

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Name of Property

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 4 Page 1

Supplementary Listing Record

NRIS Reference Number: MP100000462

Date Listed: 1/11/2017

Property Name: La Laguna de San Gabriel
(Latinos in 20th Century California (MPS))

County: Los Angeles

State: CA

This Property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation



Signature of the Keeper

1/11/2017

Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Significance:

The Areas of Significance are amended to read: **Art and Landscape Architecture.**

[The playground not only contains exceptional examples of Benjamin Dominguez's artistic work, but it was also a significant illustration of the artist's broader landscape design and integrated planning philosophies, which resulted in a complete folk-vernacular play environment, with clear connections to the emerging historic patterns of period landscape design in the U.S., as noted in the nomination narrative.]

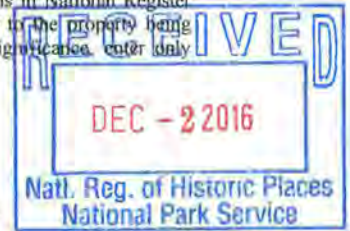
DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



1. Name of Property

Historic name: La Laguna de San Gabriel
Other names/site number: Monster Park, Dinosaur Park at Vincent Lugo Park
Name of related multiple property listing:
Latinos in 20th Century California MPS
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 300 West Wells St.
City or town: San Gabriel State: California County: Los Angeles
Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this x nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national ___ **statewide** ___ **local** x

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A ___ B ___ C x D ___

	
<u>Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer</u>	<u>11/29/16</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>California Office of Historic Preservation</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	

Signature of commenting official:	Date

Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)


Signature of the Keeper

1/11/2017
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
<u>14</u>	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>14</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture: Outdoor Recreation: Playground

Recreation and Culture: Work of Art: Sculpture

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture: Outdoor Recreation: Playground

Recreation and Culture: Work of Art: Sculpture

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: Faux-Bois

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

CONCRETE

WOOD

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

La Laguna de San Gabriel (“La Laguna,” “La Laguna Park”) is a playground located in the larger area of Vincent Lugo Park in the city of San Gabriel. It contains 14 concrete play-sculptures in a sandy ground cover comprising 19,000 square feet. La Laguna was constructed during 1964-5 by Benjamin Dominguez, a master concrete artist, originally from Mexico. Sculpting with concrete was widely recognized as an artistic craft in Mexico and his craftsmanship combines a folk vernacular style with functionality. The 14 pieces share a nautical theme and are introduced by a wooden dock that serves as the entry to the amoeboid playground.

Narrative Description

La Laguna Park was previously listed in the California Register of Historic Resources under **Criterion 3: “Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction or represents the work of a master or possesses high artistic values.”** This significance is founded in the highly unique, masterfully rendered, hand sculpted play structures at La Laguna. They were conceived of by an influential artist and craftsman and executed according to his vision and planning. La Laguna was constructed in 1965 and reached its fiftieth anniversary in 2015, as a whole the playground represents the highest form of a playground type that was sought after during the post-World War II period of urban planning. It is indicative of a national trend, but executed by a hand that elevates the playground to the status of interactive art.

Orientation: La Laguna de San Gabriel is located in the Southeast corner of Vincent Lugo Park in the city of San Gabriel. A Little League baseball field is present in the Northeast corner of the park. Opposite La Laguna and the baseball field on the western side of the park. The park itself abuts the Alhambra Wash and is tucked into a single-family residential neighborhood just south of the San Gabriel Village – a planned neighborhood and commercial district. The Minimal

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California

Name of Property

County and State

Traditional style tract homes that border the northern park access are characteristic of the post-World War II suburban growth that one can find throughout Southern California. One of the city's seven elementary schools, McKinley Elementary, borders the park's eastern side. Across Alhambra Wash, to the south of the park, is a residential area characterized by more recently constructed apartment buildings, town homes and condominiums. These neighborhoods are considered part of the Valley Boulevard commercial zone and do not have any direct access to the park. The City of Alhambra defines the Western border of the park with its delineation at Ramona Street.

Entry Although a chain-link fence distinguishes the outfield of the baseball diamond from the general park area, there is a concrete pathway and low hedge to guide park visitors from the access road to "La Laguna," which is identified by a sign, inscribed "La Laguna de San Gabriel". The metal sign is rust-colored and squared on three sides with curved "cut-aways" on the top. The words "La Laguna de San Gabriel" are hand-painted in white. Both the concrete pathway and hedge continue beyond this point, but visitors to the Laguna find this to be the official entryway.

Beyond the sign, there is a circular brick planter that contains mature palms. An internal concrete walkway winds around the planter and then follows the outline of the sandpit that houses the fourteen concrete sculptures of the Laguna.

Objects in La Laguna: In this section, each of the fourteen pieces of the Laguna will be described in turn moving around the Laguna from east to west. All of the pieces are set into an amoeboid shaped play area covered in coarse grain sand. As the overarching theme of the Park is the Sea, conceptually the sand is treated by Dominguez as water, with many of the creatures and other objects either partially submerged or protruding above the surface. **When first mentioned, the number in parenthesis after each object represents its position on the sketch map of the site, and the numbered nomination photo.**

Just past the planter, on the northern side of La Laguna, is the original wooden dock (1) from which the entire Laguna can be surveyed. There are four wooden steps up to the dock's platform. Originally, all four sides of the dock had stairs to access the platform. One can still see the base for each of the stairways, although only one remains intact. At the front of the dock is a wide metal slide descending into the Laguna. The dock has a simple roof supported by two posts centered on the sides of the platform. The wood was painted a deep red, but is now weathered and chipped.

To the immediate left of the dock sits the first grouping of sculptures. Four pieces are placed in close proximity: three seals (9, 10, 11) perched on rocks and a sinking ship (12). The concrete "rocks" reach a height of approximately three feet and the seals were designed with the intent that they provide a resting place. A treasure chest sits at the base of the first rock formation (9). It is a piece that showcases Benjamin Dominguez's mastery of the art of "concrete wood," also known as *faux-bois* or *trabajo rustico*. The chest is made of concrete with a grainy texture and reddish color that give it the appearance of being made from wood. Above the treasure chest the date "1765", exactly 200 years prior to the completion of the Laguna, is scratched into the rock.

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

The second rock and seal sculpture (10) sits just to the east of the first. This rock is distinguished from the first with a skull and cross-bones scratched into its side. It, too, stands about three feet off the ground and the seal is perched in similar fashion. The third seal (11) shares the basic characteristics of the other two, except that it lacks a distinguishing marking on the rocks. All seals are facing south and are positioned to stand sentry over the sinking ship that completes the grouping.

The sinking ship, christened “The Red Pirate” (12), is another example of Dominguez’s concrete wood. The ship appears to be 2/3 submerged, the black-painted captain’s cabin and its three white portholes is just beginning to disappear into the sand and a broken mast on top of the ship provides yet another resting place.

The ship is a warm beige color with streaks of red to show the grain of the “wood” similar to the treasure chest. The name of the ship is written on its side and a chain disappears into the sand, giving the image of an anchor buried below. Continuing around the eastern side of the playground space is one of two “lookouts” for the playground area. The Lighthouse stands over the imaginary calamity unfolding in the first grouping of sculptures. In this play sculpture, Benjamin Dominguez combined three of his signature features: rocks, a climbing tower, and a serpentine slide. The base of the Lighthouse is a series of rocks, designed to give the appearance of a rocky-shore line. Once-small shrubs placed behind the rocky base now cover the back side of the sculpture, obscuring one of the stairways to the tower itself. Built into the front of the sculpture and the rocky base are stairs that curve from the ground to the base of the lighthouse. These stairs were envisioned to suit the younger park visitor, as the rear access resembles a ladder cut into the concrete and requires greater coordination to scale.

The Lighthouse (14) stands approximately twenty feet above the rocks with an iron railing at the point of the lens. A red roof adorns the top of the structure. At the base of the Lighthouse, on its northern side, a door way opens to a metal-rung ladder placed inside the cylindrical structure. The ladder extends to an exit located just beyond the mid-point of the tower. The exit gives out to a green sea monster that is wrapped around the white Lighthouse. The tail of the sea serpent rests on the rocky-base as does its neck and head. Its body is arched upward to reach the exit from the Lighthouse. The body of the serpent is hollowed to make a slide from the Lighthouse to the ground. The serpent is two-toned, with a green body and light blue slide. Its toothy grimace is dominated by two large fangs and red eyes.

