Houston Reflections: Art in the City, 1950s, 60s and 70s

By:
Sarah Reynolds

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C O N N E X I O N S

Rice University, Houston, Texas

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Acknowledgments[1]

1.1 Acknowledgments

For Norman Reynolds, my husband of 25 years

Fifteen years ago I began listening to the memories of contemporary artists, asking them to reflect on their lives and on the city of Houston as it was almost 50 years ago. As time went by, the list of those interviewed grew, but my collection of stories was by no means exhaustive. I leave to others the privilege of capturing those histories of another generation yet to be told.

In addition to the interviewees, all of whom provided reflections of earlier times with sincerity and enthusiasm, several individuals were key to this project. **Houston Reflections—Art in the City 1950s, 60s and 70s** is a true collaboration. Robin Schorre Glover and her mother, Margaret Schorre, generously remembered Charles Schorre with me. I regret I was unable to interview him. Joel Draut, Photograph Archivist for the Houston Metropolitan Research Center at the Houston Public Library, proved to be a great help locating historic photographs. Nancy Hixon at the Blaffer Gallery reflected back to the days of Bill Robinson and earlier, and Ava Jean Mears remembered the early days of the Contemporary Arts Association with laughter and admiration for her colleagues. Earlie Hudnall was instrumental in helping me identify and contact several artists associated with Texas Southern University. He was generous with his time and tirelessly enthusiastic. Geraldine Aramanda, Archivist for The Menil Collection, welcomed me often as I delved into the papers of Dominique and John de Menil and Jermayne MacAgy.

When he heard of this project,, Charles Henry, President of the Council on Library and Information Resources and Publisher at Rice University Press, expressed his desire to publish the book. I am indebted to him for his early commitment to the value of the project and for his ongoing support. David Chien, our designer, captured my vision of the print version of this publication from the onset.

Working diligently to obtain the best possible sound quality, the late Michael Miron tackled the audio challenges of each interview, and because these were memories captured on tape, there were many. The edited and transcribed interviews were masterfully woven into a first-person narrative format by writer and creative consultant Leigh McLeroy, capturing the substance and character of each artist's voice. Not only is Leigh a wonderful writer, but she proved to be an invaluable sounding board. The abundant assistance of Sarah Shipley, Archives Assistant of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, was integral to the success of the project.

Finally, without the interest, commitment and direct involvement of Lorraine A. Stuart, Archives Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, it would have been exceedingly difficult to bring this project to fruition.

I am tremendously grateful to all for the encouragement, support, assistance and hard work that has made this publication possible.

Sarah C. Reynolds

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16131/1.1/>.

December 10, 2007

Chapter 2

Introduction[1]

From 1950 to 1975, Houston underwent explosive change, growing from an incubator of yet-to-be-realized dreams into a renowned metropolis—a center not only of commerce and political power but also of the arts. During that time, a generation of important artists came of age in a rapidly changing milieu that could be uncomprehending, occasionally hostile, and sometimes enthusiastic when it came to their work.

Houston Reflections collects the thoughtful memories of Houston artists, patrons, collectors, and enthusiasts as they recall laboring to build a serious arts community and to find their place in it. These individuals brought the arts from an ambitious vision to a sustainable critical mass, out of which grew the vibrant arts community the city now enjoys. By looking back at those years of change through the eyes of these seminal figures, we can gain valuable perspective on Houston's relationship with the arts today.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16157/1.1/>.

Figure 2.1: Cullinan Hall during construction, 1957-1958, RG5-408. Photo by Maurice Miller. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

The artists whose memories are captured in this volume were nurtured by some important Houston institutions and patrons dedicated to fostering the arts. In 1900, sowing the seeds of what would become the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, several civic-minded women organized the Houston Public School Art League. Designed to enrich the public-school system and its students in art and culture, the League within three decades would change its name and become the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The original site of the Museum was a gift from Joseph S. and Lucie Halm Cullinan and the George Hermann Estate.

The Museum's first director, James H. Chillman, Jr., served until 1953, then returned in 1959 to serve two more years as interim director. Chillman oversaw construction of the Museum's first building, designed by William Ward Watkin, in 1924. The new structure was the first art museum building in Texas, and two Watkin-designed wings were added two years later. The Robert Lee Blaffer Memorial Wing, designed by Kenneth Franzheim, was added in 1953, and shortly thereafter Ludwig Mies van der Rohe was commissioned to design a 25-year master plan for the Museum. The 1958 MFAH Annual Report quotes the architect as saying, "The first problem is to establish the museum as a center for the enjoyment, not the internment of art."

After designing the Museum's Cullinan Hall (Miss Nina Cullinan underwrote the new addition), which

opened in 1958, Mies van der Rohe designed the installation of works selected by Museum director Lee Malone. Helping to put Houston on the national arts map, the inaugural exhibition was called The Human Image and included works from the Cleveland Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wildenstein, the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts, and the Wadsworth Atheneum.

The following year, responding to Miss Cullinan's desire that the new wing be available to the fledgling Contemporary Arts Association from time to time, CAA director Dr. Jermayne MacAgy organized and installed Totems Not Taboo, long remembered as a remarkable and important exhibition.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston further raised its national profile under the leadership of James Johnson Sweeney, who became Museum director in 1961. In the MFAH 1965-66 Annual Report, Sweeney wrote, "A museum's first responsibility is to bring art works of quality to its community and to familiarize the public with works of art of quality from which a lack of familiarity might otherwise cut it off. Its second responsibility is to accumulate a collection of works of art on which it can draw so as to be able to maintain these aims constantly and to spread by loans its influence and these services to sister communities." Under his leadership, the museum expanded its collection of contemporary works and Mesoamerican pieces, and was continuously recognized for provocative and exhilarating installations. Sweeney also commissioned Mies van der Rohe to design an addition, the Brown Pavilion, which would wrap around a portion of Cullinan Hall.

The Museum's next director, Philippe de Montebello, weary of losing major art pieces to better known and better endowed collections around the country, delivered a challenge to Houston in 1973. "This year," he wrote in the Museum's Bulletin, "we had to watch many a masterpiece escape our grasp and enter collections more privileged than our own—more privileged because of the substantially higher funds available for their perpetual growth. ...[W]e fervently hope that the Capital Campaign Fund Drive, initiated more than a year ago, will permit us to regain our earlier momentum." The city met his challenge with an unprecedented outpouring of support: a $15 million fund raised for capital expenditures, overall operations, and acquisitions.

William C. Agee succeeded de Montebello as Museum director in 1974, and under his leadership the Museum continued to acquire 20th-century paintings and sculpture. Agee commenced a focused acquisition of photography by appointing Anne Wilkes Tucker as photography curator in 1976. That same year, he announced the first in a series of donations from the Dayton-Hudson Foundation, on behalf of Target Stores, Inc., to begin the Target Collection of American Photography.

Recognized during these years as a major arts venue, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston has since grown into a world-renowned institution. Under Peter C. Marzio, who became Museum director in 1982 and is now the longest-serving director in its history, the Museum has doubled its exhibition space, more than doubled the size of its permanent collection, and its endowment has enjoyed extraordinary growth. Today, the MFAH is famed for its provocative exhibitions, significant educational outreach, expansive growth, and comprehensive and growing collections.

Figure 2.2: Totems Not Taboo. Exhibition installation, February 26-March 29, 1959. RG05-78-002. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston was not the only arts venue blossoming during those early years. Houston Colored Junior College, founded in 1927, renamed the Houston College for Negroes in 1935, and designated Texas State University for Negroes in 1947, brought John Biggers to Houston in 1949 to build an art department—one of four divisions in the university's fine arts program. Working with very limited resources and only one full-time art instructor (Joseph L. Mack) in a city that was still segregated, Biggers engendered Houston's rich African American art tradition, both in his own work and in his new department. In 1950, one of his pieces was awarded the purchase prize in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston local competition, but the Museum's restrictions on black attendance precluded Biggers from entering and claiming his prize on the day the awards were made—an injustice righted a few months later by Museum director James Chillman.

Also in 1950, Carroll Harris Simms, newly graduated from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, joined Biggers and Mack as a young faculty member in their new department. The enthusiasm and commitment of these young professors began drawing the attention of Houston art patrons, and the philanthropic-minded Susan McAshan and Jane Blaffer Owen, among several others, responded quickly and generously to the clear needs of this ambitious department.

In 1952, Abraham Washington, a TSU art student, painted a mural on a wall in the art department's

newly constructed home, Hannah Hall. When his mural was made permanent, a creative tradition was begun. As a lasting testimony to the powerful legacy of these teachers' tutelage and inspiration, the walls of Hannah Hall today are covered by the art of students working in the tradition established by Biggers, the aggregate result being a lively, dramatic canvas unlike anything else in the city.

Figure 2.3: John Biggers working on a drawing of two women in his studio, 1979. Photo by Earlie Hudnall, courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

While many of the artists in this book were quietly beginning their careers here, the arts scene—a relatively small part of Houston's emerging culture—only occasionally drew widespread attention to itself, usually in connection with a big event. In April 1957, for example, the American Federation of Arts brought its convention to Houston, and the city welcomed nearly 1,500 art enthusiasts, artists, curators, dealers, academicians, and collectors from around the country. The early 1960s saw the Houston Endowment, Inc., announce a major gift of $6,000,000 to build a performing arts center. With matching grants from the Ford Foundation and many generous local donors, the gift resulted in a new and improved Alley Theatre opening its doors in 1968. In 1973, the University of Houston opened the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, the only publicly funded university gallery in the city. One year later, there was a changing of the guard in the Houston arts scene as William A. Robinson assumed directorship of the Blaffer Gallery, building on the superb work done by acting director and art professor Richard Stout; William Agee was named Director

of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and James Harithas was named Director of the Contemporary Arts Museum.

