



# COLUMBUS STATE


THE MAGAZINE OF COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS

SPRING 2016

**CSU ALUMNA  
SLAYS IN 'THE  
WALKING DEAD'**

**TOP CSU  
ALUMNI  
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**PASAQUAN**  
Inside CSU's newest  
cultural crown jewel







# Pasaquan

An indigenous-inspired jewel of CSU and the Deep South

BY CANDACE MORROW

PHOTOS BY TAMMA SMITH

**E**ach paint stroke and metal detailing resurrects the psychedelic fortress of totems, pagodas and barriers back to their brightest beginnings.

Precise handwork and preserving hearts have spent the past two years restoring the 60-year-old Georgia gem known as Pasaquan — a world-renowned visionary art site now part of Columbus State University (CSU).

“I’ve been working alongside art conservators on the structural repair of interior and exterior artwork,” said fine arts alumnus Charles Fowler, ’12, who has been assisting in restoration of the artistic property for a year and a half. “My favorite thing about Pasaquan is its relationship with the nearby town of Buena Vista. Judging from my interactions with the townsfolk, most of them have never been to the site but have grown up with the tall tales surrounding it.”

Nestled within rural Southwest Georgia’s “good view” town, the 7-acre weathered and religion-influenced relic has rejuvenated.

And it is regaining national attention for its whimsical beauty. At the start of the year, CNN dubbed Pasaquan as one of “16 intriguing things to see and do in the U.S. in 2016.”

“This CNN news just underscores all the hard work the Pasaquan Preservation Society, philanthropic organization Kohler Foundation and CSU alumni and current students have been doing at Pasaquan,” said Michael McFalls, associate professor of art at CSU overseeing the site and its programming. “Our students from the Art Department, Department of Communication, and Department of History and Geography continue to be involved in documentation,

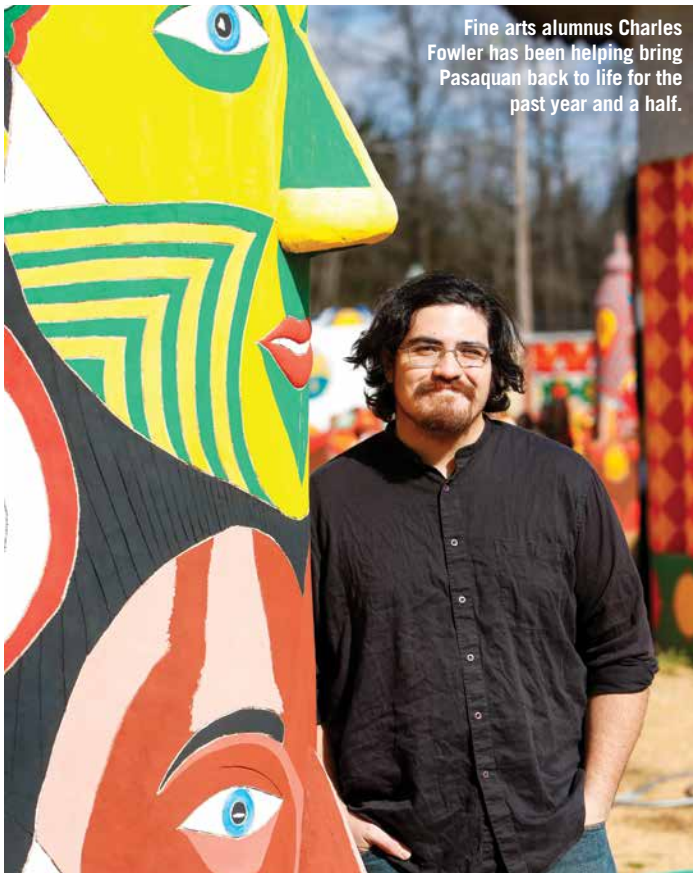
**“MY FAVORITE THING ABOUT PASAQUAN IS ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NEARBY TOWN OF BUENA VISTA. JUDGING FROM MY INTERACTIONS WITH THE TOWNSFOLK, MOST OF THEM HAVE NEVER BEEN TO THE SITE BUT HAVE GROWN UP WITH THE TALL TALES SURROUNDING IT.”**  
— CHARLES FOWLER, ’12



Pasaquan's restoration contributors: Ashley Colbert (intern), Hailey Garcia (intern), Ceallsach Crouch (alumna), Michael McFalls (CSU associate professor of art), Valerie Parker (intern), Charles Fowler (alumnus) and Steven Short (alumnus).



Fine arts alumnus Charles Fowler has been helping bring Pasaquan back to life for the past year and a half.



**Pasaquan features six structures, mandala murals and handcrafted walls.**

organization of archives, development of a marketing plan and assisting with the conservation process. Pasaquan has already become a true experiential, interdisciplinary learning environment.”

Pasaquan’s academic awakening has been featured on Georgia Public Broadcasting. Public Broadcasting Service also has documented Pasaquan creator, the late Eddie Owens Martin, on its online “Travelogue.”

### THE ARTIST

Martin became an international self-taught artist who created the art environment he named Pasaquan, meaning to “bring the past and future together.”

Developed during 1957, the folk-laden land features six major structures, mandala murals and hundreds of feet of handcrafted cement walls.

Before Pasaquan came into existence, the Buena Vista native had some artistic exploring to do. Martin left home at age 14.

He embarked on a hitchhiking adventure to Atlanta and Washington, D.C., before settling in the concrete jungle of New York. He survived the big city by working as a street hustler, bartender, gambler and drag queen. At age 37, he even gave fortunetelling a try.

By 1950, Martin packed up and headed back to Buena Vista where he continued to exercise his fortunetelling flair for pay.



Donning ravishing robes and feathered headdresses, Martin's persona clashed with his small-town society. However, his oracle occupation funded his vision to develop Pasaquan.