Beyond the Lighthouse, in the most eastern point of the Laguna, is another signature feature of Benjamin Dominguez’s parks: the Whale (15). The Whale, called “Minnie” by Dominguez, is painted blue with a wide smiling mouth that houses very white teeth, notably square molars. She is oriented on a north-south axis with her mouth opening south. Running through the center of the Whale’s mouth is a metal slide that can be accessed by climbing three stairs built into the west-facing side. The exterior of the Whale has a particular texture that is distinct from other pieces in the collection, namely the sea serpents. The red mouth of the Whale also has a clear texture to create the appearance of reality. The Whale’s construction deviates from earlier examples of Dominguez’s work because the slide and exit are in the mouth of the Whale. Most commonly the artist had created the stairway inside the mouth of the whale and the slide

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

followed the curve and descent of the Whale's back. The only other known example of this type of Whale sculpture can be found at Garden Grove's Atlantis Park, also constructed by Dominguez.

Beyond the Whale starting the southern side of the playground space is "Ozzie," an octopus (13), who faces north. Ozzie retains its original muted blue color with white suckers on its tentacles, colors that were added to the concrete itself. Six of the eight tentacles support the body of the Octopus and each curves back on itself to create a series of hoops that children, to which this sculpture is deliberately scaled, can climb on and through. The two remaining tentacles are wrapped around the head of the Octopus in varying fashion. The tentacle on the right almost makes a figure eight as its tip gently touches Ozzie's head. The tentacle on the right curves up and come to rest on the top of the Octopus' head. This piece was intended to provide a climbing challenge to coordinated visitors. This piece was completely restored in 2015.

At the center of the site and dominating its southern side is the largest piece of La Laguna: Lookout Mountain (8). This sculpture reaches a height of approximately 30 feet and covers a significant amount of ground at its base. The sides are sloped and have the same rocky construction as the lighthouse and seals. There are two stairways to access the top of the structure, again designed for two skill levels. Facing Lookout Mountain the more gentle and sloping access is visible on the right hand side. Gentle stairs that are short and large take visitors to the top of the mountain where they can access the largest slide in the Laguna. The more advanced access to the top of the mountain is located toward the rear of the structure just west of the Octopus. At the top of the mountain one finds the second and largest sea monster. The tip of the tail curves up and off of the mountain while the body snakes down to the sandy lagoon below. Like the sea monster on the Lighthouse, Dominguez used two colors on this slide as well: a muted green for the body and a light blue for the internal slide. This Sea Monster also has large fangs set in a semi-smiling face. The slide exits between the monster's eye and nostrils. On the side of the monster's head are two yellow fins.

Next to Lookout Mountain, continuing around to the Western side of the playground area is another grouping of sculptures. These are the dolphin family of "Flipper"(6), "Skippy" (5) and "Peanut" (4), as named by Dominguez. The "mother," (5) painted black and white, appears to be jumping though the sandy water and is frozen just as her head is about to plunge under again. Her back arches up making a steep climb from her snout. At the top of her back, she stands about three and one half feet off the ground, but the slope to her tail is a gentle curve that creates a small slide for park users.

She is centered against her two "baby dolphins" who sit behind her to the south. All three face Lookout Mountain, but the two little dolphins seem to be sitting on top of the sandy water. The dolphin that is closest to Lookout Mountain is painted red and stands about two and one half feet off the ground at its highest point. The other is painted blue and does not have its head held as high as the first. Both function as perches or resting places and are too small to serve as slides.

On the western side of the playground area sit two pieces: a starfish (3) and a snail (2). The starfish, "Stella," is perched on its five legs creating a space for children to crawl and hide under

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

its body. Like the small dolphin, the starfish is also painted red. On two of the legs, small notches were made so that, like other pieces, this sculpture could be climbed. The three remaining legs serve as slides back to the sand. Next to the starfish is a snail, "Sammy". The snail is similar in scale to the whale and, at its center, contains a metal slide. Access to the slide can be found in the rear of the snail. As with other pieces, steps were cut out of the concrete to climb to the top of the structure before sliding down and out of the snail's mouth. The snail is painted bright yellow and blue, and has a distinctly graded texture that is different on each side of the snail. The colors wind around the conch-like shell of the snail. The mouth of the snail opens around the slide and at the top of the tentacles are two blue eye-spots.

The Snail faces east, toward the final sculpture of the playground area. Through the center of the sandy lagoon snakes a long blue and yellow sea serpent (7) along the east-west axis. The serpent faces west and has a wide open grin that shows the remnants of a toothy smile, a concrete "beard" extends below its lower jaw. Yellow spines/fins line the back of the sea serpent and provide toe holds for climbing. The length of the serpent submerges into the sandy lagoon three times, creating archways large enough to pass underneath the body of the serpent.

Landscape Elements: The La Laguna de San Gabriel landscape consists of several distinct but interrelated elements. Together, the play sculptures themselves are the primary feature of the playground. They are set within a curvilinear sandpit of an abstract, elongated amoeba-like form when viewed in plan. Scored concrete walkways encircle the sandpit, which is buffered by a consciously designed natural landscape. All of these features, although modest in expression, work together to define the La Laguna de San Gabriel playground as a distinctive outdoor room.

Integral in defining the playground as a destination, the natural landscape consists of layers of plantings that serve to define the borders around the sandpit at near ground level – at or near a child's eye-level – as well as at 10 to 15 feet above ground-level, where the features serve as a sort of landscape wall. A low evergreen hedge (possibly *Photinia spp.*/possibly *Prunus spp.*) and areas of lawn located between the sandpit and hedgerow define the space at a child's eye level, creating a progression of spaces as well as a comforting sense of enclosure that also permits easy adult surveillance. Juniper hedges, Dracaenas (*Cordyline australis*), and palms provide accent plantings of a more sculptural character that create evergreen landscape focal points that contrast with and complement the play sculptures in the sandpit. Numerous Chinese elm (*Ulmus parvifolia*) trees, as well as pines create a permeable landscape enclosure that serves to define the space in the vertical plane as an outdoor room, but in a manner that is visually accessible to other nearby portions of the park while setting it apart in a subtle way. Many of the plant materials are ordinary, were commonly used in early- and mid-twentieth century park environments, and were chosen in large measure because they are easy to maintain, yet they are used skillfully to create a sense of place.

As previously discussed, trees have a significant function in defining the playground in the vertical plane as an outdoor room – particularly the Chinese elm trees – due to their number and the sculptural, drooping habit of their limbs. In addition, although now lost, shade trees were once planted in Lookout Mountain; these fell during heavy rains in 2005. Those trees would have

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

provided additional landscape focal points of a sculptural character, and would have complimented the other landscape components encircling the playground.

Another use of trees to create important focal points of a sculptural character is the “Island berm” (also known as “Palm Island,” or simply “The Island”) of Dracaenas, palms, and pines that occurs on the western edge of the sandpit. The Island berm was part of Dominguez’ original scheme for La Laguna, and was present in an early site-plan collage that he created for the City of San Gabriel. The dracaenas and palms of the Island berm are distinct from the other landscape elements around La Laguna. Although overgrown at present, and partially topped by

intrusive ivy vines, these simple clusters of plants, by virtue of the form of their trunks and the pattern of their foliage, serve as a quiet counterpoint to Dominguez’ play sculptures in the sandpit, and echo, in a more three-dimensional manner, the amoeboid shape of the sandpit found at the ground plane. The theme of the Island berm is in keeping with La Laguna itself, and extends the aquatic, semi-exotic theme of the playground.

Alterations: Since its opening in 1965, La Laguna has undergone only minimal alterations. The changes that have taken place over the last four decades can be categorized as a.) structural, b.) color, and c.) landscaping.

Structural changes: Only the dock had undergone structural changes. Two of the original four staircases remained, located on the northern and eastern sides of the dock. The southern staircase was replaced with a wide metal side. The dates of these alterations are unknown. The Dock was restored in 2011 to its original four staircases that provided access to the platform.

Color: One of the most distinct and significant features of the Laguna is the color of the pieces. Deviating from his earlier works, Dominguez colored the concrete that he used on each piece. Until the last two years, none of the pieces was ever painted. The original color palate was muted and earthy. The predominant colors were beige, yellow, brick red, blue, light greens, and grey. Presently only the Octopus, Serpent, and Lookout Mountain retain their original colors.

In 2006, the three seals, originally a muted grey, were painted black along with the captain’s cabin on the sinking ship. The Snail was painted bright blue and yellow. The original colors were a muted mustard yellow and a brick red that had shades of brown in it. Additionally, the Starfish and the mouth of the Whale were painted bright red. Both were originally a more muted shade of red. Finally, the dolphin family was also painted. The “mother”, originally the same muted blue as the Octopus, was painted black with a white underbelly. The baby dolphin located to the Southeast of the mother, originally a muted red, is now bright red. The dolphin located to the Southwest of the mother, originally a muted green, is now painted bright blue.

In 2007, two more pieces were painted. The Whale was painted a bubble gum pink. Its original color was the muted blue featured on many other pieces in the park. The whale was repainted to a muted blue in 2010. Finally, the serpent that is wrapped around the lighthouse was painted a bright lime green. Like its counterpart in the park, it was originally a muted green with a blue interior.