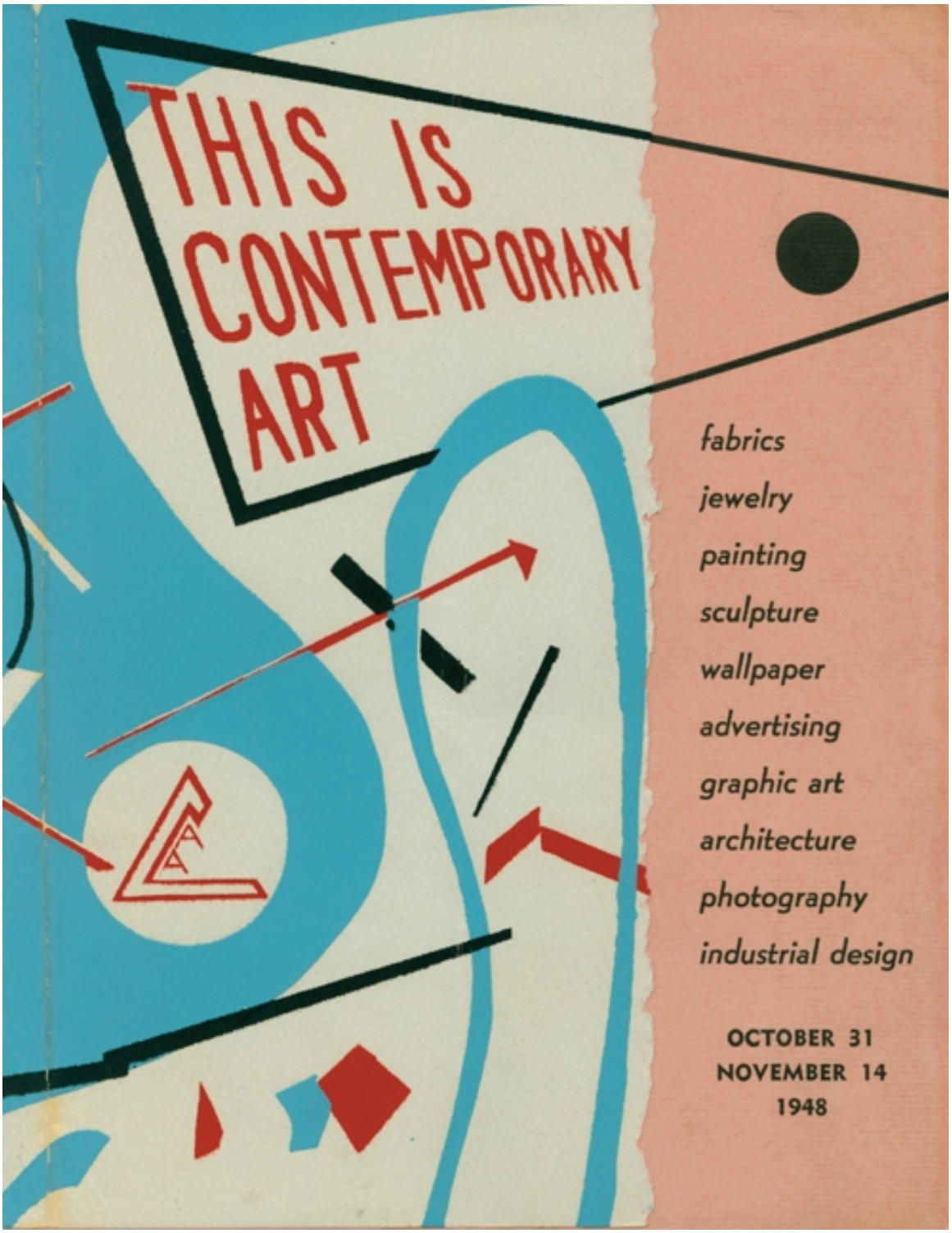

Figure 2.4: Cover of catalog for Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, exhibition, "This is Contemporary Art," October 31-November 14, 1948. Courtesy of the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston.

The growth of contemporary art in Houston can be said to have begun in 1948, the year the Contemporary Arts Association received its charter from the State of Texas. The CAA, which had its beginnings in Robert Preusser's studio class at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, mounted its first exhibition—This is Contemporary Art—at the Museum that year. The CAA's promotional material declared, "This will be the first show of the association and every effort will be made to interest the people of Houston and to show that Contemporary Art does not only include painting and sculpture but many other fields of art and the relationship of each to good design." Under the supervision of an active Board, artist Frank Dolejska designed the catalogue and exhibition, which included sculpture, photographs, graphic arts, and everyday objects.

The CAA entered the 1950s operating out of a small building designed by Mackie & Kamrath, on land leased for $1.00 per year. The Association's first secretary, Ava Jean Mears, remembers working at a card table in lieu of a desk, and working with Preston Frazier as security guards at the association's Van Gogh show a few years later. Contemporary art in 1950s Houston was not widely accepted, and the CAA drew tremendous energy from its sense of being part of the avant garde. It was an exciting time for the "burlap crowd," so named because the exhibitions were often mounted on burlap-covered walls by volunteers who spent countless hours conceiving, organizing, installing, and promoting provocative exhibitions.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the CAA struggled to find its identity, moving back and forth between a virtually all-volunteer organization to a more staid institution with full-time management in place. Tumultuous as those years were, they were also marked by spectacular CAA events, as the association shifted focus from perpetuating its own collection to staging exhibitions and other programs. From 1955 to 1959, CAA Director Dr. Jermayne MacAgy installed a series of brilliant exhibitions giving contemporary art a historical context. Her successor, Robert C. Morris, hired in 1959, attempted to broaden the focus of the CAA to include performing arts, film, and other media. His successor, acting director Donald Barthelme,[2] designed a memorable series of programs and exhibitions in music, literature, film, and the visual arts as "surveys" in the avant garde. When Barthelme left for New York, the CAA board organized several important exhibitions, including a show of west coast artists entitled San Francisco 9, and the unforgettable 1965 show of Robert Rauschenberg's works. The show included performances by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in Rauschenberg-designed costumes, dancing to the music of John Cage.

Subsequently, the Contemporary Arts Association changed its name to the Contemporary Arts Museum and board president Carrington Weems brought Sebastian J. Adler to Houston from the Wichita Art Museum to give CAM an expanded presence in the Houston arts scene. Under their leadership and that of Pierre Schlumberger, CAM launched a building campaign that—with a significant matching grant from the Brown Foundation—resulted in a new building near the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. In 1972, CAM opened its new doors with a controversial show, Exhibition 10, highlighting experimental work by young artists. The show quickly became the talk of the town and was later described, depending upon who was asked, as "bewildering," "offensive," "provocative," or "exciting."

Adler's successor, James Harithas, determined that Texas had come enough of age artistically to justify his resolve to "beat the drum for Texans," and his first CAM exhibition was a showcase for regional artists. Entitled 12 Texas Artists, it included works by John Fleming, Woody Gwyn, Dorothy Hood, Louis Jimenez, Raffaele Martini, William Petty, Sandra Stevens, James Surls, Michael Tracy, Robert Wade, and Mack Whitney.

A few years later, in the summer of 1976, a devastating flood destroyed historic records, files, works of art, and CAM's physical plant. But the community responded immediately with a campaign to restore and rebuild, and the organization fully recovered, aggressively embracing its dynamic future.

[2]Donald Barthelme, 1931-1989, American fiction writer, reporter for the Houston Post, and one of the founders of the University of Houston Creative Writing Program.

Opening Night - Contemporary Arts Museum

Figure 2.5: By Frank Freed. 1953. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of the Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation.

No look at the development of the arts in Houston would be complete without consideration of Dominique and John de Menil, who arrived in Houston from Nazi-occupied France during the 1940s. In 1949, they built their Houston home, designed by Mies van der Rohe protégé Philip Johnson, and began their long, loving mission in service of the arts. John de Menil joined the Contemporary Arts Association that year, and two years later he and Dominique organized the CAA's first one-man exhibition, a show by the legendary surrealist Max Ernst. In 1954, John and Dominique established the Menil Foundation, and began their generous support of the University of St. Thomas. The de Menils solidly reinforced Dr. Jermayne MacAgy in her effort to build the university's new art department into a major center of arts activity. During MacAgy's brief tenure, ten important exhibitions were mounted, the program was expanded, the art history department grew in size and influence, and a new generation of important young artists joined the department.

The unexpected death of Dr. MacAgy in 1964 brought the de Menils even more actively into the foreground of Houston's emerging arts world. Mrs. de Menil became the acting chairman of the art department, hiring staff, teaching, and organizing exhibitions. Bill Camfield, having just arrived only a few months before MacAgy's death, worked with Mrs. de Menil to hire art historians Mino Badner, Walter Widrig and Philip Oliver Smith. A young Rice University graduate, Geoff Winningham, arrived to teach photography, and James Blue took on filmmaking. A print club for collectors was begun; membership cost $5.00 and members could purchase prints and signed lithographs at cost. In September of 1964, Art Investments, Ltd., was formed as a limited partnership with capital of $100,000. The partners shared joint ownership of a few paintings, which rotated among them.