The cultural complex took shape on Martin's family farmland — lavishly fusing Africa, Pre-Columbian Mexico and fictional island Atlantis in design.

And with it, Martin changed his name to St. EOM, the guru of Pasaquan.

Despite his outward free spirit, St. EOM committed suicide during 1986, and Pasaquan started to fade — literally.

Aside from Pasaquan, St. EOM's work also has been featured at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Library of Congress and Smithsonian Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C.

In Georgia, his work joins collections at the Albany Museum of Art in Albany and High Museum of Art in Atlanta.

## THE ACADEMICS

Nearly 30 years after St. EOM's death, the Kohler Foundation became interested in bringing the crumbling keepsake back to life with CSU as an educational partner.

Pasaquan's restoration process initiated during 2014.

Since then, both current students and alumni have worked through some of Georgia's most humid and frigid conditions to repair, repaint and unearth its structures for public viewing.

"St. EOM created hundreds of artworks and studies throughout his lifetime in addition to Pasaquan," said senior studio art major Ashley Colbert. "For the past two months, I have been interning with the Columbus Museum and LaGrange exhibits to organize his work on paper inventory for set up later this spring. I'm learning the art of curating an exhibit, which is very tedious."

Alumna Lauren Cantrell has documented Pasaquan's rebirth from the project's start date.

"I spent an entire year working with Kohler Foundation to archive St. EOM's works of art and later his personal belongings while earning my bachelor's degree at CSU," said Cantrell, an art history major who graduated last year. "I'm still working on my research, carrying this experience into my master's thesis at Georgia State University. I'm studying self-taught and visionary artists. Pasaquan is a staple in the Southern community and has had a growing following of self-taught art historians throughout the world."



John Salhus with Parma Conservation of Chicago touching up interior artwork at Pasaquan.



Valerie Parker (intern), Hailey Garcia (intern) and Ceallsach Crouch (alumna) discussing the artistic community's architecture.



## THE ADVOCACY

The Pasaquan Preservation Society (PPS) has maintained the folk architectural site since 2003.

The society also has worked alongside CSU and Kohler on the revitalization project, which has become the largest art environment preservation initiatives Kohler has taken on.

The work includes object and painting conservation with conservators coming from International Artifacts (Houston) and Parma Conservation (Chicago).

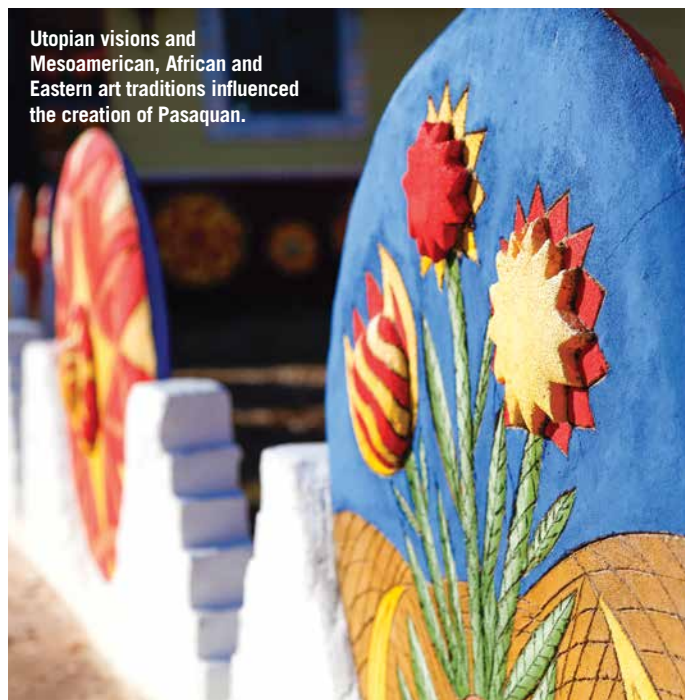
Local tradespeople under general contractor T.G. Gregory also have addressed structural concerns and functionality in Pasaquan's six buildings.

During 2015, Gov. Nathan Deal presented PPS with the Governor's Award for the Arts and Humanities for its efforts to help preserve Pasaquan. Currently, CSU Foundation owns the property. Kohler gifted the site to the university's foundation during December 2015.

CSU is priming Pasaquan to serve as a local attraction for hosting performances, retreats, tours, artistic workshops and various educational programs and activities.

Today, the quirky, artistic community joins an impressive group of new attractions and breathtaking locations across the nation.

Utopian visions and Mesoamerican, African and Eastern art traditions influenced the creation of Pasaquan.



Ruthie Rolfsmeier with Kohler putting the finishing details to an interior wall.





Pasaquan is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is considered among the most important visionary art environments in the United States.

Pasaquan stacks up against captivating places like Alaska's national parks; Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington; the Green Chile Cheeseburger Trail in New Mexico; and the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Los Angeles.

Renovations to the site are still in progress and slated for completion for public viewing by mid-May. A grand opening is scheduled during October.

"This site is unique because of its utopian message and use of imagery from non-Western art and philosophies," said Cantrell. "Studying the site and working on it has given me a deeper understanding of approaching art environments. It's in safe, caring hands."



## Partnering with Pasaquan

**PASAQUAN** is one of those have-to-see-to-believe cultural experiences. It is located at 238 Eddie Martin Road in Buena Vista, Georgia. Call 706-507-8306 or email Michael McFalls at [mcfalls\\_michael@ColumbusState.edu](mailto:mcfalls_michael@ColumbusState.edu) to learn more about ways to partner and participate at Pasaquan.



Go behind the scenes of CSU's psychedelic fortress at [YouTube.com/ColumbusStateU](https://www.youtube.com/ColumbusStateU)