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Because Dominguez mixed the color into the concrete the original color of all the pieces can still be detected at their foundation and remains under the new layer of paint. On the seal perches, Lighthouse, and Lookout Mountain, a beige silicate covering has chipped and worn off exposing the plain concrete underneath.

Landscaping

The most significant change to the landscaping (other than the growth and maturation of the plants, was the loss of several shade trees planted in Lookout Mountain. During the heavy rains of 2005, the three shade trees fell, cracking the mountain. Parks and Recreation maintenance crews removed the trees and patched the Mountain.

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Name of Property

Los Angeles, California

County and State

Integrity

Over the 50 years of the park's life, the pieces have endured expected wear and tear. Most notably, some are chipped and cracked. The serpent has lost its teeth, although stumps remain visible. Nevertheless, most of the park remains unchanged and untouched since its opening to the public in May 1965. La Laguna playground retains a high degree of integrity. The figures are recently repainted, based on the original colors of the pieces.

The **location** and **setting** of La Laguna de San Gabriel has retained full integrity since its construction. None of the sculptural pieces have been removed, and no other elements within the playground have been added by the City of San Gabriel over time. This park was ideally located according to the Guide for Planning Recreation Parks for it was situated in a Post-World War II suburban neighborhood characterized by single family track homes, and this setting is still present. La Laguna Park is set next to the Island berm: a tropical themed landscape of dracaena and palm trees that complement the subtly exotic sea creature theme of the playground itself. The Island berm is located adjacent west of the playground and is itself is a character defining feature of the overall scheme. Additional setting features include the presence of a shrub boundary encircling the playground, numerous original sidewalks that contour to the ameboid shape of the sandpit, and original curbing defining the edges of the play-space.

Dominguez' exemplary and thoughtful expression of **design** is retained. The sea creature theme was chosen by Dominguez for its child-friendliness. To Dominguez, sea creatures have smooth surfaces and a lack of sharp edges that were conducive to being themed playground equipment. The design integrity of each piece is retained. Dominguez appears to have been familiar with the European tradition of Mannerist Sculpture Gardens, and the considered composition of pieces as they relate to one another was an intentional design which is also retained. La Laguna Park presents a unique use of **workmanship** and **materials**, and the park continues to strongly express Dominguez' unique mastery of both. In Mexico, Dominguez was trained in the *faux-bois* (false wood) technique, which texturizes and colors concrete to provide the affect of wood. Aside from limited examples of his actual *faux-bois* work in the playground, the same techniques and training are used to present numerous varied surfaces and details upon the sculptures, including highly expressive faces, numerous suspended tentacles and tails, and even handmade human molars with the "Minnie the Whale" slide. Dominguez was a master of concrete and his manner of use is still retained with full integrity at La Laguna. Often, Dominguez painted into wet concrete in a technique similar to *buon fresco*. Though many of the pieces retain their original coloring, unfortunately some were painted in 2005. However, the original coloring is known and is present beneath the recent repaint. La Laguna retains its integrity of **feeling** as a whimsical expression of fantasy play thoughtfully scaled to young children. Additionally, due to the style of the pieces, their original coloring, and in no small part to the landscaping itself, La Laguna retains integrity of feeling as a mid-twentieth century 1960s era playground. La Laguna retains its integrity of **association** to Benjamin Dominguez himself as the creator of the La Laguna Park.

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Art

Period of Significance

1965

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Dominguez, Benjamin

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

La Laguna de San Gabriel is a park located in San Gabriel, California, consisting of 14 concrete play sculptures created by master artist Benjamin Dominguez. The property is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion C, with a period of significance of 1965, the year of the park's construction. The property is nominated under cover of the Latinos in 20th Century California Multiple Property Document, in the area of Latinos in the Arts, as an example of the Murals and Artwork property type.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

La Laguna de San Gabriel Playground (La Laguna Park) is the final of many parks created by concrete master Benjamin Dominguez. La Laguna Park represents the culmination of Dominguez' artistic work and the many signature elements that he developed over a period of decades, and these signature elements are combined and represented in the park's large play-sculptures. Benjamin Dominguez (1894-1974) was a Mexican immigrant and master concrete artist who brought with him to the United States age-old techniques of concrete working and sculpture garden design that originated in Europe and learned by Dominguez in Mexico City. Dominguez used this knowledge to create unique and highly imaginative children's playgrounds. The distinctive folk vernacular that Dominguez expressed in his play-sculptures and the mastery

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California

Name of Property

County and State

of concrete art that he displayed, were afforded an opportunity to shape and distinguish child's play during a time when city officials sought artistic activity rather than proscribed play. His sculptures provided exactly the sort of play that the "blue ribbon committee" of architects, professionals, specialists, and government officials endeavored to inspire in the Guide for Planning Recreational Parks.¹ For the City of San Gabriel, La Laguna Playground is testament to the broad and continuing pattern of immigrant and minority communities and the contributions they make to the broader community. Dominguez' contribution to the communities who have managed to retain his works is a testament to the often organic process and understanding of the population that is so important to the design and function of public spaces.

La Laguna Park as a Cultural Landscape

The distinctive folk vernacular that Dominguez expressed in his play-sculptures and the mastery of concrete art that he displayed were afforded an opportunity to shape and distinguish child's play during a time when city officials sought artistic creativity rather than proscribed play. When Dominguez began work on La Laguna de San Gabriel in 1965, he was given full creative license by the City of San Gabriel. Whereas his previous California commissions had been by the piece, San Gabriel designated a line item in their parks budget for the creation of a play area. His play-space was to be a third play area within a larger park, but he imagined, positioned, and created the pieces as he thought they should relate to the space and to each other. Aside from Dominguez' pieces themselves, numerous aspects of the immediate physical context work together to create a cultural landscape expressive of 1960s era trends in landscape design, and one that further enhances the experience of the pieces themselves.

The La Laguna de San Gabriel landscape consists of several distinct but interrelated elements: a curvilinear sandpit with an abstract, elongated amoeba-like form when viewed in plan; the diverse array of play sculptures found in the sandpit that serve as the centerpiece of the playground; the concrete walkways that encircle the sandpit; and the consciously designed landscape buffer that borders the sandpit. As previously mentioned, the Island berm just west of the sandpit was part of Dominguez' original scheme for La Laguna, and was present in an early site-plan collage that he created for the City of San Gabriel. The theme of the Island berm extends the aquatic, semi-exotic theme of the playground itself; adjacent the "Lagoon" is an *Island*. The correlation between La Laguna and the Island berm is a particularly significant relationship in understanding the park as a cultural landscape. The dracaenas and palms of the Island berm are distinct from the other landscape elements around La Laguna, as they subtly reference the exotica theme that was prevalent in Southern California from 1946-c.1968. The oceanic, exotica theme of the Island berm landscape has parallels in similarly themed residential and commercial landscapes of the same era as the park. In nearby Rosemead, Bahooka Restaurant & Bar, a Polynesian themed restaurant from 1967 features a similar "Island" of palm trees at its entrance, along with philodendrons: another common plant used in exotica-themed environments. Along Rosemead Boulevard, which is a primary north-south corridor through the San Gabriel Valley, 1960s-era Tiki themed apartment complexes such as the Kahlua in Rosemead, the Kapu Tiki in Alhambra, and the Outrigger Apartments in Temple City feature large A-frame entrances, freestanding Tiki gods, and numerous palm trees as landscape elements, often grouped in clusters near the primary entrance to the complex.

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

San Gabriel Park and Playground Planning during the Post-War Era

While the creation of La Laguna de San Gabriel is located firmly in the context of the San Gabriel Valley's post-World War II sub-urban growth, its significance is rooted in the complicated process of planning suburban spaces, establishing park systems that served the communities living in suburban areas, and the extent to which minority communities left their imprint on the development of cities during the 1950s and 1960s. San Gabriel incorporated in 1913 yet did not immediately undergo significant development and growth until after World War II. Unlike urban areas, the heavily agrarian character of San Gabriel meant that parks and spaces for public recreation were not pressing concerns until tract homes began to dot the landscape during the post- World War II era. Like numerous other communities across the region, San Gabriel sought to accommodate the rapid population increases that accompanied the G.I. Bill and burgeoning defense industry across California. Once a landscape of Japanese owned ranches and individual farms dotted with schools small businesses and offices, the open agricultural areas gave way to track homes and old neighborhoods expanded to make way for the new residents of the city. Between 1945 and 1955, the population of San Gabriel jumped from 16,840 to 27,786. Motivated by Federal and State publications, such as Planning the Neighborhood issued by the Federal Government in 1948 (Public Administration Service, chair Frederick J. Adams), cities across California developed general plans to coordinate and manage their growth. Therefore, in the early 1950s a general plan for city development became a necessity for San Gabriel, and included plans for a city parks system.