Figure 2.6: Dominique de Menil with Jermayne MacAgy. Courtesy of The Menil Collection.

That same year, the de Menils commissioned Mark Rothko and engaged Philip Johnson to begin work on a University of St. Thomas chapel conceived as a memorial to Jermayne MacAgy. Originally planned for the university campus, the chapel eventually was built just west of the university, on property the de Menils had acquired. Dedicated in 1971, the Rothko Chapel houses 14 of Rothko's dark, expressly quiet paintings, and is now known around the world as an exceptional venue promoting social justice, religious understanding, and introspection.

The de Menils abruptly withdrew their active support of the St. Thomas art department in 1969, shifting their attention and patronage to Rice University and a newly formed Institute for the Arts. The already-established Rice University Department of Art was chaired by John O'Neill and included among its faculty Katherine Brown, Earl Staley, and Bob Camblin. Charles Schorre had been on campus since 1959, teaching life drawing to students in the School of Architecture. Most of the St. Thomas art history and studio art faculty subsequently migrated to Rice, and Dominique de Menil, writing in the Institute's first newsletter, declared, "The Institute for the Arts has now settled in alongside the Department of Fine Arts at Rice University. After hectic months of moving spiritually and bodily from the University of St. Thomas to Rice, we are happy to be able to concentrate once again on developing the Institute's programs. We will continue to expand and diversify our exhibitions, films, and lectures to highlight the best traditions of history and the innovative trends of today. Our aim is to excite the campus and Houston with new ideas and new approaches to art."

After the death of John de Menil in 1973, Dominique began work on plans to retain their collection in Houston. She named Walter Hopps director of her museum, and Paul Winkler associate director. In 1980, she commissioned Renzo Piano to design a new museum. Seven years later, Houston celebrated the opening of The Menil Collection, an extraordinary gift to the city and an extraordinary place for all who are inspired and transformed by art. There could no longer be any doubt that Houston had come of age as a major center of modern arts activity.

Sarah C. Reynolds, December 10, 2007

A longer version of this introduction is included in this volume's archival materials, housed at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston archives.

Chapter 3

David Pryor Adickes, b. 1927[1]

3.1

3.1.1 Early Lessons

I graduated from college in Huntsville (Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas) in Math and Physics in '48 and then went straight to Paris for two years, then came back to Huntsville around Christmas of '50 and to Houston in spring of '51.

I opened a little art school and invited Herb Mears, my old colleague from Paris, to come down from New York—we opened this school, The Studio School of Contemporary Art, together. He was working as a window dresser for Abraham and Strauss in Brooklyn, so he was glad to get out of there and have some other sort of thing. So we opened this little art school, and it didn't work. We made the basic mistake of charging people after they came rather than getting a commitment from them. So we didn't make any money, but we had a lot of fun and met a lot of people.

The art school was on Truxillo Street between Main and Fannin. All the action was right there...because 2K's was three blocks away, and that was the night action for all the theater people and writers and these types of people. The town was small in those days.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16138/1.1/>.

Cubist Philosopher

Figure 3.1: by David Adickes. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the artist

3.1.2 The James Bute Paint Co.

The only real gallery selling contemporary art was the Bute Gallery downtown, run by the young impresario Ben DuBose. They had hired Ben out of the University of Houston to come and basically liquidate their prints. They had a big inventory of prints...everything was prints [back then]. Basically it was a big downtown store whose business was wallpaper and paint, but it had a little room in the back...where they sold framed prints. They weren't doing well, so they hired Ben DuBose to liquidate the prints...have a sale and sort of wipe out the business. Well, Ben came in and saw that they could make this business go because they had a little frame shop [as] part of it. He said, "Let's try to make a gallery out of this." Then Ben started bringing in artists. I was one of the very first. I think not the first, but of the professional artists in town, there weren't more than five or six.

Figure 3.2: David Adickes at studio at 2600 South Main, Houston, 1953. Courtesy of the Artist.

3.1.3 The Art League of Houston

Early Spring of '51, The Art League sponsored a show in the garage of the Shamrock Hotel...one of those exhibition spaces. I was brand new in town; Herb hadn't even arrived yet—but he sent his stuff down and I had them on the wall...and he sold some, too, and he was not even in town yet. Robert Joy, the artist, says that this is the freshest, newest stuff—so he called Nina Cullinan, who came over and brought one or two or three other people who weren't that well known. That's where I met Ben. He had just developed his downtown gallery and says, "Come down and show with us," so I did just a few weeks later and John de Menil bought the biggest one for $100. It was 48 inches square—a red still life.

3.1.4 Misjudged

Every year they had this marvelous show called the Houston Artists Annual and there was a $100 purchase prize and other prizes. I submitted to it in the spring of '51 and was awarded the purchase prize by Judge William Lester of The University of Texas. When the show opened, he came over to the opening and I didn't have the first prize, but had an honorable mention. So he went up to Ruth Uhler and said, "Now just a minute—I gave first prize to this man."

She said, "Well after you left we discovered he had not lived in Houston for a full year and that disqualified him for the prize."

Lester said, "That's not fair," and she said, "We'll make it up to him somehow."

So one day the phone rang and Ruth Uhler said, "Would you like to have a one-man show in the museum?"

And I said, "Is the Pope Catholic?"

So I had the first show. It was called a corridor show, and it was upstairs. I didn't have much stuff...mostly washes from Paris because I'd just gotten back from Paris. Nina Cullinan bought one, so it was a great success. That was the beginning of my little career being launched and realizing I could make sort of a living. I had another job—I was a draftsman for an oil company by day, but was painting by night. But that gave me the confidence to quit that job and paint full time. And that was all due to luck. If I had just won the prize I would [not] have had a one-man show, and that was such a prestigious thing.

3.1.5 Selling Shares

I needed to go to Europe (in '53 and '54) and didn't have any money, so I developed this idea of selling shares in myself. I wrote up this document and printed it on blueprint paper and sort of padded the edges so that it would look like a document. It outlined what I wanted to do: go to Europe, paint, bring back paintings and guarantee everyone who bought a $50 unit one painting and one copy of any lithos I did while I was there.

I went...stayed in Europe 14 months on $1800...and while I was there bought a car for $400, then sold it for $400! I lived in Barcelona for $25 a month in a penthouse—couldn't spend a dollar for a meal, that sort of thing.

When I got back, we had a party at which I was to deliver all the stuff. So we put 36 numbers in a hat and had the people that had bought shares [draw]. A plastic surgeon that I knew bought five, and my cousin Lucille bought two. Henri Gadbois was another artist...his wife Leila McConnell bought two. Bill Condon bought two, I believe, and Nina Cullinan bought two. Anyhow, they were all there—oh, and Jane Owen was one of those. Somebody put the word out to Time Life magazine that it was going to be one of those deals where very wealthy ladies in hopsack clothing were going to be there. Of course they all showed up dressed normally, but the photographers were there and interviewed extensively...but it was never printed. Some other story bumped it. But I have all the photographs: pictures of all these people choosing their paintings.

3.1.6 Galleries on the Go

In about '53 Bute Gallery moved from downtown to River Oaks, and they were doing very well. River Oaks Shopping Center was showing good signs of being a deal, so James Bute took a space out there. It was

a tight little neighborhood, and the restaurant of choice was One's a Meal. We were there every day for breakfast—it was a little artistic nucleus. But Bute never paid Ben DuBose any money. He was on a salary far below his level of service to the company. I went to Japan and around the world for two years while they were there at West Gray, and when I came back from Japan in about 1960 I talked Ben into opening the gallery on Kirby. I had put up the money, and Ben was the expertise. He announced to Bute one day that he was leaving the gallery and opening his own and they closed the doors, locked up all records so nobody could steal the addresses and all that. They fired Ben summarily on the spot...so it took us about two months to get the other building ready and open the gallery.

Ben had gotten a pretty good group of 12 to 15 artists. Other than myself there was Herb Mears, Charles Schorre, Charles Tedwood, Lamar Briggs, who was working just down the street at Evans-Monical...and then there were several women. Patty Waldrip Taylor was one of the best, one of the biggest.

Other galleries opened. Meredith Long Gallery opened out on Westheimer next to the railroad track near what is now Highland Village. Artists like Dan Windgren and others were his mainstay people. There was the Louisiana Gallery over on Louisiana near Brennan's, and Kiko Gallery opened down on Lubbock—it was a very good gallery, very good—next to Alliance Française near the middle of the block. Parker Cushman had a very nice gallery down on Montrose off of Westheimer, about where Numbers night club is now. Parker was importing Paris School stuff.

Those were the big days; that's when the gallery business really started to flourish. They had great openings. They were showing international stuff. The openings themselves were on Fridays primarily, and were the social event of the week. That was where you saw and met everybody. They were good and they a lot of fun and very active. The shows were covered by the press—Maxine Mesinger in the Post—and it was very exciting.

Figure 3.3: David Adickes, Christmas 1954. Courtesy of the Artist.

3.1.7 Love Street Light Circus

I opened Love Street Light Circus and Feel Good Machine in '67—it was the hottest psychedelic club in town. It was down on Allen's Landing in an old white building; a night spot for kids. It was a big room with giant mattresses and hundreds of colored pillows, and everyone would lie horizontal looking at the light show. This was the same year that the whole thing started in San Francisco with the Philmore Auditorium...I was out there that New Year's Eve of '66 and just fell in love with that projected light of psychedelic light shows. It was the hottest thing going—it went wildly one summer and we tried to stay open through the next year, but the following summer I opened one just like it in San Antonio for the Hemisfair '68 expo, and it failed. The first band we had in Houston was called The Red Crayola and they were just a bunch of kids from Rice, but we had some of the big bands. Anyone who got close to it will never forget it. There are people I have run into today who remember.

