Original Project Proposal

_The River of the Desert_ is an extended spatial poem about life and death spreading between horizon and horizon. Structurally, the work is a 900’ transparent corridor set in a flat desert—a corridor that begins and ends in immensity—a transparent nothing caught between infinities. The structure is a visual parallel to a fifteenth-century poem by Jorge Manrique, “Coplas por la muerte de su padre,” “Ode on the Death of His Father.” This luminous tunnel is a reversal of time: the beginning of the poem is the end of the poem, and vice versa.

The project concerns the translation of language as words into language as action. The integration of thought and act in a daily ritual may serve as a model for restructuring new awarenesses of living. The area of El Morro is a hinge cultural area. Spanish, several Indian tribes, and the recently arrived Anglo-Saxons. For this reason, we think it is a symbolic place for a universal poem impossible to translate into words. The project may interest people in the communications arts, actio-poetry, and ones impressed by the beauty of nothingness and the universe.
Coplas por la muerte de su padre

Recuerde el alma dormida,
abíve el seso y despierte,
contemplando

cómo se pasa la vida,
cómo se viene la muerte
tan callando;

cuán presto se va el placer,
cómo después de acordado,
da dolor,
cómo, a nuestro parescer,
cualquiera tiempo pasado
fué mejor.

Ode on the Death of His Father

O, let the soul her slumbers break!
Let thought be quickened and awake,—
Awake to see

How soon this life is past and gone,
And death comes softly stealing on,—
How silently!

Swiftly our pleasures glide away:
Our hearts recall the distant day
With many sighs;
The moments that are speeding fast
We heed not; but the past—the past—
More highly prize.
Onward its course the present keeps,
Onward the constant current sweeps,
Till life is done;
And did we judge of time aright,
The past and future in their flight
Would be as one.

Let no one fondly dream again
That Hope and all her shadowy train
Will not decay;
Fleeting as were the dreams of old,
Remembered like a tale that's told,
They pass away.

Our lives are rivers gliding free
To that unfaithful, boundless sea,
The silent grave;
Thither all earthly pomp and boast
Roll to be swallowed up and lost
In one dark wave.

Thither the mighty torrents stray,
Thither the brook pursues its way,
And tinkling rill,
There all are equal. Side by side,
The poor man and the son of pride
Lie calm and still.

I will not here invoke the throng
Of orators and sons of song,
The deathless few;
Fiction entices and deceives,
And sprinkling o'er her fragrant leaves
 Lies poisonous dew.

To One alone my thoughts arise,—
The Eternal Truth,—the Good and Wise:
'To Him I cry,
Who shared on earth our common lot,
But the world comprehended not
 His deity.

This world is but the rugged road
Which leads us to the bright abode
Of peace above;
So let us choose that narrow way
Which leads no traveller's foot astray
From realms of love,
Partimos cuando nacemos,
andamos mientras vivimos,
y llegamos
al tiempo que fenezcemos;
asi que cuando morimos
descansamos.

Este mundo bueno fue
si bien usásemos del
como devemos,
porque, según nuestra fe,
es para ganar aquel
que atendemos.

Our cradle is the starting-place;
In life we run the onward race,
And reach the goal;
When, in the mansions of the blest,
Death leaves to its eternal rest
The weary soul.

Did we but use it as we ought,
This world would school each wandering thought
To its high state,
Faith wings the soul beyond the sky,
Up to the better world on high
For which we wait.
Unos, por poco valor,
ipor cuán bajos y abatidos
que los tienen!
Y otros, por no tener,
con oficios no devidos
se mantienen.

Los estados y riqueza,
que no dexan a desora,
¿quién lo duda?
No los padimos firmeza
pues que son de una señora
que se muda;
que bienes son de Fortuna
que rebuelve con su rueda
presurosa,
la cual no puede ser una
ni estar estable ni queda
en una cosa.

Pero digo que acompañen
y lleguen hasta la huesca
con su dueño;
por eso no nos engaínen,
pues se va la vida apriessa
como ona.
Y los deleites de acá
son, en que nos deleitamos,
temporales,
y los tormentos de allá,
que por ellos esperanmos,
eternales.

Los placeres y dulores
desta vida trabajada
que faltámos,
¿qué son sino correderos,
y la muerte la culda,
en que caemos?

Ten Centuries of Spanish Poetry
(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University

Some, the degraded slaves of lust,
Prostrate and trampled in the dust,
Shall rise no more;
Others by guilt and crime maintain
The scufflew that without a stain
Their fathers bore.

Wealth and the high estate of pride,
With what untimely speed they glide,
How soon depart!
But nor the shadowy phantoms stay,—
The vassals of a mistress they,
Of fickle heart.

These gifts in Fortune's hands are found;
Her swift-revolving wheel turns round,
And they are gone!
No rest the inconstant goddess knows,
But changing, and without repose,
Still hurries on.

Even could the hand of avarice save
Its gilded baubles, till the grave
Reclaimed its prey,
Let none on such poor hopes rely;
Life, like an empty dream flies by,
And where are they?

Earthly desires and sensual lust
Are passions springing from the dust,—
They fade and die;
But, in the life beyond the tomb,
They seal the immortal spirit's doom
Eternally!

The pleasure and delights which mask
In treacherous smiles life's serious task,
What are they all,
But the fleet coursers of the chase,—
And death an ambush in the race,
Wherein we fall?

Gorge Manrique

Photograph by José de Prada.
Specific Material and Equipment for the Piece

200 rebar arches (Ø ½", length 21"
3,600,000 sq. ft. polyethylene film (1,000 g. width 21"
5,400 yds. nylon rope (Ø ¼")
170,000.0 staples
8 industrial hand staplers
400 rebar sticks, one end pointed (Ø ½", length 24"
7,000.0 yds. wire (Ø ⅛")
2 metric tapes (130"
650' rope (Ø ⅛") for measurements
5 scissors
20 lbs. nails (Ø ¼" x 6"
4 hammers
5 mazes
4 screw drivers
5 pliers
4 wrenches
2 shovels
3 ladders