Influential publications, such as the aforementioned Planning the Neighborhood helped shape the development of general plans for development in cities. The pamphlet asserted that parks were a necessary part of the health of a neighborhood, important for fostering good social relationships. Furthermore, since the publication and others like it used the "service area of an elementary school" as the unit for defining a neighborhood, the park was meant to function as a meeting point for the various neighborhoods contained within the city. This publication defined the various categories of parks that should be implemented in city planning and argued that, when possible, "parks should be combined with school sites to save on land acquisition costs and avoid duplication of facilities." This was certainly the case in San Gabriel where the plan for a city park originally contained playing fields and badminton courts. However, once the site was chosen next to an elementary school, the components of the park changed in order to provide alternatives to the amenities already available at McKinley Elementary School.

In 1951, following the city's master plan, a 12-acre parcel of land that sat along the Alhambra Wash was purchased and surveyed for use as a public park. Prior to World War II it was ravine that served as a flood control basin. Over time it also came to function as a city dump. However, under the new master plan, it was to be the location of a new park for the city's residents. The ravine was filled and, in a piecemeal fashion, the city built two play areas for children and made plans for a Little League baseball field that would boast one of the few grass in-fields. It was plainly known as "Municipal Park."

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

In 1956, the state published the results of the aforementioned study entitled, *Guide for Planning Recreation Parks in California*. This was an interdisciplinary study that was dedicated to helping cities develop effective policies and guidelines for their recreational facilities – particularly since it asserted that this was an area of crisis for California. It provided detailed recommendations for the proposed facilities and their relationship to each other, yet maintained that designers should experiment with new recreational spaces.

As it pertains to La Laguna playground and the other works of Benjamin Dominguez), the study suggested that the play area for school aged children should include: “swings, traveling rings, horizontal ladder, large-scale play sculpture that children can envisage as a spaceship, lookout tower, a deep sea monster, and a vacant lot area in which children can dig, carve...stage mock battles, build crude huts, and pretend they are hunting in the forest.” These guidelines articulated a new vision for park design. Rather than simply providing a play lot for tots, the recommendations indicated that the park should provide a creative and imaginative experience for park goers.

These recommendations manifest themselves in two parks where Dominguez created play areas, and the guidelines amount almost perfectly to statements made by the respective directors of Parks and Recreation in Garden Grove site of Dominguez’ “Atlantis Park” and San Gabriel. Carpenter articulated his desire to create a park that would draw new visitors and provide a new and unique landmark for the city in an interview stating, “Up to now, the success and popularity of Municipal Park has been our willingness to stretch the imagination a little and create an unusual atmosphere not found in most parks.” Despite the influence of the two pamphlets on city officials, Dominguez was unacquainted with the guidelines based on the fact he neither read nor spoke English. His design for parks was far more organic and drew on techniques and skills he acquired in Mexico rather than on published guidelines.

The period beginning during the late 1940s and continuing through the late 1960s was one of the most important in the evolution of playground design. Theorists expounding the tenets of Modernism in the fields of architecture, landscape design, and art, found sympathetic partners in the child education, philanthropic, and applied arts fields that were willing to build playground equipment or whole playground environments showcasing the new design ideas (e.g., Isamu Noguchi and Louis Kahn’s project for the Adele Rosenwald Levy Playground, Riverside Park, New York City; 1961-1966).² At the same time, new economic prosperity, the pronounced “baby boom” related jump in the non-adult population, as well as the increased interest in family-oriented leisure activities that marked the period prompted the emergence of “Story Book Lands” across the United States. Two parallel typologies for playground design resulted. In one of the paradigms, the Story Book Land fantasy environments were established showcasing children story book creatures, characters and/or structures that were recreated three-dimensionally in a fanciful form of realism. Examples of this will be later discussed in the “Fantasy Environment” context. A second typology wedded contemporary pedagogy with the principles of modern art and landscape design in a search for innovative, sculptural expression that prized abstract design rather than realism.

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

The company most successful and best exemplifying the second typology during the Post War years was “Creative Playthings and its later subsidiary, “Play Sculptures.” 3 Creative Playthings was founded in 1944 by Frank and Teresa Caplan and flourished after exhibiting at the New York Toy Fair circa 1950, when a long partnership was formed with Frank and Bernard M. Barenholtz.⁴ During the postwar period, the visionary perspective of advocates for playground design reform found broader audiences through mainstream architectural and art periodicals, and through exhibitions sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) and other cultural institutions.⁵ The high point in thinking about the design of playgrounds was the competition sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art in 1954. The competition showcased a range of modular elements that could form new contexts for play. The media recognition that followed gave playgrounds “a heightened legitimacy in art circles and in more general spheres,” and also provided a further incentive to innovative playground equipment. Creative Playthings achieved great success in the MOMA competition, which resulted in the company subsidiary Play Sculptures. Creative Playthings and Play Sculptures created award-winning slides, climbers, and abstract outdoor equipment used by parks, playgrounds, and schools all over the world.⁶ This includes many of the numerous and ubiquitous Rocket Ship slides and other similarly themed equipment from the postwar era up through the 1970s seen in school and municipal playgrounds across the United States. In July of 1966, CBS, which was interested in moving into the education industry, purchased Creative Playthings.

⁷ 2 Susan G. Solomon, *American Playgrounds; Revitalizing Community Space* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2005).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Oakland Public Library, “Creative Playthings Puppet Family,”

<http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO/collection/puppets.htm>, viewed 14 Jul 2008.

⁵ Solomon, *Children’s Playgrounds*.

⁶ Oakland Public Library, <http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO/collection/puppets.htm>.

⁷ Oakland Public Library, <http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO/collection/puppets.htm>. A second company called Creative Playthings was founded in 1951 and early on was focused upon wooden swing sets. Today this company provides playground equipment for numerous schools and municipalities across the country. The two “Creative Playthings” companies do not appear to be affiliated,

Criterion C: High Artistic Values, Work of a Master Artist

La Laguna de San Gabriel is significant as an excellent, increasingly rare example of a themed mid-century era playground. The pieces, all of which are aquatic themed, exhibit a combination of imagination, thought, and craftwork that was highly unique from its opening day, and is virtually impossible to find in today’s playground equipment catalogs. Benjamin Dominguez was one of a known handful of Mexican immigrants who immigrated to Texas in the 1920s having learned the 250 year old European tradition of *faux-bois*: employing concrete to appear as wood, and examples of it are present within La Laguna. Additionally, through the mixing of fantasy and real creatures in a highly considered composition, La Laguna Park takes its design cues from Late-Renaissance sculpture gardens, exposure to which appears to have been part of Dominguez

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

training. La Laguna de San Gabriel appears to be highly unique as a municipal playground for referencing the Late-Renaissance sculpture tradition.

The individual pieces are significant for the amount of hand-craftsmanship exhibited as municipal playground pieces. Many of them have highly expressive faces, with teeth—including human style molars-- eyes, antlers, and other features. Others have extended tentacles and tails and other elevated parts that were thoughtfully, purposely scaled by Dominguez for children to crawl and walk around. Dominguez' craftsmanship is present in the smallest details; tongues are portrayed with small fissures, a sea snail features a raked concrete pattern on its shell, many of the creatures feature smooth but slightly mottled surfaces which reveal the soft impressions of Dominguez' hands, and a pirate ship even features the *faux-bois* concrete woodwork in which Dominguez was trained.

Additionally, La Laguna de San Gabriel is significant for expressing popular trends in 1960s era park landscaping. The highly intact landscape design includes scored concrete sidewalks around an ameboid shaped sandpit, a simple metal entryway with a hand lettered sign, and a bermed landscape of tropical themed plants that match the theme of the playground. This last element (the Island berm) appears upon early mock-ups of the park done by Dominguez, and the composition of his park was designed in correspondence to it. "Modernization," in addition to numerous fears regarding liability, has led to the destruction of playgrounds across the country of a similar character and time of La Laguna. Though La Laguna de San Gabriel appears to have been unique from its beginning, the park has gained exceptional significance as a rare example of its type: a hand crafted, thoughtful and imaginative playground of one consistent theme, set within a highly intact, mid-century era landscape.

Although far less widespread, a third important playground typology emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s that is often referred to as the "adventure playground" approach. Adventure playgrounds were constructed without traditional playground equipment, often using junk or other salvaged materials to heighten the desire to explore the physical environment in undirected, free form ways that might appeal to a range of children of different age groups.⁸

By the early 1970s, a heightened concern about playground injury-related lawsuits, codification by organizations such as the National Recreation Association (NRA) and the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) of playground equipment design safety guidelines that essentially advocated "no-risk" playground environments, and a sharp increase in liability insurance premiums, brought this exciting period of experimentation in playground design to a close.⁹ The fate many midcentury playgrounds was sealed in February 1981 when the CPSC released its "Handbook for Public Playground Safety," the first ever federal guidelines designed to reduce the number and severity of injuries on the public playground.¹⁰ The handbook was published in two volumes, one with technical information and the other in lay language, so that parents, teachers and recreation leaders could be watchdogs in relation to goings-on in their community and school playgrounds.¹¹ Installations in publically owned environments such as parks and schools were remodeled, and fantasy and Modernist playground elements destroyed. Standard equipment meeting the criteria of the NRA and CPSC were often

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

installed in place of the removed features. This process of destruction and replacement has made intact park playground groupings such as La Laguna de San Gabriel quite rare today.

