

Ian Hamilton Finlay • *UNDA*, 1987

Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925-2006) is best known for "Little Sparta," a farm and garden in the Southern Uplands of Scotland, which he and Sue Finlay began transforming into a neoclassical sculpture park in 1966. They have created temples from farm buildings, and have distributed architectural fragments, fountains, and commemorative plaques interspersed with significant plantings throughout the property. Before undertaking the conversion of an ordinary farm into a poetic and philosophical garden, Finlay was primarily known as a writer of short stories and concrete poems. "Little Sparta," like all of his work, explores the complex relationship between the wildness of nature and revolution, and the attempts of culture-particularly literature, painting, and other forms of classical knowledge-to control and contain it.

Although he is now better known as a sculpture than as a writer, the power of language remains central to Finlay's work. For UCSD he created a one-word poem installed at one edge of the north playing field between the Humanities Building and the student apartments of Thurgood Marshall College. UNDA consists of five stone blocks into which are carved, in various sequences, the letters U, N, D, A, and an S-like mark which is the editor's notation for "transpose these letters." The letters on each block in the sequence carry out the transpositions indicated by this curved mark so that regardless of the order of the letters, each block ultimately spells out UNDA. In the course of the multi-part sculpture, the wave sign rolls through UNDA, the Latin word for wave, while the tops of the stones are aligned with the distant horizon of ocean. A literary cycle is identified with the cycle of the natural wave, an association that the artist relates to the velocity and flow of language.

UNDA was completed in 1987 and was Finlay's first permanent outdoor work in the United States. Sue Finlay and Nicolas Sloan collaborated with him on the project. The stones are rough-cut guiting, or English limestone, which was quarried near the Cotswolds and selected for its similarity to the color of the cliffs near the campus. A few eucalyptus and pine trees were planted on either side of the sculpture to make a connection with the distant trees, to frame the view, and to create the sense of a special enclave.