3.1.8 How It Felt

We were young. If I were young today, that age, I'd probably feel that it was the greatest time...the biggest thing going. Going to Europe was hot stuff for everybody in the summer in those years. So they got interested in European art. A lot of people brought back French stuff and art galleries just popped up because that's what was happening. Everybody was building new houses then...the post-war boom was in full swing and people were building houses in Tanglewood...Meyerland...and they all needed paintings. It became a hot business then.

David Adickes was interviewed on August 1, 1997. Listen to the interview here[2] .

[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16138/latest/01 David Pryor Adickes.mp3

Chapter 4

Gertrude Levy Barnstone, b. 1925[1]

4.1 "Draw a Circle."

I was about seven when my mother took me over to the Museum of Fine Arts and talked to Mr. Chillman,[2] and he said, "Draw a circle." And I drew a circle...so he put me in the class. It wasn't a children's class. It was an adult class that did oil paintings and nudes and all kinds of good stuff. It was very exciting and alive. A new teacher, Bob Joy, moved down from Pennsylvania to Houston with his family. That was during the depression, and it was all pretty vital and it was very exciting for me. It became my life.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16152/1.1/>.

[2] James C. Chillman, Jr., was the founding director of the MFAH, serving from shortly before the William Ward Watkin building opened in 1924 until 1953 and again as interim director between 1959 and 1961.

Sun Catchers

Figure 4.1: by Gertrude Barnstone. Installed at U.S. Green Stamp building on Holcomb, 1951. Courtesy of the artist.

4.2 In the Fifties

When I think of the 50s, I think of a fabulous sense of wonderful things happening, wonderful in terms of energy and hopefulness. The war was over...and so many people were moving here. Howard,[3] who became my husband, moved to Houston in '48. The Shamrock was built then, and everything just boomed and exploded...everything was possible and there was so much energy and a positive sense in the air. It was terrific! I was volunteering—a lot of us were doing things. In fact, that's how Howard and I first got together, because he was a newcomer in Houston, and got involved at CAA. That was, of course, the scene of so much happening—CAA became a good enterprise for the de Menils.[4] Houston was their—what's the term?—tabula rasa. There was just this incredible attitude of, wow—let's go. And to have that with first class art, not pretenders, not second class, but really top notch stuff...their activities and involvement were fabulous.

I had gotten married and was having babies, so I had a studio at home. We turned one room in an apartment, and then a house, into a studio. I was doing a lot of painting and then some sculpture. I had

[3]Howard Barnstone graduated from Yale University with a Bachelor's degree in Architecture in 1948 and moved to Houston that same year. He married Gertrude Levy in 1955; they divorced in 1969. Barnstone practiced and taught architecture in Houston until his death in 1987.

[4]Parisian John de Menil married Dominique Schlumberger in 1931. The de Menils arrived in Houston in 1942 and became US citizens in 1962. Together they amassed one of the largest and most wide-ranging art collections in the United States.

several shows, two or three one person shows...and I remember being thrilled at one of them that Jim Sweeney showed up with Alexander Calder,[5] and that was great fun. He was pretty "in his cups," but it was a delight.

Figure 4.2: Gertrude Barnstone, Mexico 1959. Courtesy of the artist.

4.3 The Burlap Group

The burlap group was a lot of Houston artists—not me—who wanted to make the Contemporary Arts Museum, and any art group with a lot of art activity in Houston, exhibit Houston artists. Well, the de Menils wanted—they brought the Van Gogh show—they wanted to do other things that were right up there. But these people objected strongly; they said there should be opportunity for them. They needed venues to show their work and develop. As far as I was concerned, I wasn't going to learn anything looking at my work, and I knew most of their work from art school. I wanted to see things I wouldn't otherwise see in Houston, because that's the only way I was going to be an artist. I don't know if it was a metaphor for other things, but the idea was that they would, if they could, hang burlap on the walls and hang their art on the burlap.

[5] Alexander Calder, 1898-1976. American abstract kinetic artist best known for creating mobiles and stabile sculpture.

4.4 Early Leadership

The de Menils brought Jerry MacAgy,[6] and she was one fantastic person. Her personality was so dynamic. You were just attracted to it by the force of her—it was such a good kind of thing. It wasn't dominating or manipulative, or it never struck me that way, certainly. I've never heard anything like that about her. But she was a real, vital force for things happening—things of the mind, which was so exciting. Then Jim[7] and Laura Sweeney came. That was tremendous. He did fabulous things while he was here. They became really good friends of ours, as with Jerry MacAgy. It was real personal for us, because Howard was doing a lot of work for Schlumberger for the de Menils. It was about not having narrow boundaries. The boundaries were endless so the sky was the limit for what you could do: extending, trying, and building on one's development.

Figure 4.3: Gertrude and Howard Barnstone at Totems Not Taboo opening, 1959. Photo by Eve Arnold. Magnum. Courtesy of Gertrude Barnstone.

4.5 Other Pursuits

In the 60s I got on the school board—the Houston school board—and it was extremely political, extremely dramatic. It was quite an experience. In '64 I ran, and then I didn't get off until 1970. I found that during that time I couldn't keep up with the art thing in any form...the focus changed. Then in 1970 I did other things—TV and whatnot. Channel 2 (KPRC-TV) kindly gave me a job doing community relations...because

[6] Jermayne MacAgy was an exhibit designer, museum director and art professor who became director of the Contemporary Arts Museum in 1955. During her four-year tenure she organized 29 exhibitions, many of them considered unusual at that time.

[7] James Johnson Sweeney, noted art critic and former Guggenheim director, was named Museum of Fine Arts director in 1961, where he served for six years.

I was divorced by then, and had three little children. After a few months they asked if I would do a non-commercial children's program. Those were the days of Sesame Street and the realization that—wow!—you could do something worthwhile. The FCC was breathing down the necks of commercial stations to do this, so they wanted me to work it up. Since I'd been on the school board they figured I had some feel for this thing about kids. I did that for a few years, and they gave me total carte blanche, which was wonderful.

The show was called Sundown's Treehouse, and it was participatory...about eight kids with total ethnic diversity. They were all under ten, but the children ran the show. I would come up with an outline of what the show was going to be, and we'd meet and we'd talk about it and we'd start doing some dialogue back and forth, and then two days later—it was the taping, and kids just went! I tried to include a lot of participatory things like putting a piece of plastic in front of the camera and a kid with a brush would draw on it, so on the screen all you'd see is a brush and these lines and things. I loved doing that program.

The whole television thing lasted a few years, then the Women's Caucus for Art became important. I'd been so active politically, and discrimination was just everywhere. This was certainly something that needed to be worked on, so I was very active in that...helped get that going. And I was active here and there nationally for a few years, as well as doing my own work. Then you realize, okay, I've done that, I've got to get back to what is really me, and put all my energy and focus on that. So I did.

4.6 Part-Time Welder

After I lost my job with Channel 2, I was a media consultant for a while—whatever the hell that means, which was practically nothing. Then I decided I was going more and more into getting back into art. Art had always been there in my life since I was a little kid. So I sort of pulled back into art after that. I realized that I had in the past done some big things, but then they weren't very good. Back before I got married in the 50s, I got a commission to do two very large things for the US Green Stamp building on Holcombe. And there were two separate pieces of aluminum—it was big, you know, five inch by one inch thick, curled. Well, I couldn't make them—obviously I had them fabricated. You have something fabricated if you work in metal and it's big. Remember that. And my other thing was working in multimedia, which was everything from paper to this to that. Wood, sometimes metal would come into it.

I didn't know what the hell to do with metal. I figured well, I've got to learn to weld so I can get a chance to do something else large. I can do it. People all over the world learn to weld, so I went to the community college and learned to—and I loved it. So I got a job in welding. I welded the aluminum frames that plexiglass skylights went into. It was repetitive, it was a skill. And the more you weld, the better you get. It's all habit—I mean practice, practice, practice. So I did this for half the week, and then the rest of the week I did my own work. By the time I learned to weld, I had moved into this house and the garage was already a shop. So it had everything. All I had to do was put in electricity for a welding machine. It was wonderful. It had shelves and a sink and a flat cement floor. It wasn't the biggest in the world, but it's worked for 30 years, and I've done big things in it.

4.7 On Making Choices

I've had several times in my life I've felt I really had to make a decision—do I want to go into theater, because I did a lot of theater, too. Should I go into theater, or should I go into art? And two or three times I've had that fork in the road, and I've had to sit down and figure out what I want to do. Finally I made the decision that once and for all it was going to be art, because with art you could pull more out of yourself; it's somehow more creative than being an interpretive actor, and the repetition of night after night of performances. I did some things at the Alley. I started that pretty young, when I was about 13. And there was a remarkable woman who was sort of an icon in American theater...Margo Jones. She was brought here by the woman who was head of the Parks Department to head the community playhouse. I was 13, 14, 15, and I kept on until I started college and by that time she'd left. Margo went on to New York and directed Ingmar Bergman, then she ended up with her own theater in Dallas.

She said, "Decentralization of the arts, baby, don't ever forget, decentralization of the arts." She said that theater was too important to be centered in New York and Los Angeles...that theater belongs...is a part of...everybody's life. It's got to be out there. So it was in this interrelatedness of the arts that I grew up.