Conclusion

La Laguna de San Gabriel represents an increasingly rare modern resource: an extant mid-twentieth century playground. At this time, such playgrounds are increasingly replaced by the modern catalog park that promises safe and accessible play. Parks and play spaces that were designed to be safe and accessible to children a generation ago are seen as defunct and old, and these playgrounds are threatened as new safety guidelines seem incompatible with the creative expressions of decades past. Neither the period that they represent nor the theories driving park design play a significant role in decisions to keep or destroy these spaces. While homes were quickly built in similar style and fashion, cities turned to their parks to provide a gathering place for their diverse community and to create an attraction for visitors. La Laguna de San Gabriel fulfilled and continues to perpetuate that goal. The park is an intact, significant expression of the creativity of the community and artist that created it. La Laguna de San Gabriel embodies the culmination of an artist's career, creatively and uniquely defines the public spaces of the city, represents the mid-century theories governing park design, and is a testament to the diverse contributions of the many communities that comprise the city. La Laguna is a salient statement of the contributions of the minority communities as they assimilate and integrate into mainstream society. It is the mark that Dominguez left behind that gives California one of its most defining qualities: the continued diversity of its communities.

Master Artist Benjamin Dominguez

Benjamin Dominguez was born in Guanajuato, Mexico in 1894. As a young man he came to the United States, seeking employment in Colorado, and met and married his first wife. Together they had one son, Benjamin, Jr. Upon the untimely death of his wife, he returned to Mexico, remarried, and enrolled in the Academia de Artes Plasticas of the University of Mexico. He completed his studies in 1925 and began his career in the concrete arts. His particular specialty was that of "concrete wood". In Mexico, there was a school dedicated to this technique and Dominguez rose in notoriety for his mastery of the art. His most recognized work in Mexico was at the Chapultepec Zoo in Mexico City where he designed the enclosures for the lions and tigers. Over the next 30 years, Dominguez worked at his craft and raised his 13 children with his second wife, Anna. After World War II, Dominguez moved his family to Juarez, close to the U.S.-Mexico border and began establishing contacts for work within the United States. The 1950s proved to be a time when Mexican-Americans became more visible in American society and Dominguez benefited from friendships with men who had not only crossed the border, but who had also crossed into mainstream American society. He traveled often to El Paso and built a friendship with Ruben Salazar, a native of Juarez and a reporter for the El Paso Tribune-Herald. The youngest Dominguez son, Rene, recalls many meetings and conversations between his father and Mr. Salazar. For the Chicano community, Salazar has come to represent the early integration of Mexican-Americans into mainstream society. For Dominguez he was a valued contact who helped secure early commissions in El Paso.

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Name of Property

Los Angeles, California

County and State

Dominguez Early Works

Once Dominguez moved his family to El Paso in 1956, his first commission in the United States was from Washington Park Zoo in that city. Based on the work Dominguez did for Chapultepec Zoo in Mexico City (1942), he was commissioned to create the Bear Pits, erecting a concrete tree for the bears to climb – a piece that no longer remains. This initial commission opened the door to future commissions that primarily featured the play-sculptures that Dominguez had conceptualized while living in Juarez. For his first playground which was located

in El Paso, Dominguez deliberately selected sea creatures as the best medium for children's play. Rene Dominguez recalls many drawings and discussions while the family lived in Juarez about the smooth surfaces and gentle curves that the sea creatures would provide for slides and safe tactile play.

At the El Paso playground, which was created circa 1959, Dominguez created dozens of pieces - fish, harps, and double slides along with climbing structures that integrated various modes of play - turning his home into a virtual factory. A most popular piece was one that he titled "Sputnik" and that had the appearance of a moonscape in and out of which children could climb. Dominguez painstakingly wrote letters, using a Spanish-English dictionary to translate his words in order to secure commissions. Eventually, his play sculptures became quite popular. In the El Paso area today, a lone turtle remains. The pattern of commissions that emerged in El Paso repeated itself in both California and Nevada. In both states, Dominguez was first commissioned to practice the specialty of *faux-bois*, constructing rustic bridges in Beverly Hills' Coldwater Park (status undetermined) and the Las Vegas Desert Inn Golf Course. However, these initial commissions once "fantasy parks" – a name repeatedly used in the media coverage of his parks.

Dominguez' Fantasy Parks

The fact that Dominguez' fanciful creations were often described as "fantasy parks" seems to be part of the shift in the conceptualization of parks and play-spaces. An article in the journal *Parks and Recreation* noted that, "[t]he break in attitude towards the redesign of play areas has come from our European neighbors...[t]hey conceive that the play area should be an aesthetic and dramatic

experience, as well as a physical one." The article continued to state that the "new" park was a museum, an opportunity to see and experience the arts and crafts of the community, a native folklore center. It noted that the "rubber stamp" playgrounds of the past had given way to a new approach to recreation and park design in America. Now, rather than fitting the play equipment, "to create square spaces called playgrounds...[pieces] are selected and placed as required by the contour or position of the land." Greater attention was given to the design of outdoor spaces, creating attractions as much as playgrounds, and showcasing artistic expression. Dominguez' concrete play-sculptures captured the fantastic quality cities sought for their new parks. A significant commission came in 1960, when the Las Vegas Women's Service League hired Dominguez to create a fantasy park that included whales, friendly dragons, mammoth

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

mushrooms and gargantuan turtles. It was often the case that many groups, such as city departments, women's leagues, Kiwanis Clubs, and Rotary Associations, would combine efforts to fund the creation of a park that would not only be a place of recreation but also an attraction. The play-space was intended to appeal to a broad range of age and to be a unique and distinguishing attraction for residents and neighboring communities.

Rene Dominguez recalls that his father was given creative license in designing the play-space in Las Vegas – something that would be a point of contention in later parks when he did not have full control over the site. With all of his fantasy parks including La Laguna, Dominguez felt strongly that there was an appropriate space for each of the pieces he created and that the various animals should “talk to each other...they should not be separated.” He felt that the careful placement of the pieces would create an environment that had artistic appeal to visitors and that would foster imaginative play on the part of the children. The enthusiasm for the Las Vegas Park led to three known commissions in Southern California: Whittier Narrows, Garden Grove, and San Gabriel. Following the commissions for his work, Dominguez again moved his family and settled in La Puente. He was now in his late 60s and so his younger sons worked as his apprentices, doing much of the hard manual labor of molding the rebar and wire to their father's specifications. On each of the parks, Dominguez himself executed the drawings, models, and all of the fine finishing details for each piece. Many of the details that gave the sculptures their character were made with tools that Dominguez either brought from Mexico or made himself.

At Whittier Narrows, LA County supervisor, Frank G. Bonelli, commissioned Dominguez to create six sculptures around Legg Lake. Of the California works, these pieces most resembled those that he made in Las Vegas. Three pieces in particular, were specifically requested: a fish slide, a Mother Dragon with small mushroom seats, and a double headed dragon (all featured in the Las Vegas park). Dominguez had a clear vision for each of his pieces and, until his death, was bothered that Supervisor Bonelli wanted the pieces scattered around Legg Lake. Dominguez felt strongly that the pieces communicated to one another and that they should be grouped in close proximity. A similar conflict emerged as Dominguez built Atlantis Park in Garden Grove. Seemingly directed by the Guide for Planning Recreation Parks, The Park at Garden Grove contained multiple elements and areas for play. Dominguez was hired to create several of his signature play- sculptures to be integrated with the other park components. As was the case at Whittier Narrows, Dominguez felt that the sea creatures were too scattered and could not communicate as they should as artistic works and elements of child's play.

As a father of 13 children and grandfather to twice as many, Dominguez was keenly aware of the tendencies, and needs of children's play. He understood the creativity that children need to express and the imaginative nature of their play and he wanted his creations to foster that play. He also understood the need to face challenges in both skill and psyche and often provided two different approaches to his sea creatures: one where children could confront the sea creature head on and a second, less intimidating approach for those that were still too timid. Many good examples of this can be found in the La Laguna play area. Rene Dominguez recalls discussing with his father how they should create a dual access to the Lighthouse and Lookout Mountain slides. How children would approach the elements was a concern to Dominguez.

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

Shortly before his death, Dominguez was approached to create an Aztec play sculpture for “Plaza de la Raza” in Lincoln Park. Although he began some cursory sketches, he died in 1974 before he could begin work on the project. In his place and memory, his son Rene completed the designs and built the Aztec slides. For a man who in many ways represented the immigrant experience, this was an important acknowledgement of his contributions to the communities in which he worked and lived. Plaza de la Raza was created to be a Chicano Cultural Center in Los Angeles, affirming and expressing the contributions of the Mexican-American community. When new safety guidelines were introduced in 2002, the Aztec pyramid was found to be non-compliant with the safety recommendations and was slated for demolition. This playground no longer remains and has instead been replaced by one of the “catalog” play structures that are now a common feature of many city parks.

