

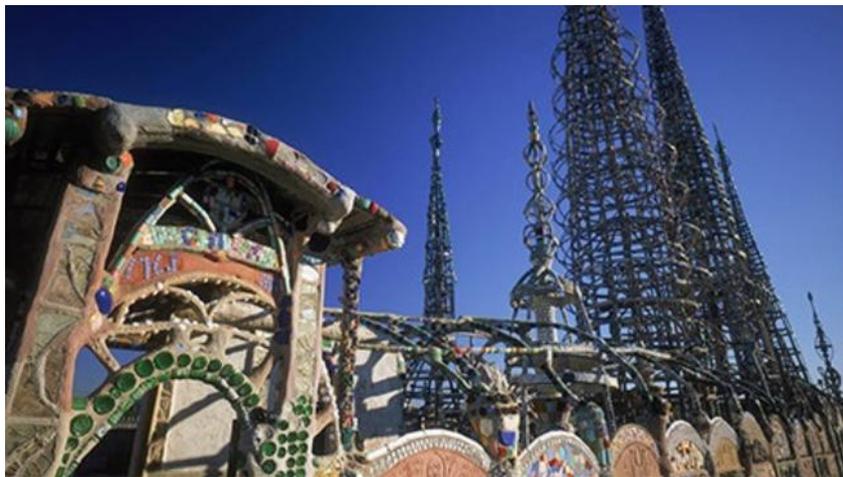


WATTS TOWERS: UNESCO DESIGNATION SOUGHT

Simon Rodia's masterpiece may one day receive a very special designation.

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UNESCO World Heritage Sites, those places deemed to possess "Outstanding Universal Value" by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Committee, truly dot the globe in a grand sweep, a sweep that includes a host of spectacular destinations meant to last the ages.

Angkor in Cambodia is on the list, as is Chartres Cathedral in France. And in California? Yosemite National Park and Redwoods National Park are the two natural sites designated as World Heritage Sites.

A third Golden State treasure, a cultural site, may soon join the parks on this hallowed, protections-aplenty list: the Watts Towers.

Simon Rodia carefully created the towers, tile-by-tile, for 33 years, beginning in 1921. And while "towers" are in the very name, the whimsical and intricate creations both soar up and span dramatically across a sizable lot. There is, in short, nothing quite like these magical and majestic artworks.

But the road to becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site isn't necessarily short, for any potential place, for there are typically a number of agencies and people involved.

The Cultural Resources Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation made a request in April 2016 with the National Park Service's Office of Internal Affairs that Watts Towers be considered "for inclusion on the United States Tentative List" for the protected sites.

"In the letter, State Parks made the case that the property meets the requirements for authenticity, integrity, legal protection, and management that the World Heritage Convention needs for consideration of potential properties."

UNESCO will then be "formally" asked by the park service to review the request. The making of Watts Towers was a fantastical feat, a wonder of art and persistence, but that still didn't prevent talk of possible demolition in the past. Numerous passionate supporters and advocates have played a part in saving the Watts Towers, and securing its future; today it is a U.S. National Historic Landmark as well as a California Historical Landmark.

This loved-upon landmark is a place Southern Californians can see often, but September is a special month. Two long-running events, the Day of the Drum and the Simon Rodia Watts Towers Jazz Festival, traditionally happen in the early fall, and 2016 is no exception: Both will unfurl, with sound and heart, on Saturday, Sept. 24 and Sunday, Sept. 25.

Will one of the topics among visitors be the possibility of the towers becoming a World Heritage Site one day? It would surely be a huge development for one of LA's, and the planet's, most singular and soulful experiences.