My mother wanted to be a writer, but she didn't. But she hated being a housewife. That's why she felt that the worst thing that could happen to a woman was to get married, and the second worst thing that could happen to a woman was to have children, because they limited a woman's opportunity to develop her talent, her intelligence, and to grow as a person. So I mean, I heard this stuff and went, "Okay—well, I'm going to do it. I'll show you."

I had a husband that felt the same. The last thing he wanted was a wife who would be a housewife, take care of the babies. Howard didn't want that. We agreed on that early on, so we were on the same wavelength there. So that was nice.

Gertrude Barnstone was interviewed on June 9, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[8]
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[8] http://cnx.org/content/m16152/latest/02 Gertrude Levy Barnstone.mp3

Chapter 5

Preston Bolton, b. 1920[1]

5.1

5.1.1 A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats

When I first came to Houston...way back in the 40s, the symphony was the only thing in town that anybody supported that even looked like art...and I'm not sure it was art, either. The museum (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) was in place, but it showed a lot of dusty things.

When the CAA [Contemporary Arts Association[2]] was formed [in the late 40s] there was absolutely no contemporary art in Houston, and the people who supported the early CAA did it because of that. As it grew, there were other contemporary things offered in the city, so it's all a matter of timing.

My theory in all of this through the years is that the city is only as good as all of its arts. One art alone can't support a real cultural endeavor for a city, and if we had a wonderful ballet and a terrible symphony, it isn't good. So I tried to promote ballet—and all the things we were weak in—in order to bring them up to the same level.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16167/1.1/>.

[2] The Contemporary Arts Association was chartered in 1948 by founding members Walter I. Farmer, Robert Preusser, Alvin Romansky, Karl F. Kamrath, Edward M. Schiwetz, and Robert D. Straus.

Figure 5.1: Preston Bolton with Mrs. Blaffer seated at Rudi's, 3807 Main St., Houston, November 26, 1957. Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

5.1.2 Upstart: The Contemporary Arts Association

Jane Owen and Ima Hogg were the ones interested in gathering a group primarily in the performing arts and visual arts. It was one of those organizations that was looking to get more money for the arts and trying to get corporations interested. That didn't happen. It happened later with various organizations, but not at that time. They gave a wonderful masked ball every year that was lots of fun, at the Rice Hotel.

One of the founders of the Contemporary Arts Association was Walter Farmer. Walter Farmer was with Foley's and he was in charge of the store's decorating department—all the displays in the store—and he was one of the guiding lights that got together a group that included Carol Straus, Alvin Romansky—nine or ten people and then some. The agenda was to create an interest in contemporary art. You know, we didn't have galleries then and Jimmy Chillman[3] hated contemporary art and wouldn't do anything about it.

[3]The MFA's first director was James Chillman, Jr., who remained as head of the museum for thirty years, overseeing two major expansion projects in 1926 and 1953.

The first show that I remember was at the Museum of Fine Arts in one of their upstairs rooms. I remember two; there might have been more. One was on household objects, and it was when Foley's was being built.

Arts Council Elects Bolton

Preston M. Bolton has been elected president of the Arts Council of Harris County, formerly the Allied Arts Association.

Mr Bolton, an architect, is the immediate past president of the Contemporary Arts Association. He has served on the board of the Allied Arts Association for three years. He is also on the board of the Houston Foundation for Ballet.

PRESTON M. BOLTON
Architect Named

Figure 5.2: "Arts Council Elects Bolton," The Houston Post, June 17, 1956, p. 17. Copyright 1956 Houston Post. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

5.1.3 Moveable Art

The original Contemporary Arts building was built downtown where The Heritage Society is now, and the property was owned by John Blaffer and he let them use it. The building was paid for by John de Menil, but it was on the John Blaffer property. That's where the Van Gogh show took place, which was one of the famous ones there. John de Menil was the moving party behind that exhibit. Back then the American Federation of Arts was a very prominent thing, and I was president of the CAA at that time, and I went to New York and invited them to come have their thing here. And I think it was one of the really influential movements in the city that focused on art, and local people knew that there were big people interested in art. It was a very good exhibition.

Then that building was moved out to the Prudential site...they picked it up and moved it right down Main Street. It was a wonderful party. All of us were riding on the truck, you know—Nina Cullinan, Winifred Safford and all of the early people. And Prudential paid for actually putting it there on their grounds. But again...we had to move because Prudential wanted to use their property, and they got tired of keeping CAM up.

5.1.4 Charting Course

CAA became the Contemporary Art Museum (CAM) to borrow from other museums. CAM would not have a permanent collection, except that was not decided at the first. We were given a number of objects—Calders and things of that nature—so those were accepted, but the primary reason we decided not to have a permanent collection was that we didn't have any place for it. When they moved to Bissonnet those works were sold, or given back to the donors.

There was conflict on the board as to whether the organization should be for local artists only, or whether they should expand to national or international artists. John de Menil was the one that was very much in favor of national and international. And Eleanor Freed—because she had a painter husband—was definitely not for it, nor were the local artists. Because remember, there were no galleries in those days, and there was no place for the artist to show his or her work. That's the reason some left the Contemporary Arts Museum because the local interests took over, and they just weren't interested.

The CAM went through a number of directors who had their own flavor, like Lefty Adler and his wild show for the opening of the museum where cockroaches were prominently displayed. It was not a very well accepted exhibit. There were some good parts to it as well as some bad ones, and it attracted a lot of attention at the time—it brought a lot of people here. And Pierre Schlumberger broke the [inaugural] bottle of champagne on the building.

5.1.5 Showing at the Shamrock

In the 60s, one of the most influential things that happened was that the New York galleries would come down and stay at the Shamrock Hotel and show works and take them out to homes. It was not an art fair. It was done on an individual basis. They would take a suite at the Shamrock, and if the individual liked a piece he would take it out to her house and sell it just like an oriental rug, you know. But it worked.

5.1.6 Looking Forward

The encouraging thing to me about the Houston arts scene today is the young people that are on all these boards now. They're taking the responsibility that their parents and grandparents had for the city. The boards are young boards, and that's as it should be and wonderful for the future. Besides that, the city has been very, very generous in money. When I first came to Houston it was easy to get money for hospitals, but it was not easy to get money for anything to do with the arts. That's changed.

Preston Bolton was interviewed on September 2, 1997. You can listen to the interview here[4] .

[4] http://cnx.org/content/m16167/latest/03 Preston Bolton.mp3

Chapter 6

H.J. Bott, b. 1933[1]

6.1 To Houston by Way of Galveston

I went to high school in San Antonio and left there in 1952, but I didn't return to this area until 1969. I moved to Galveston and should have moved to Houston right away, but Galveston was an incredible experience. We lived there ten years and my wife DeeDee[2] had a gallery called Loft-on-Strand. We had a building that had 15,000 square feet of space, so I had a drawing studio, a painting studio and a sculpture studio, and then we had the gallery, plus our living quarters. To give you an idea of the spacious accommodations, our dressing room was 800 square feet.

I moved to Galveston from New York. I had a job with an ad agency and I just happened to go to Galveston and see all these old storefront buildings that were vacant. I asked why they were all available—my God, in New York they would have been just chock full—and the man said, "They want too much money."

I asked, "Well, what is too much money?"

He said, "Well they want $45, $50 for some of those lofts."

Even in those dollars, in 1969, I mean this was nothing. I went back to New York, resigned my job and made it to Galveston. Part of the decision also had to do with the fact that the Menil Collection, which at that time was at University of St. Thomas, had had a very large article in Art in America about what they were doing in Houston...and it all happened to gel at the same time.

I thought this was going to be a wonderful situation of being able to be outside of Houston so I could be left alone, but at the same time it wasn't difficult to get here. I had made the terrible mistake of moving from what is now the Chelsea area in New York out to Long Island so I could be by the foundry and hell, I could have gone to Wyoming and it would have been the same thing; it was so difficult to get back into the city. But with Interstate 45, even with the construction it wasn't that bad. Now, many of those trips I don't really remember because that was when I was still drinking, which just frightens the hell out of me—to think that I'd come up here and go to an opening and drive back and have no idea how we got back home.

But anyway, the bottom line of the Galveston experience which lasted ten years was that it was very enriching and it was a fulfilling kind of thing that I had always wanted—to have a complete atelier like Max Ernst had set up in the southwest. And I think I did well self-satisfaction wise. DeeDee thought at first we were going back to New York because when we met, she was on her way to New York...but I had determined after I spent one winter here that I wasn't going back to New York.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16153/1.1/>.

[2] Harvey Bott married Margaret Jane Deats ("DeeDee") on May 27, 1970.