The Genesis of La Laguna, and its Presence in the Community

Sometime within 1963 to 1964, San Gabriel Parks and Recreation Director Frank Carpenter had seen the sculptures that Dominguez had created at Atlantis Park in Garden Grove, California, and thought that he had found the perfect artist to create a playground in San Gabriel that would be unrivaled by neighboring cities and that could lend a unique characteristic and attraction to the city. Carpenter allotted a 19,000 square foot area of Municipal Park to be used for the new “fantasy park.” This park was ideally located according to the Guide for Planning Recreation Parks for it was situated in a Post-World War II suburban neighborhood characterized by single family track homes. It was adjacent to a local elementary school which meant that recreational fields did not need to be duplicated. Unlike traditional recreational fields, for the City, creative play and artistic use of space was the desired goal of La Laguna.

Nautical themes were in great demand by city parks officials and Dominguez set about giving San Gabriel its first “Lagoon.” Tucked back along the Alhambra Wash, he carved out an amoeboid sand pit and then designed the park using small models to experiment with the manner in which the pieces would interact with each other and the space in which they were placed. He wanted to create a feeling of openness that would peak the curiosity and exploratory nature of children. He built the pieces on a “life-like” scale so that children could experience the largeness of sea creatures. At the same time, he provided places where parents could safely supervise their child’s play.

Once work began, Dominguez drew the individual sculptures and then enclosed his work space using large sheets of wood. Many have speculated on the reasons for this. Some think that he did not want to work in plain view of passing school children and curious on-lookers. Others have suggested that the enclosure may have allowed the concrete to dry more slowly. Once he drew the shape of the sculpture on the piece of wood, he shaped the rebar and wire to complete the frame. Each piece required several layers of work and Dominguez’ own mixing recipes for concrete, but at La Laguna de San Gabriel, Dominguez experimented with the final layer of the play-sculpture. He used a pure silicate sand and mixed the final color of the sculpture into the cement. At previous parks, Dominguez had used thick epoxy paint to color the pieces, however,

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California

Name of Property

County and State

until 2006, the pieces at the Laguna de San Gabriel were never painted. Instead, pigment was mixed into the drying outer layer of cement upon each piece.

When the Park opened to the public on May 16, 1965 with an attendance of 1,500 children, it achieved its goal of defining and distinguishing the city's public spaces. It also accomplished its goal of providing a unique play space for children. This was Dominguez' ultimate goal and in the three generations of park-goers, the fact that no serious injury has ever been reported speaks to the careful intent of and attention to a safe and creative play experience for children. Over time, the park became a field trip destination for school children and a much used photo opportunity. It also won the heart of the community, whose youth affectionately refers to La Laguna as either "Monster Park" or "Dinosaur Park".

At the age of 72, Benjamin Dominguez was happy to create his vision for a park and called it "his gift to the children of San Gabriel." He named the playground that he created in San Gabriel "La Laguna de San Gabriel." For the artist, the park represented the culmination of a life's work. For San Gabriel, La Laguna Playground is testament to the broad and continuing pattern of immigrant and minority communities and the contributions that they make to the broader community.

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Oral History: Rene Dominguez, 1-15-2007, Chico California.

El Paso

El Paso Herald Post, "El Paso Youngsters test new park Playground Equipment; Unusual Shapes provide adventure in climbing fun", 4-7-1958

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 9718, Washington Park Bear Pit, 10-2-1956

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 7757, Washington Park Playground, 12-5-1958

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 9489, Washington Park Playground, 12-19-1957

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 8134, Mission Hills Park, 12-29-1957

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 247, Washington Park Playground, 1-22-1958

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 5913, Eight Parks, 7-16-1957: Clardy Fox, Mary Webb, Mt. View, Mesa Terrace, Memorial, Madeline, Sunset Heights, Alamo

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 1339, Washington Park Playground, 3-6-1958

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 3950, Washington Park Playground, 3-5-1957

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 8613, Washington Park Playground, 11-12-1957

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 7249, Washington Park Playground, 11-19-1958

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 6370, Washington Park Playground, 10-8-1958

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 7954, Washington Park Playground, 10-15-195

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 6723, Washington Park Playground, 10-24-1958

El Paso, Purchase Order, no. 6063, Washington Park Playground, 9-25-1958

Las Vegas Las Vegas Sun, "Fantasy Park: Pride of Service League", 10-30-1970 Las Vegas Review, "Mexican Artist Designs a Land of Make Believe Here",

Beverly Hills

Coldwater Canyon Bridge Letter, Benjamin Dominguez, 8-16-1957 Coldwater Canyon Bridge Letter, Charles W. Reither, 8-19-1957

Coldwater Canyon Bridge Purchase Order, no. 6961, 9-12-1957.

Whittier Narrows

Contract for Legg Lake (Mother Dragon and Mushrooms), 6-8-1960

Contract for Legg Lake (Octopus, Fish, Starfish, Tripod, Abstract), 8-16-1960

Montebello

Contract for Grant Rea Park (Whale), 2-9-1961

La Laguna de San Gabriel

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Name of Property

Garden Grove

Herald Examiner, "Atlantis Playground of Fantasy", 7-13-1963

LA Times, "1000 Sign Petition to Protest 10c Admission to Atlantis Playground", Bill Gettemy, 8-25-1963

LA Times, "Dedication Today: Davey Jones Locker, Creatures of the Sea Background for Park", July 4, 1963

LA Times, "Ground Breaking Due", May 27, 1962

LA Times, "Mythical Atlantis Will Come to Life in Garden Grove Park," 1-7-1962 LA Times, "City, Clubs to Share Park Development", 7-23-1961

San Gabriel

Valley Messenger, "Sea Animals Find Home On Dry Land", 2-21-1965

Post Advocate, "Child's Delight to Open", 5-15-1965

Post Advocate, "Child's Park to go Nautical", 4-21-1964

Christian Science Monitor, "Inland Sea Creatures", 9-1-1965

LA Times, "Mythical Creatures Inspire Real Children", 7-25-1985

LA Times, "Born in a Dump 17 Years Ago, Park Grows Like a Living Thing," 4-13-1967

Letters:

Bonelli to Harry Petrie, Civil Service Commission 7-19-1962

Petrie to Dominguez, Concrete Examinations, 7-24-1962

Dominguez to Petrie, Play Sculptures, 8-3-1962

Dominguez to Bonelli, 8-3-1962

Translations:

Independent Star News, Dirk Werkman, "Los Monstruous del Parque Whittier Narrows", 9-30-1962

Secondary Sources:

American Public Health Association Committee on Hygiene of Housing. Planning the Neighborhood. Chicago: R.R. Donnelly and Sons, 1948.

Brockman, C. Frank. "Concepts of Recreation." Recreation, 52:8 (October 1959), 309.

Burnap, George. "Parks, Their Design Equipment and Use." Prepared for National Recreation Association. Philadelphia: J.B Lippincott Company, 1916.

Butler, George. "Our Space Standards". Recreation, 51:1 (January, 1958), 24-26.

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

California Committee on Planning for Recreation, Park Areas, and Facilities, R.L. Rathfon, Chairman. Guide for Planning Recreation Parks in California.

Caplan, Frank "The Playgrounds of Tomorrow", Parks and Recreation, 43:1 (January, 1960), 18-19, 74.

Cranz, Galen. The Politics of Park Design, A History of Urban Parks in America. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982.

Creative Playthings. <http://www.creativeplaythings.com/company/history>, viewed 14 Jul 2007.

"Designs for Play" (anonymous), Recreation, 52:4 (April 1959, 130-131).

"Early history of Playgrounds in the United States." Found at:
<http://www.outdoorfunstore.com/playground-history.asp>. Accessed on July 8, 2008.

Oakland Public Library. "Creative Playthings Puppet Family."
<http://www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO/collection/puppets.htm>, viewed 14 Jul 2008.

Rainey, Ruben M and J.C. Miller. Modern Public Gardens. San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2006.

Smith, Stanley. "America's First Play Sculpture at Oakland" Parks and Recreation, 35:7 (July 1952), 18-19.

Solomon, Susan G. American Playgrounds: Revitalizing Community Space. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2005.

Wallach, Frances. "Playground safety: the long trail - from the 1940s to the 1990s." National Park and Recreation Group, 1995.
<http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mim1145/isn4v30/ai16889608/print?tag=artBody;col1>
viewed 14 Jul 2008.

Weir, L.H. "Historical Background of Recreation in America," Parks and Recreation, 29:3 (July-August, 1946), 238-243.

