

THE ETERNAL ROADTRIP

THE ART of WARREN ANDERSON

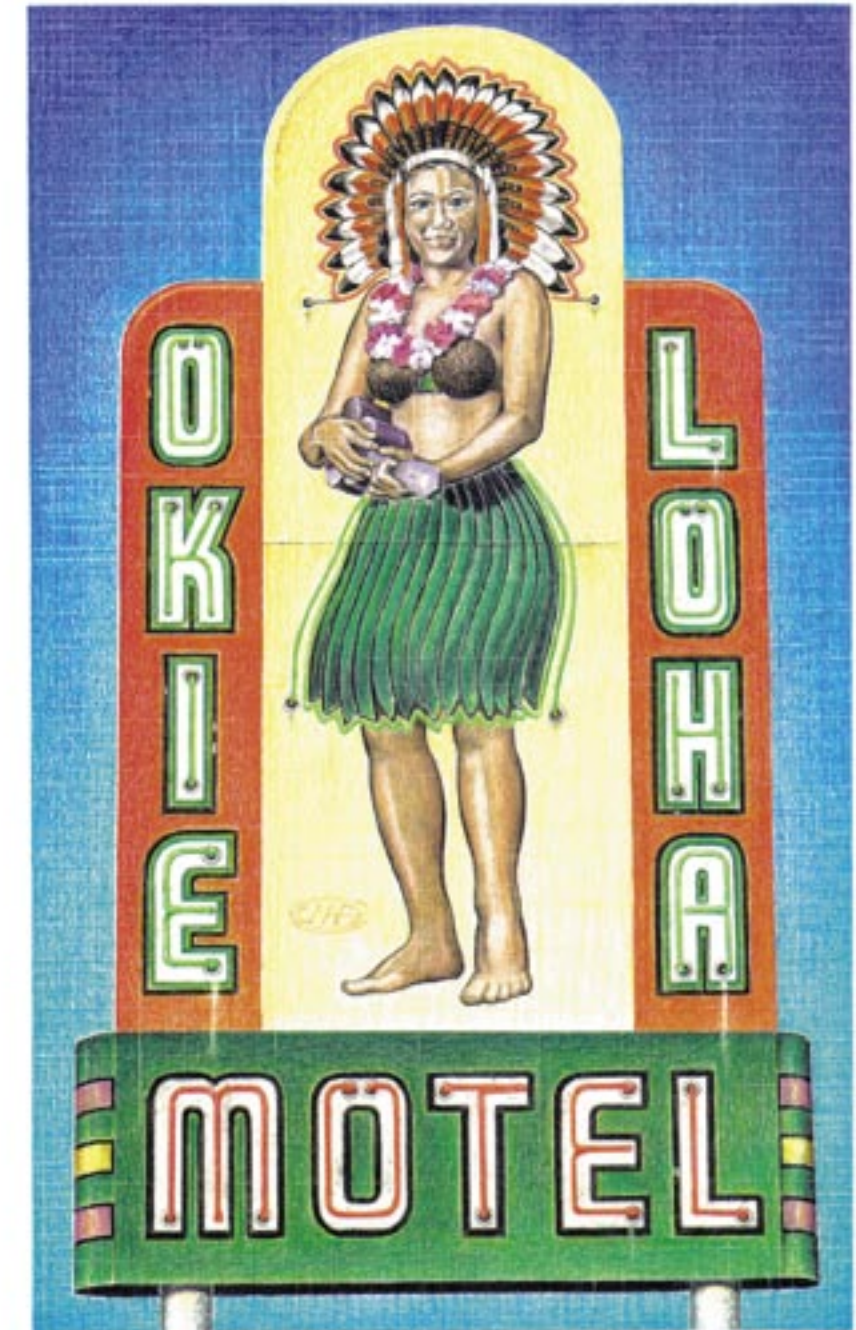


by DOUGLAS TOWNE

WHILE ASSEMBLING THIS ISSUE, I had the pleasure of visiting Warren Anderson in Tucson. Once again stunned by the art gracing his home, I inquired whether he would consent to have some of his drawings included in a future issue of the *SCA Journal*. I left with a handful of images, but later, when I decided to use “Stoic Roadside Chieftain” for the cover, I needed a higher resolution print. In response to my request, Warren sent the following e-mail — the last I would receive before he passed away — that in two lines captures his essence:

Hi Doug,
The improved Roadside Chieftain image left here yesterday via Apache runner. Should be on your premises upon arrival of same ... hold on to your scalp.
Warren

This communication illustrates, like the vintage roadside signs he so enjoyed, how much of an iconoclast Warren was: amusing, insightful and full of surprises.



Rainbow Tourist Court, “End of the...(Rainbow), Terrell, Texas

Okie Loha Motel, “Route 66-Hawaii,” Warren’s Imagination

Warren's death last summer robbed the roadside community of one of its pioneers. He was an artist who, traveling through Douglas, Arizona, in 1975, had an epiphany when he saw a map showing U.S. 80 stretching from San Diego to Savannah, Georgia, painted on the side of the Gadsden Hotel. Warren took a sabbatical as Professor of Art at the University of Arizona and drove the old highway, documenting its signage. Warren bonded heavily with his new subject matter, writing "I have come to feel a responsibility for the preservation of these rapidly disappearing vestiges of a vernacular American art form and a more leisurely mode of travel."

His resulting colored pencil drawings, that were a response to a trend away from regionalism and individualism in roadside advertising, found their way into numerous gallery exhibitions, museum collections and the book, *Vanishing Roadside America*—one of the original paeans to the previously unarticulated beauty of the American roadside. The acceptance of his works by these staid institutions provided validation that the study of the roadside was indeed an important field. Whether you knew Warren or are viewing his art for the first time, commercial archeology enthusiasts owe him a tip of the hat for cracking open the door to new outlets for our roadside photos, art, and writing.

Of Warren Anderson's seven featured works (including the cover), three images are from his book (one includes the accompanying text), two images are from signs he viewed in

his other travels, and two are images of imaginary signs he conceived in the later stages of his career. Warren's images can also be seen on his website, www.warrenandersonretro-eraart.com and can be acquired through the Jane Hamilton Fine Art Gallery at www.janehamiltonfineart.com which represents his estate. The *SCA News* (Summer 2005) carried an obituary for Warren Anderson and the *SCA Journal* (Fall 2002) a review of his book.

Here's a description of Lovely Lady, at right, from *Vanishing Roadside America*, page 94:

Perched high in the sky above Main Street in the desert town of Holtville, about to dive into a cool, watery oasis, is this lovely lady from the past. Her singularity dominates the monotony of two varying sized rectangles containing the message. Her modest one piece bathing suit is contemporary with the language in the sign — Motor Inn rather than Motel.

Forever caught in her mid-air dive, she once served as a beckoning refreshing symbol for the parched, overheated, pre-air conditioned automobile traveler. Today's cool encapsulated motorist, traveling along Interstate 8 well south of Holtville, is deprived of her countenance. Though she is unique in execution and placement she does have many cousins across the land. But as with the aquamaids of the old, carefully choreographed movies, their performances have nearly ceased. ●

Western Motel, "You Are Now Entering Texas," El Paso, Texas

Holtville Motor Court, "Lovely Lady in the Desert Sky," Holtville, California

Cowboy Motel, "Hot n' Hurtin' in Amarillo, Route 66," Amarillo, Texas

Wayward Viking Motel, "In Foreign Waters," Warren's Imagination