Avoid Authority

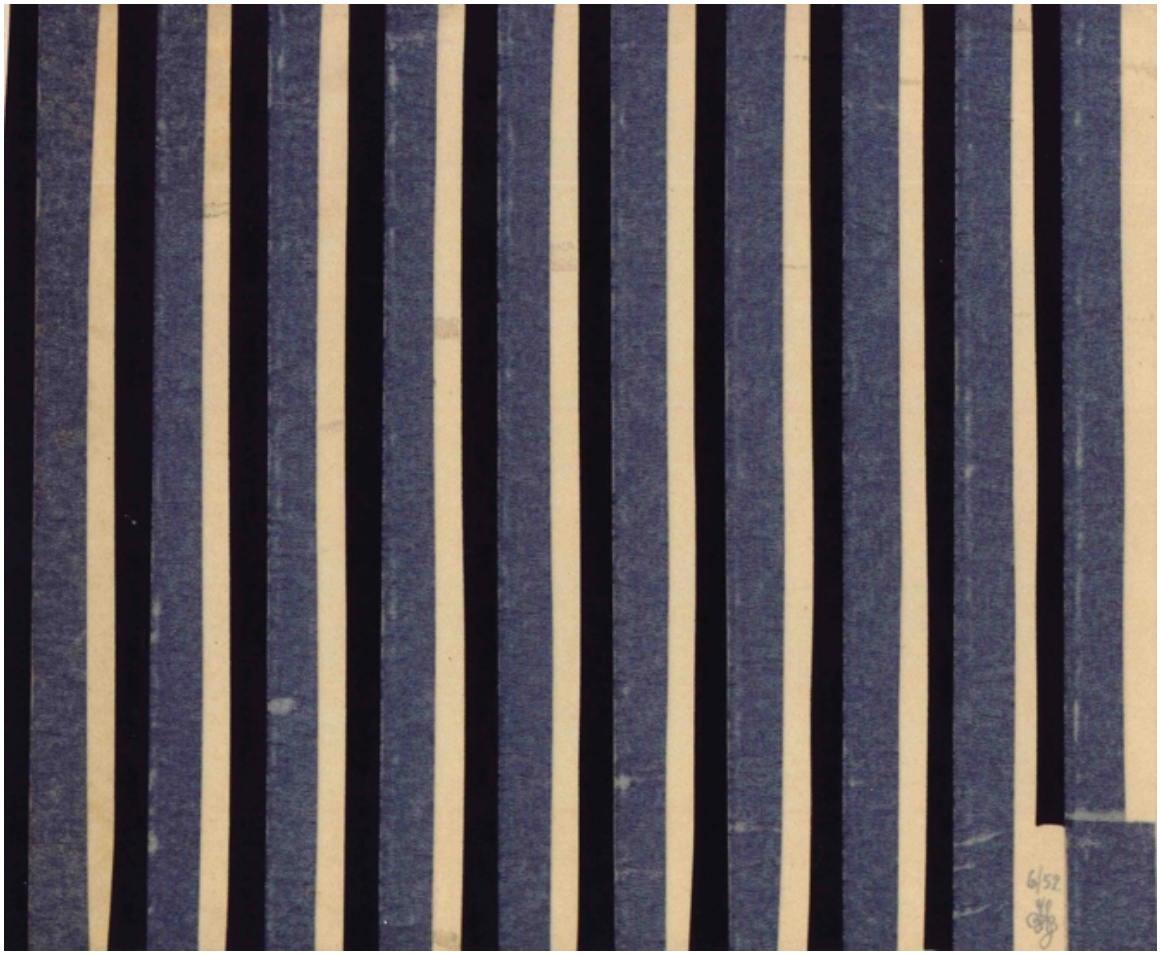

Figure 6.1: by Harvey Bott. Photo by Hans Staartjes. Courtesy of the Sicardi Gallery

6.2 Odd Jobs

I went out to the medical branch (University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston) and got a job there as a ghostwriter and an in-house management consultant since my academic background is in cultural anthropology. DeeDee was in banking at the time and she wanted me to go full-time as an artist, saying that she would support it, but I was too much of a male chauvinist. I couldn't handle it. So I kept the job at the medical branch for four years, then I set up an art therapy program that had to do with disassociated people, feeling that an artist would have more of a touch with that and be a better art therapist than someone straight from psych. I set up a program with MHMR (Galveston Mental Health and Mental Retardation) that lasted about four years. We had the art therapy center and then we had working studios. I had a little apartment complex for my studio assistant and two of the art therapists had studio apartments. Michael Tracy was one of the artists that I trained as an art therapist, and Michael was just a really incredible therapist. I mean, [the clients] absolutely loved him. They'd say, "How can he be the art therapist? He's

just like us!" He had wonderful command and a great sense of empathy.

Figure 6.2: Harvey and Margaret Bott, 1987. Courtesy of Harvey Bott.

6.3 The Blue Barn on Barnes

Number One in the decision to move to Houston from Galveston had to do with the contacts that DeeDee had, for her career. Number Two had to do with the fact that both of us really felt that Houston was coming along as an art center. And so when we made the decision to leave Galveston it was either Long Island or it was Houston. I found that I could work with less pressure here. I always felt that in New York there was too much careerism and that was one of the reasons why I left. People were always so involved in becoming famous instead of doing their work.

The art world is really a microcosm of the rest of the world. You can influence a lot of people, but that doesn't mean you are going to be famous. You can look at what takes place in Washington and see the same kind of thing taking place in the art world. It's all the chicanery that everyone gets upset about—but if you're going to be an artist you should do your work and let the work just speak for itself.

When we moved to Houston in 1979 I didn't have a studio to start with, and I moved everything from those 15,000 square feet into storage units. We took up an entire bank of I think 15 units...and filled them up from floor to ceiling.

I was looking for a loft, you know, and I went downtown and would see these wonderful places that would make fabulous studios and also living quarters. The owners of the buildings—this was in '79—they thought I was a real flake. Who would want to live in those old buildings? They're making fortunes down there today, or I hope they are.

DeeDee found me this wonderful studio which I'm still in on Barnes. So we offloaded the 15 storage units and I finally moved into my studio on the fourth of July, 1979. We watched fireworks on the bayou (Buffalo

Bayou) from the studio, which was really fun. Now it's all developed, but it was very undeveloped at the time—only a few metal buildings and a few little houses in the area.

6.4 A Motif of One's Own

When I moved down here from New York, part of the move had to do with the search for something that was my own. I wanted my own motif...my own process that could become like a driving force. I came up with something I recognized because of my cultural anthropology background. I was working as a management consultant and I was in this meeting and just bored out of my mind. As I was doodling, I drew a little square and [divided it into quadrants], then drew an "s" through that square that was almost like little half circles. Not needing to do anything more with it, I saw the rest of it...and it was like, "Oh my God!"

I had this cornucopia of all the homo sapiens archetypes and these four interlocking forms become all these archetypes: the major crosses, paisley, the yin and yang, and it goes on and on and on. Well, in this meeting as soon as I drew that "s" and saw what I saw, I said out loud, "Oh my God!" and there was a lull in the meeting.

The vice president for business affairs at the medical branch just said, "Oh, don't worry about Bott, he's just working on his art." He had no idea that's exactly what had taken place. Well, I went home and showed it to DeeDee and she said, "Oh that's wonderful, but what does it mean?" So I started trying to talk about it, but you know, I was so full of myself at the time (which I still am) that for days I just went on and on and didn't do any more drawings. Then I finally made some drawings that I have in our apartment that became foundation of all of this. It allowed me to have something by which I could work on some very formal issues aesthetically, and I could work on figure-ground relationships and still maintain the fact that I was using what I then called volume displacement, moving this half circle around inside this square. I took this into three dimensions, and probably 80 percent of my work was [and still is] sculpture.

Figure 6.3: Harvey Bott pictured in his studio in the Heights area of Houston. Photo by Emerald Homes. Courtesy of the artist.

6.5 Recent History

In the 20 years since [I arrived in] 1979, Houston has become as vicious as New York. There are four or five very acrimonious coteries that operate in the city. It's just part of what the art world is like. Careerism has attacked here and is a very dominating kind of fact. Some of that has to do with people wanting to survive [off] their work, and that necessitates being more self-promotional, more careerist oriented. I think that overall the city has suffered from that. No one city has everything and you can find some real gems out there, undiscovered.

I went to one group show on Vine Street and was so captured by this kid's work that I just had to buy a piece, right there on the spot. I felt he needed that sense of approval that was beyond, you know, "God, I really love this work!" He's young and God, is he inventive. He [had] six pieces in a row...thousands of hours of work and so labor-intensive that they're just unbelievable.

This instilled in me [the conviction that] there has to be a mentor. There has to be a catalyst before you can really accomplish anything. And if I do nothing else in my life I can be a catalyst for someone. I would say that I'm very satisfied with what I have achieved, even though there's no superstardom to it. But I've influenced a lot of people and not just in the visual arts. [In contrast] the coteries that exist are very, very helpful to those that are involved in that coterie, but they are very destructive to those that don't have the wherewithal to become a part of it.

Young artists have to understand that there are an awful lot of disappointments out there. The one thing you must achieve for yourself is the satisfaction that what you are doing is the best that you can do at the time.

Harvey Bott was interviewed June 8, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[3] .

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m16153/latest/04 HJ Bott.mp3

Chapter 7

Jack Boynton, b. 1928[1]

7.1 In Town to Teach

I moved to Houston in 1955 to take a job at the University of Houston in the art department...teaching painting, a drawing course, a design course and advertising design, which I didn't like much. That same fall I was winning a couple of prizes and Ann Holmes[2] did a little feature on me [in which] she erroneously said, "Jack Boynton, new chairman of the art department at the University of Houston...," so I said, "Ho, ho, ho—I've gotten a promotion!" Then I was having coffee with the chairman, so I said [the same thing] to him, and he didn't laugh. I didn't know it, but my days were numbered from there on.

I was brought in to teach four courses and [there was] a big bunch of part-time faculty including Lowell Collins and various and sundry other ones. Lowell was very kind to me in the beginning. He let me use his studio and gave me rides to school. We rode together for a semester or two in his old jeep.