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
_previously determined eligible by the National Register
_designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
_recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #
recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office X
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other
Name of repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

NRHP Status code: 3CS

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property

.436 of an acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84:

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 34.083524 Longitude: -118.104305

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

La Laguna de San Gabriel is located at Southeast corner of Vincent Lugo Park in the city of San Gabriel. On the northern boundary of is a pathway between the baseball field and the playground. On the southern side the playground abuts the Alhambra Wash. One of the city's five elementary schools, McKinley Elementary, borders La Laguna's eastern side. The City of Alhambra defines the Western border of the park with its delineation at Ramona Street.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Because La Laguna is within a city park, these boundaries are those that place the playground within the park. The park boundaries are described in the orientation of the park within the city.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Eloy Zarate

organization: Friends of La Laguna

street & number: 116 N. Del Mar Ave

city or town: San Gabriel state: CA zip code: 91775

e-mail eizarate@pasadena.edu or eloy@friendsoflalaguna.org

telephone: (626) 287-3346

date: 4/18/2016

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: La Laguna de San Gabriel

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel, Vincent Lugo Park

County: Los Angeles State: CA

Photographer: Eloy Zarate

Date Photographed: 4-14-16

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0001	east
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0002	south
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0003	southwest
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0004	north
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0005	south
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0006	south
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0007	east
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0008	east
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0009	north
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0010	north
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0011	southeast
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0012	east
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0013	south
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0014	east
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0015	east
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0016	west
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0017	south
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0018	southwest
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0019	Playground West
CA_L.A.County_Latinos20thCenturyMPS_La Laguna_0020	Playground East

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

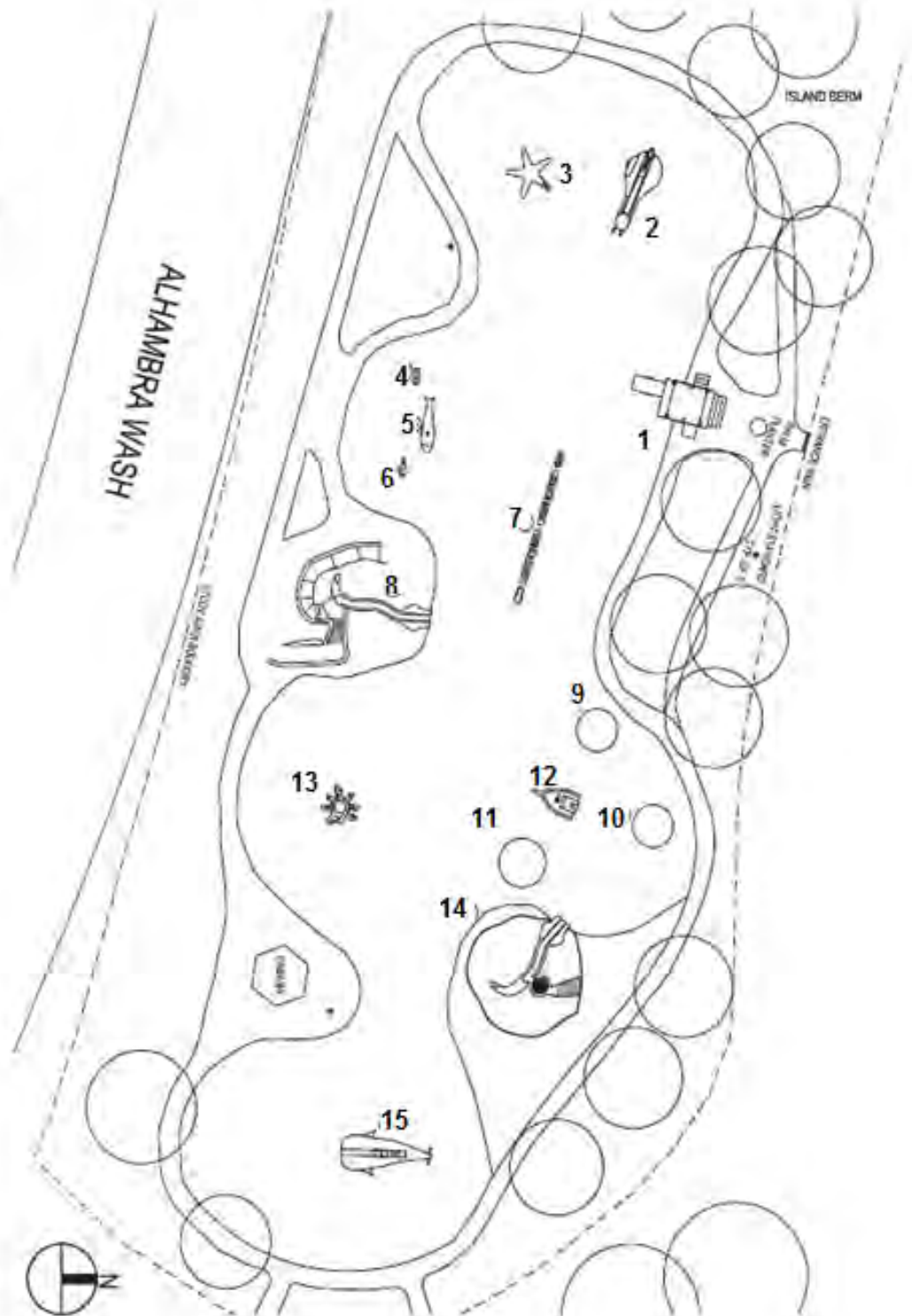
La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Figure 1: Sketch Map of La Laguna de San Gabriel

Legend:

- 1: Wharf
- 2: Snail Slide
- 3: Starfish
- 4: Blue Dolphin
- 5: Grey Dolphin
- 6: Red Dolphin
- 7: Sea Serpent
- 8: Lookout Mountain Slide
- 9: West Seal on Rock
- 10: North Seal on Rock
- 11: East Seal on Rock
- 12: Sunken Ship
- 13: Octopus
- 14: Lighthouse Slide
- 15: Whale Slide



La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Figure 2: Location Map of La Laguna de San Gabriel



Laguna de San Gabriel

La Laguna de San Gabriel
Name of Property

Los Angeles, California
County and State

Figure 3: Google Earth location map of La Laguna de San Gabriel, park location indicated in decimal degrees.



