

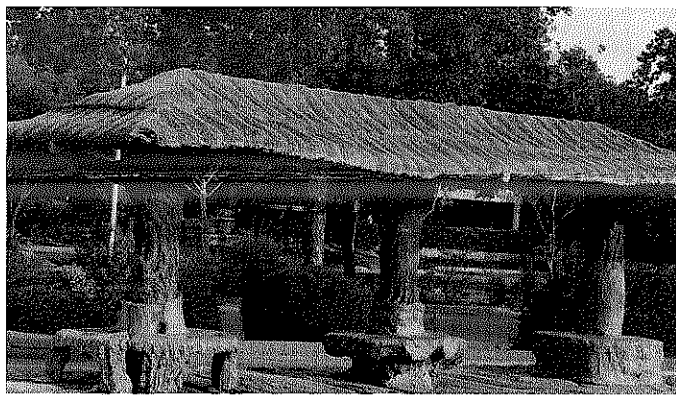
CARLOS CORTÉS, PALAPA (NEWELL AND CAMDEN).
PHOTO: PATSY PITTMAN LIGHT

TRABAJO RÚSTICO IN SAN ANTONIO

Trabajo rústico celebrates the artistic medium of creating shapes and surfaces in concrete of craggy rocks and lichen-covered, worm-eaten and rough tree bark. The technique (also known as *faux bois*) was invented in France by Joseph Monier, over 150 years ago and has spread across the world.

Gates, stair railings, benches, tables, and roofed shelters (known as *palapas*) are well-known forms of the genre seen around San Antonio. Visitors and local citizens encounter examples of the sculptures daily—many not aware that skilled artisans produced them.

San Antonio's first *trabajo rústico* artist, Dionicio Rodríguez, moved here from Mexico in the early 1920s. He developed his skill in Mexico City, working with cement contractor, Robles Gil, and is credited with the rock work and fountain at Lagos de Chapultepec. His early association with Dr. Aureliano Urrutia in creating sculptures for Urrutia's private park, Miraflores, led to commissions for San Antonio parks, Alamo Cement Company, and a succession of private clients. Rodríguez hired helpers, including Maximo Cortés, Sam Murray, and others, who learned the technique from him and would eventually establish their own independent businesses.



DIONICIO RODRÍGUEZ, ALAMO HEIGHTS TROLLEY STOP.
PHOTO: LAURIE LIGHT SAUNDERS, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS

Rodríguez's reputation spread by word of mouth, and he acquired jobs with clients around Texas and eventually in seven additional states. Projects in North Little Rock, Arkansas (Pugh Park) and Memphis, Tennessee (Memorial Park Cemetery) are some of his best-known works, and they are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, along with 15 additional sites,

including 9 in San Antonio. His creations continue to fascinate and astound onlookers, who are impressed with his exceptional talent in imitating shapes and surfaces from nature. Documentation of his life and work is published in Patsy Pittman Light's *Capturing Nature: The Cement Sculpture of Dionicio Rodríguez* (Texas A&M University Press, 2008).



DIONICIO RODRÍGUEZ, HOLLOW TREE HOUSE,
BRACKENRIDGE PARK.
PHOTO: BOB PARVIN, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESS

The *trabajo rústico* tradition did not fade away with Rodríguez's death in 1955. Maximo Cortés created significant work in San Antonio, and his son Carlos Cortés, continues the tradition of enriching our community with the work he produces in his San Antonio studio. A small group of artisans work in the genre around the U.S.

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