I was at U of H from '55 to '57, and then I spent three years [in Houston] doing odds and ends—I didn't have to go find a job for another three years. Then I moved to San Francisco and taught at the California School of Fine Arts...while I was there it became the San Francisco Art Institute. I was there from 1960 to 1962. I finished up my contract there and moved back here in 1962.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16158/1.1/>.
[2] Ann Holmes was the former fine arts editor of the Houston Chronicle.

Untitled

Figure 7.1: By Jack Boynton. 1959. Courtesy of the artist.

7.2 Early Successes

At the first, I sort of had some strokes of good luck. I had a show up already in Fort Worth that was a one-man show in the Fort Worth Art Center. This was the fall of 1955 and I moved just in time to get to classes because we were pretty backed up to get the stuff done. The big prize I won that year was the D. D. Feldman prize, which was $1500—a lot of [money] in those days. And then I won—I split first prize—in a local show with David Adickes. Before I ever got to Houston I had already been in the Younger American Painters show that Sweeney[3] had put on, and I had been in Young Americans at the Whitney. So I had been in the Guggenheim and in the Whitney before I ever moved to Houston.

As it turned out I moved to Houston the same month that Jerry MacAgy did, and naively, I sort of took my [Fort Worth] catalog over to her. I don't know how I got in, but I asked her who might be good to send the catalog to in Houston, and she was very kind and gave me some names to put on the list. I didn't realize at the time how difficult Jerry could be on occasion; Sy Fogel[4] had come in and been sort of imperious about his presence and he really turned Jerry off. Anyhow, she was kind to me and gave me some names. Jerry was the one who first encouraged me to go to New York and seek a gallery. I hadn't been to New York at that point in time...and so I went to New York. I didn't get a gallery at that point, but I got a gallery at a later point in time.

When I first moved here one of the first shows I sort of entered was [something called] Art Rental, which was at the Contemporary Arts Museum (CAM). This preceded Jerry MacAgy, because I don't think she kept it long after.

There was another show that was called Pacemakers that Jerry had at the [Contemporary Arts] Museum. Charles Williams from Fort Worth was in that and I was in it, and then there were a number of other people...Hassel Smith from California—a number of artists from California were in the show. This would have been in 1957.

Later (1958, 1959) I had two shows with Barone Gallery [in New York City], and then with George Staempfli (in 1961). Staempfli had been here as a curator under Lee Malone, who by that time had left and become the coordinator for the Brussels World Fair. As it turned out, I was one of the artists—one of 17 American artists—who were in the Brussels World Fair. So you know, I thought I had it made at that moment. Oops! First wrong turn!

7.3 The Sixties

In 1962 I moved into a studio with Jim Love on Holman Street and Main, right across from a church. It was an old, old building...a good space, but it was falling down-type space. We'd have a big rain and plaster would fall, etc. So we moved downtown to a place above a jewelry store. I don't think either of us ever worked there, but it was our studio for a while. I do remember taking Sweeney there in August and he showed up in a tweed suit and there was no air conditioning!

So I'm back in town, and broke—still trying to peddle a painting here and there, still trying to get in with the right gallery and all that stuff that everybody goes through. I got a gig at the University of New Mexico as a guest professor for the summer and I thought it might lead to a job that would stabilize things, but I didn't get the job. I came back here [Houston] after that. I can't remember much of the 60s, but [the art scene in Houston] was not that much.

[3] James Johnson Sweeney was director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from 1961 to 1967.

[4] Seymour Fogel, 1911-1984. Served as an apprentice to Mexican muralist Diego Rivera in 1932 as he was working on his controversial mural at Rockefeller Center in New York City. Later he taught at University of Texas, Austin, where he became an integral part of the Texas Modernism movement.

Figure 7.2: New Arts Gallery. Courtesy of Jack Boynton.

7.4 The University of St. Thomas

In around '69, the de Menils got pissed with St. Thomas and went to Rice. I was the one that made the pitch to the search committee at St. Thomas as to what to do instead, and I was pitching a studio art department instead of an art history department. Pat Colville and Earl Staley and I had all sort of pitched this concept of creating an art department from scratch, which was sort of an interesting thing to do at that point. They originally offered me the job—but I didn't want to do that inasmuch as I had gotten in with [Colville and Staley], so we each took a course.

This was right at the peak of the Vietnam resistance—'69 or '70—the fall of '69 was our first year. We were all of a sudden the biggest department on campus because we got all the dissidents—and that lasted pretty much through the 70s. We did a lot of exhibitions of other people in the space we had...and turned out a few art students, some of whom are still kicking. It was a lively program for a while. By this time we'd gotten some other people in the department like David Gray...and Nancy Jersick, a historian. When Earl [Staley] decided to quit being chairman I could have gotten the chairmanship at that point, but I didn't want it again.

I was there from '69 to '85. It would have been in '85 when they decided it was time for the art department

to go. It was pretty exciting for a few years.

7.5 A Who's Who of Memory

Vital artists in Houston in the 50s, 60s and 70s would have been Jim Love, Dick Wray, Herb Mears, Dorothy Hood, Charles Pebworth. Lowell Collins still had status in the 50s, and Henri Gadbois. Mildred Dixon Sherwood had some prominence. Of course, people like Stella Sullivan, you know. Stella was sort of conservative, even then. The 50s was sort of the interim that Jerry MacAgy had big influence, and she had people that were either very enthusiastic about her, or were very negative about her. She didn't seem to hit the halfway mark. Nobody was indifferent. Then in the 60s I moved to San Francisco, and back in '62—and somewhere in that interim Sweeney came to town, and Sweeney sort of had sway for a while.

For the museum, he was bringing in—and I think Jerry was trying to bring—an international or at least a national flavor. Sweeney brought in people like Chillada and Tinguely and Soulage and a lot of those people, whereas MacAgy was bringing people from California like Hassel Smith. Sweeney was stirring up the pot a little bit. He had some pretty interesting exhibitions in the process, and he bought one of my big things.

Dick Wray used to say that in the 50s, if Dorothy Hood, Richard Stout, he and I had been riding in the same car and it had gotten hit, it would have wiped out art in Houston. There were not a lot of people [then] that were doing anything very avant garde, you know.

Jack Boynton was interviewed on April 20, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[5] .

[5] http://cnx.org/content/m16158/latest/05 Jack Boynton.mp3

Chapter 8

William Camfield, b. 1934[1]

8.1 The Spring of '64

Ginny and I came to Houston to work at the University of St. Thomas over the winter of 1963-64. I began teaching at St. Thomas that spring semester of 1964. I came here expressly because I had grown up in Texas—a native Texan—and decided I'd like to come back for a few years. While [I was] working as a graduate student at Yale, Jerry MacAgy had come through, and the director of graduate studies there knew I was interested in maybe moving back to Texas and said, "Hey, why don't you meet this woman?" We met literally under a vitrine or table in the Yale Art Gallery. Jerry was on her hands and knees when I found her, trying to see how they had constructed this vitrine. I say, "Hey, this is someone a little different," and so it turned out that the most interesting job in Texas at the time—bar none—was at the University of St. Thomas. So we met the de Menils and others and Ginny and I decided to come here. And as you know, Jerry, who was a diabetic, had a seizure and died six weeks after we got here. So we sort of entered Houston by fire in a way, but Dominique [de Menil] and I picked up the department.

I think the de Menils were committed to the city, and because they had come to a splitting point with the CAA, they wanted to continue that commitment with the city in some way, and the University of St. Thomas offered a possibility for that in Jerry MacAgy. They wanted to keep Jerry MacAgy. She had brought so much to the city and to them as individuals. And again, St. Thomas was a place where that could happen. I don't know what all they meant to do. I know they wanted to continue having stimulating exhibitions; I know that they wanted to continue to foster a knowledge of and a love of the arts in the city. Whether or not they intended to have an academic program, I don't know, but Jerry MacAgy was teaching courses in the history of art as well as organizing these stimulating exhibitions, and she decided, "I can't do it all. I need a real art historian here so I can spend more time doing exhibits." And that is how we got together. After Jerry's death, both Dominique de Menil and I said, "We need help—both of us need help." So Dominique went out for some help, and I went out for some help.

I'm trying to comment on what was most memorable and most important about Jermayne MacAgy, and of course I only knew her a short time. I first mentioned her genius for conceiving and executing exhibitions, but then I moved back and said, no—that is more of a vehicle. I think what was most essential about Jerry was her ability to excite people about the arts. And her genius again for conceiving and executing exhibitions was perhaps the most important way she did that. But she was a teacher, a pied piper, in all kinds of ways. [She was] more concerned with the exhibits, and that is why I became involved. She was looking for someone to do the art history; that was not her cup of tea. She did it—she excited people—but she really was not an art historian, and she wanted some help there. That is how I came to be in the picture. I was more an art historian but interested in exhibitions, and it looked like we could work together.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16172/1.1/>.

Figure 8.1: Andy Warhol and Dr. William Camfield at the University of St. Thomas, May 1968. Courtesy of William Camfield.

8.2 St. Thomas Expands

Dominique and I knew we needed help after that spring where we picked up the program. And so we began to search for new people. The fall of that year, '64 I think, we announced a job opening or two, and that led to the hiring—in terms of art history—of Mino Badner and then Walter Widrig and Philip Oliver Smith. So we ended up with four art historians there in a year or two. [That] led to the hiring of Geoff Winningham in photography and James Blue in filmmaking, and there were others involved, too. James [was] a superb filmmaker and teacher. And Geoff Winningham of course is still here, and has really been sort of a pioneer for opening art photography in this city. So St. Thomas became really the lively center, particularly in the exhibition program and in art history. We didn't have that much going on in terms of studio art, excepting of course, Winningham and Blue, who were major contributors to the city then; their legacy is still there.