Location: Latitude 34.083524, Longitude -118.104305





















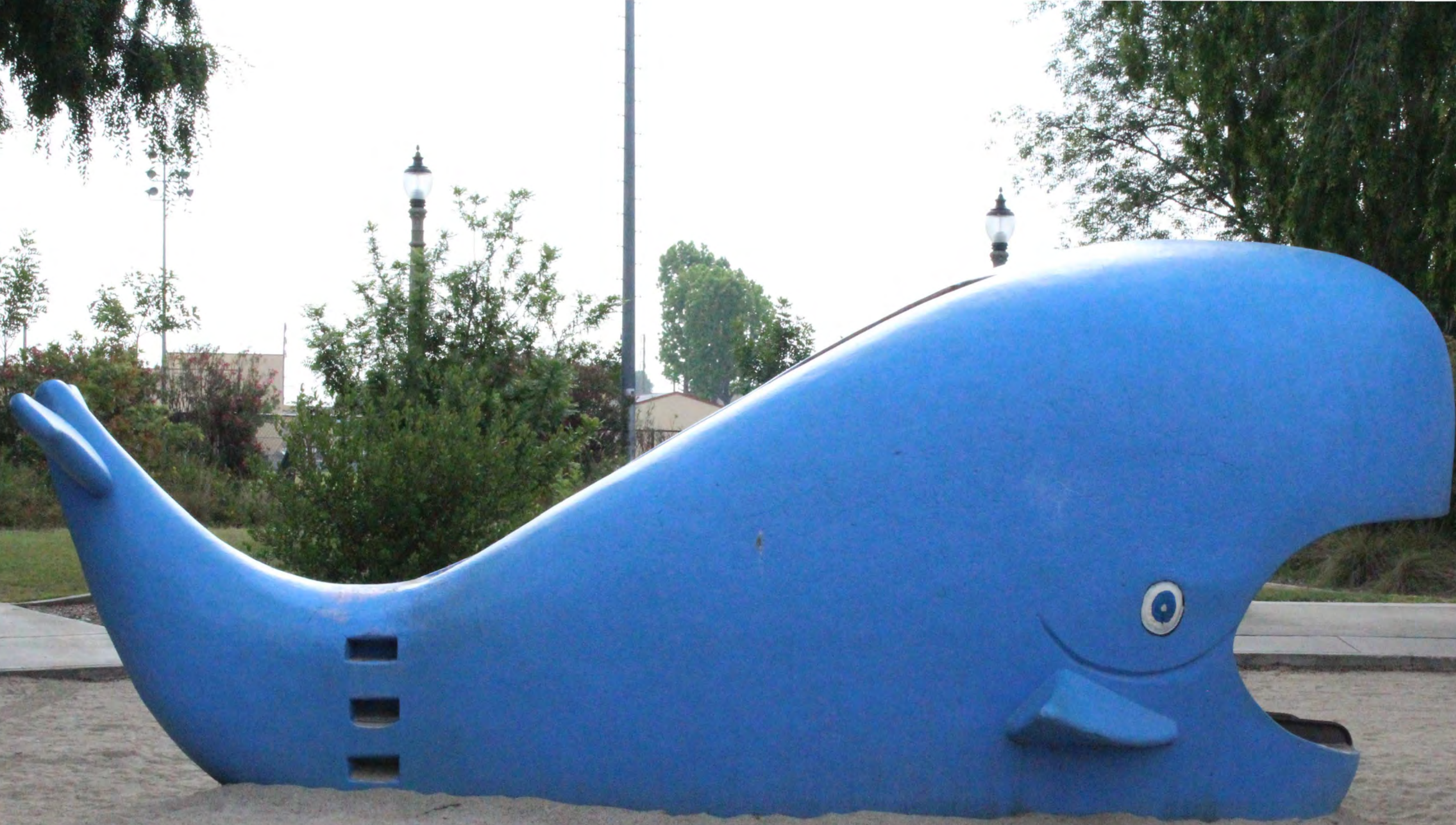




THE RED PIRATE









LAGUNA de SAN GABRIEL









UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: La Laguna de San Gabriel

Multiple Name: Latinos in 20th Century California (AD)

State & County: CALIFORNIA, Los Angeles

Date Received: 12/2/2016 Date of Pending List: 12/27/2016 Date of 16th Day: 1/11/2017 Date of 45th Day: 1/17/2017 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: MP100000462

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

<i>Submission Type</i>	<i>Property Type</i>	<i>Problem Type</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years

Accept Return Reject 1/11/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: La Laguna de San Gabriel is locally significant under National Register Criterion C in the areas of Art and Landscape Architecture. Known locally as "Monster Park," the site is recognized as the distinctive work of a Mexican master concrete artist Benjamin Dominguez and features 14 highly unique and masterfully rendered hand-sculpted concrete play structures. Completed in 1965, the playground represents the culmination of Dominguez' artistic work and many signature elements that he developed over decades are present in the sea creatures of La Laguna. The folk vernacular designed landscape (playground) meets the Registration Requirements of the Latinos in Twentieth Century California MPS Cover Document, as an example of the Murals and Artwork property type (see Latinos in the Arts).

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept Criterion C

Reviewer: Paul Lusignan

Discipline: Historian

Telephone: (202)354-2229

Date: 1/11/17

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR YN

La Laguna de San Gabriel
San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, California
Staff Report

La Laguna de San Gabriel is a playground located within Vincent Lugo Park in the city of San Gabriel. It contains 14 concrete play-sculptures in a sandy ground cover comprising 19,000 square feet, completed in 1965. La Laguna was constructed by Mexican master concrete artist Benjamin Dominguez. His style combined playful, sculptural designs and functional playground equipment to create imaginative sculptures intended for active playground use. The 14 pieces share a nautical theme, retain a high degree of integrity, and share context as a cultural landscape. The property is nominated under the cover of the Latinos in Twentieth Century California Multiple Property Document as an example of the Murals and Artwork property type.

La Laguna de San Gabriel, also locally known as “Monster Park,” is nominated under Criterion C as the work of a master artist. Its significance is based on its highly unique and masterfully rendered hand-sculpted concrete play structures. The park represents the highest form of a playground type that was sought after during the post-World War II period of urban planning. It is indicative of a national trend, but executed by a hand that elevated the playground to the status of interactive art. Liability concerns have caused the removal of similar playgrounds, making parks like La Laguna a rare and threatened resource. This park represents the culmination of Dominguez’ artistic work, and many signature elements that he developed over decades are present in the sea creatures of La Laguna.

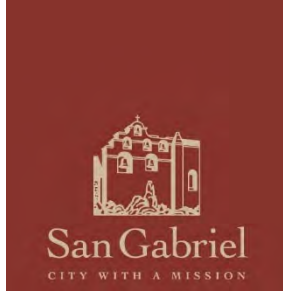
Benjamin Dominguez was born in 1894 in Guanajuato, Mexico and completed his studies at the Academia de Artes Plasticas of the University of Mexico in 1925. His specialty was a technique called *trabajo rustico*, or “concrete wood,” and examples of his concrete artwork included enclosures for the Chapultepec Zoo in Mexico City and a concrete tree at the Washington Park Zoo in El Paso, Texas. El Paso was also the location of his first playground commission. This became the first of many playgrounds constructed by Dominguez, each containing his signature play sculptures, characterized by attention to detail, coherent composition of landscape, and appeal to children. La Laguna represents a style of unique, site-specific playground architecture, executed by a master artist, in a form that is becoming rare. Many of his works, like other playgrounds of Dominguez’ era, have been demolished and replaced with modern, prefabricated playground equipment.

The nomination was prepared by a third party. The property owner, the City of San Gabriel, has provided a letter of support.

Staff supports the nomination as written and recommends that the State Historical Resources Commission support the determination that La Laguna de San Gabriel is eligible for the National Register under Criterion B at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1965, under the cover of the Latinos in 20th Century California Multiple Property Document, and should be listed in the National Register. Staff

recommends the State Historic Preservation Officer approve the nomination for forwarding to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

William Burg
State Historian II
October 3, 2016



Phone: 626.308.2800

Fax: 626.458.2830

City Hall: 425 South Mission Drive, San Gabriel, California

Mail: P.O. Box 130, San Gabriel, California 91778-0130

Web: SanGabrielCity.com

October 17, 2016

Office of Historic Preservation
Department of Parks and Recreation
Julianne Polanco
State Historic Preservation Officer
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 92496-0001

**Re: Support of National Register of Historic Places Nomination for
La Laguna de San Gabriel**

Dear Ms. Polanco,

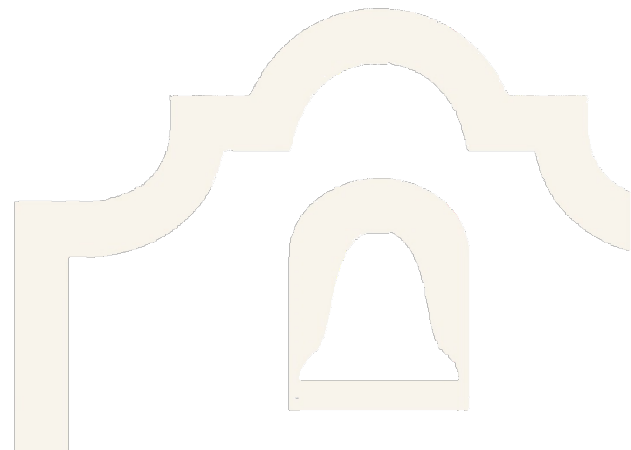
On behalf of the City of San Gabriel, I would like to take this opportunity to offer our support for the nomination of La Laguna de San Gabriel to the National Register of Historic Places. La Laguna is a gem in our community and an important landmark to many residents in the San Gabriel area. Through the collaboration of the Friends of La Laguna and the City, this cultural and historical landmark has gained regional, state and national recognition. As owner of this resource, the City wholeheartedly supports this nomination and urges the State Historical Resources Commission to include La Laguna as part of the National Register.

As an illustration of our support, in June 2009, the City Council unanimously voted to adopt Resolution 09-12 designating La Laguna as a local landmark. This is one of only two features that have been placed on the City's Register of Historic Places. This was completed prior to the designation of the site on the State Register of Historical Resources.

If you have any questions or would like additional information regarding this correspondence, please feel free to contact Community Services Director Rebecca Perez at (626) 308-2875.

Best regards,

Chin Ho Liao
Mayor



**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

1725 23rd Street, Suite 100
SACRAMENTO, CA 95816-7100
(916) 445-7000 Fax: (916) 445-7053
calshpo@parks.ca.gov
www.ohp.parks.ca.gov



November 29, 2016

J. Paul Loether
Deputy Keeper and Chief, National Register and National Historic Landmark Program
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service 2280
1201 I (Eye) Street, NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

Subject: **La Laguna de San Gabriel**
San Juan Capistrano, Orange County, California
National Register of Historic Places

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for La Laguna de San Gabriel to the National Register of Historic Places. This property is located in San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, California. On October 28, 2016, the State Historical Resources Commission unanimously found the property eligible for the National Register under Criterion C at the local level of significance. The property is nominated under the cover of the Latinos in 20th Century California Multiple Property Submission (Amendment). The amended Multiple Property Submission documents and disks will accompany this letter.

The property was nominated by a third party. The property owner, the City of San Gabriel, has provided a letter of support for the nomination.

If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact William Burg of my staff at 916-445-7004.

Sincerely,

Jenan Saunders
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures