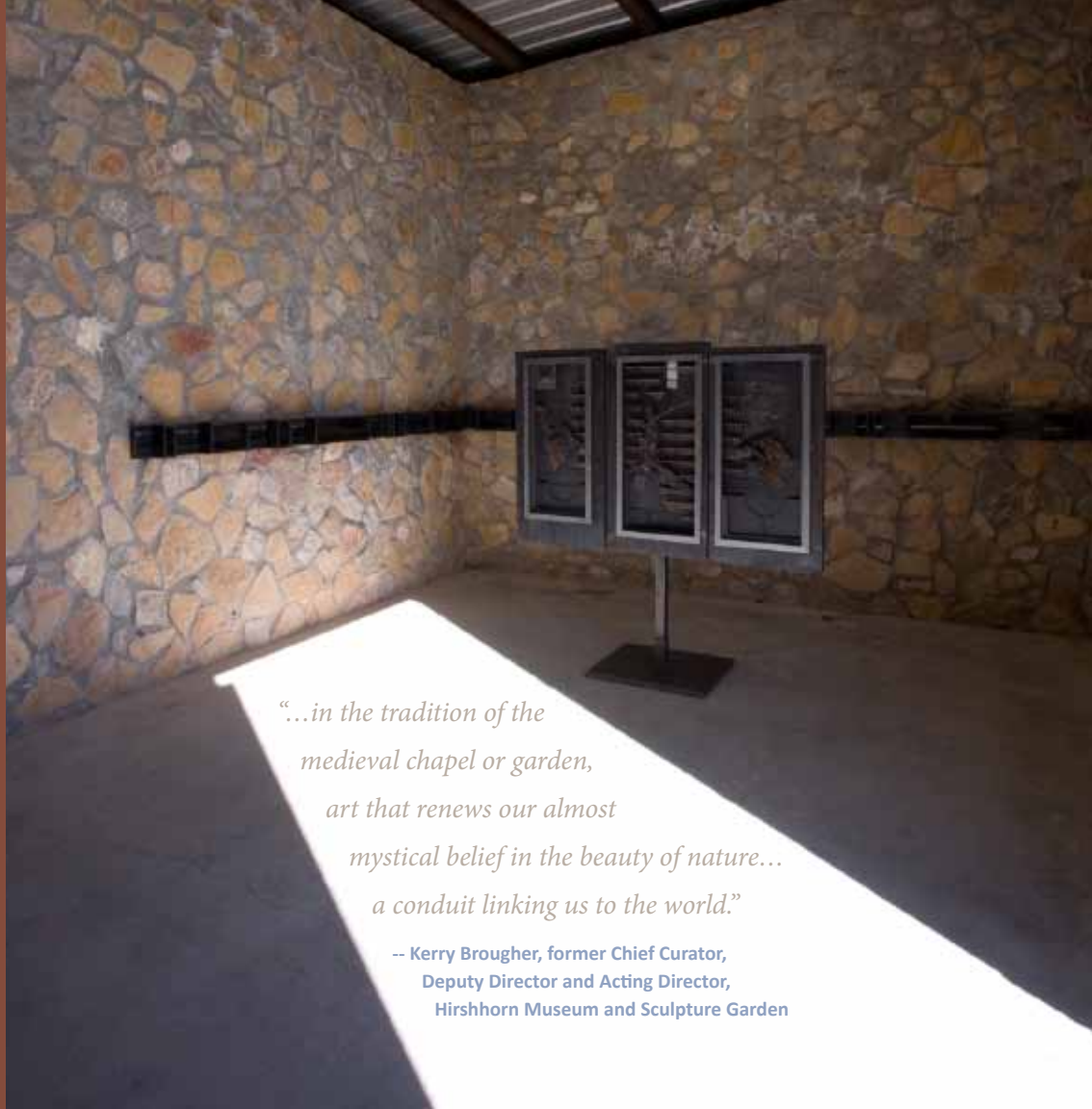
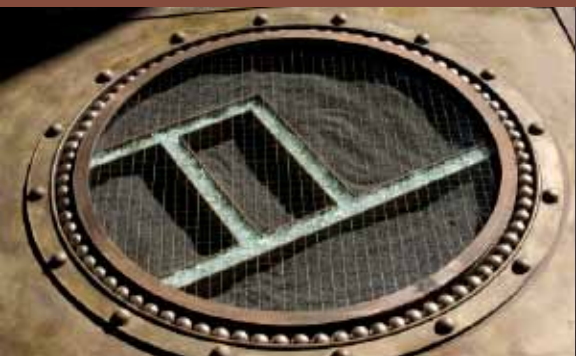
Since 1981, I have slowly acquired well over 2000 acres for the site, built a complex of stone buildings and walkways using over 250 twelve-ton truckloads of rock, and completed the interiors of three of the four buildings. Yet before me still lies the completion of the interior of the fourth building, the most ambitious undertaking to date, and the construction of up to 56 stone columns, some of which will be over three stories high, which will ultimately surround the complex in a thousand foot diameter circle.

It is, of course, impossible to predict the future. In spite of countless efforts made by thoughtful men and women of every era desiring only that their well intended instructions be followed after their deaths, these instructions are invariably and ultimately modified or ignored by courts of law, unforeseen new paradigms, or by the sheer weight of time, itself.

The Hill is but a small utterance made by one man living at a particular moment in a particular place. Given the fragility of our every word and the silence that will envelop us all, I would only hope that the Hill, as I have envisioned its existence and use, would continue to be of some service or consolation to my family, my friends and my community for at least a short while after my passing.

-- James Magee





*"...in the tradition of the  
medieval chapel or garden,  
art that renews our almost  
mystical belief in the beauty of nature...  
a conduit linking us to the world."*

**-- Kerry Brougher, former Chief Curator,  
Deputy Director and Acting Director,  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden**





*"...a masterpiece...impressive, indeed, extraordinary...a map of the imagination."*

*-- Willard Spiegelman, Wall Street Journal*



*“... an extremely American work...reducing articulate art historians to murmuring wonder... a work capable of making adults weep and begetting terror...whose meaning is too abstract to grasp — a sacred space that extends particularity straight to the imagination.”*

*-- Pamela Petro, Granta*



*“...with all the power of a major masterpiece by Goya, Van Gogh, or Picasso...  
at a level not seen in Texas Art for more than a generation — and perhaps ever.”*

— Dr. Richard Brettell, Margaret M. McDermott Distinguished Chair of Art and Aesthetic Studies and Edith O’Donnell Distinguished Chair, The University of Texas at Dallas

**CORNUDAS MOUNTAIN FOUNDATION**

**The Hill of James Magee**

**1916 Myrtle Street | El Paso, Texas 79901**

**[www.mageehill.org](http://www.mageehill.org)**

**Photography by Tom Jenkins**

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