[St. Thomas] was a really lively place in terms of the growing program in art history and particularly film and photography, but visiting artists, thanks to the de Menils, were coming in from time to time. Marcel Duchamp,[2] René Magritte,[3] émigŕe [Roberto] Matta,[4] Jean-Luc Godard.[5] You never knew who was coming by. But we had just stunning exhibition series with such scholars as George Heard Hamilton[6] and Ellen Johnson[7] and Dietrich von Bothmer[8] and [Donald] Posner[9] and on and on and on—and just a sterling series of lectures. And Dominique proved herself to be more than an able student of Jerry MacAgy when it came to conceiving and installing exhibitions—very stimulating exhibitions.

To foster knowledge of the arts and love for the arts, and for people to want to live with the arts, a print club was [established as] a way for people who didn't know much about the arts or who were timid and didn't want to (or couldn't) invest a lot of money to actually own something. Once or twice a year my wife Ginny, who was director of the print club there for a while, would go to New York or Paris. I was going back and forth for a while to do research in Paris and [we would] come back with these wonderful prints—major 20th-century and 19th-century figures. Then there would be a big sale of these and everybody came out. It was a big social event, and people could acquire a Rouen print or a Picasso etching, or what—you name it—a contemporary piece by some European or whoever. It started a number of people on collecting, and in addition to the print club, where you could buy something for ten dollars to a thousand dollars, they had a club—a collectors' club—for people with deeper pockets that met at their houses. They would actually bring on consignment major paintings and sculptures, and people would sort of choose this painting or that sculpture and they would live with it for a couple of months and then rotate it around, and if somebody fell in love with something they had a chance to buy it.

[2] Marcel Duchamp, 1887-1968. French-born American Dadaist/Surrealist conceptual artist.

[3] René Magritte, 1898-1967. Belgian-born Surrealist whose works were popularized in America in the 1960s as album covers for such musicians as Styx, Jackson Browne and Jeff Beck.

[4] Roberto Matta, 1912-2002. Chilean-born French Abstract Expressionist/Surrealist painter.

[5] Jean-Luc Godard, b. 1930. French film maker considered to be at the forefront of modern cinema in the 1960s.

[6] George Heard Hamilton, 1910-2004. Art historian and professor of art at Yale University from 1936 until his retirement; long associated with the Museum of Modern Art as a trustee and chairman of the Museum's painting and sculpture committee.

[7] Ellen Johnson, 1911-1992. Influential art historian and curator who taught at Oberlin College in Ohio for 38 years.

[8] Dietrich von Bothmer, distinguished research curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York since 1946; considered by many to be the world's leading archeologist and historian of classical art.

[9] Donald Posner, 1922–2005. Leading scholar of Baroque and 17th and 18th century art and professor of fine arts at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.

Figure 8.2: Dr. William Camfield and Dominique de Menil, c. 1970. Courtesy of William Camfield.

8.3 A 1.3 Mile Exodus

In the fall of '69, the de Menil group came to Rice. I had never planned to stay long in Texas, and had actually almost signed a contract at Brown University. I had bid the de Menils goodbye, and we were about to move to Rhode Island. But unbeknownst to us, there were already difficulties between the de Menils and the University of St. Thomas. They split ways in the spring and summer of '69, and Rice was interested in picking up the people in the Arts [Department] at St. Thomas...a whole troop of us came over. The de Menils, without pressuring us, just asked if we would stay to help the transition, and Rice did too. We did—and we are still here. Rice had to find places for us, and the de Menils proposed a building that would fit in with the campus in terms of the type of brick work and historical reference and design, etc. But there wasn't time for that, or people didn't think there was time for that. So the decision was made to put those two buildings out there: the buildings that now house the Media Center and the Continuing Studies Program.

They were meant to be temporary buildings—yes!—but they are still there. And one of the arguments from a crusty old guy at Rice was, "Goddamn, I remember The University of Texas when they brought in these Quonset huts after WWII, and they were supposed to be temporary, but they are still there, and I won't stand for this!" They're not Quonset huts, but...they are corrugated metal, so they are squared-off Quonset huts. But they were very elegant inside, and they are not only still here, but they are highly sought-after spaces. There are people on this [Rice] campus that would kill to have one of those buildings now.

Rice University had...for years James Chillman, who as you know was Director of the Museum of Fine

Arts, and a part-time teacher at Rice. He had been here since 1916. He taught history of architecture and other history courses and from time to time Rice had had someone else doing a little academic work in history of art and architecture. But there wasn't an art department until 1965. Katherine Brown was hired in 1963 at Rice to do some art history courses, and she knew so much more about art history and history of architecture and so forth, that the School of Architecture said, "Hey, keep her!"

The de Menils left St. Thomas a small collection of books and other things, too, but St. Thomas developed a stronger art department in terms of studio art. And Earl Staley had been let go at Rice previously, and he was hired as the Chair at the University of St. Thomas, and built a very lively little department there with Jack Boynton and a classicist who dealt with classical Greek and Roman art—and I believe she is still there.

8.4 Academic Art in the Seventies

The 70s became richer early on, right away. Certainly at Rice, where things changed radically in terms of the arts with the de Menils' shift—because finally there really was an art department, and since there were five art historians and five artists, it immediately became sort of a balanced department. But it was a complex department, too, which nobody recognized—because in addition to the department per se, the media center, being physically separate, tended to become an entity of its own. Both Winningham and Blue were empire builders out there, so the Media Center was part of the art department technically, but practically it was out there—and they had lots of money and lots of ambition, lots of energy and lots of talent. Then unbeknownst to most people, drama was part of the department.

One regret I have is that we looked right away for a new chairman [at Rice] to preside over and lead all of this. John O'Neill didn't want to continue as chair, and I didn't want to have the chairmanship of it. Both of us took a whack at it, but we tried to recruit someone new and vital to come in and be a leader and administrator over all of this. We weren't successful in finding anyone who really caught our imagination and so early on it became a decision to sort of rotate the chairmanship and try to have some sort of even balance between historians and studio people chairing it.

[Also] in the 70s the program at U of H began to develop, particularly in the studio arts. George Bunker came in as chair, I think, in 1974. About that time some new faculty members were coming in—people like Gael Stack, and beginning in the mid-70s with the leadership of Bunker, the University of Houston really developed a significant program in studio arts. The history program over there has always been dominated by the studio department. But U of H was the place to be in the mid-70s. A lot of activity was going on and that included Bill Robinson, who was hired as director of the Blaffer Gallery. He revived the Houston area exhibitions, which I think helped generate some local pride. And at the University of St. Thomas, Earl Staley, who had been at Rice and then let go by John O'Neil as I have already indicated, opened a small but thriving department at the University of St. Thomas and they, too, provided a charge to the city.

8.5 In the City at Large

It was a boom decade. I mean, people were making money and to go back to the University of St. Thomas, the de Menils had already introduced Philip Johnson to this city as an architect. And in 1974 Pennzoil got to him, and he did the twin towers. It was a symbol of dynamism of the city and the boom years of the city and the Museum of Fine Arts took off. Suddenly the Museum had a real cadre of professional curators, and they began to do more diverse shows, and the purchases began to expand partly because of the boom city. The wonderful families like the Browns, the Cullens, and the Cullinans could do more for the Museum. The collection began to grow. Agee came in and he brought lots of new growth. The Brown Endowment funds came in...Target Stores began to make money available to buy Texas and regional arts and photography, so some major works were acquired. The Museum and Agee were able to do some extraordinary purchases—not just modern, either. He got that fantastic Gothic head. He got the Assyrian relief, and all across the board. So there was a lot going on at the Museum of Fine Arts in the 70s as well. There began to be talk about

a "third coast." Not just East Coast, West Coast, but the Gulf Coast. This is a place to be. We've got something unique and vital and original, and some of the established artists began to get more national attention. And there were some exchange shows that got Houston artists out into Philadelphia, Detroit, LA, New York, etc. People began to think, by the late 70s, that something was going to happen here. Why not Houston? And of course, it coincided with the decade in the whole country where New York was challenged. We had moved out of those heydays of the 60s where somewhere we knew where the avant garde was. There seemed to be no direction and New York was faltering, and Europe was staging a comeback and it was up for grabs. Houston had it, you know, and it was no longer New York. It's going to happen somewhere else and why not here? So a lot of that was going on.

8.6 What the Future Holds

It seems to me that Houston is just on a continuing upward arc in terms of what it offers in the arts. This includes the museums, it includes the educational institutions, it includes the symphony, the opera, the ballet, theater; it includes patronage in the city, it includes the artists and alternative spaces—Houston is just getting richer and richer and more sophisticated.

It seems much more difficult now for someone to be sort of a renaissance woman as Jerry MacAgy was. She was not exactly a one-woman show in town, but she did so much and did it so well. It would be very difficult for someone to do that now. There is just so much more going on. It would be nice to have some sort of charismatic art leader or leaders. I suppose we still have them, but it would be difficult to have one that stood out something like her. Patronage is changing where the grand families, their members have passed on or are quite aged, and in many instances their children have caught the bug and caught commitment to the city. I think that is really admirable. There's just a lot more people with perhaps not such deep pockets or still more complex interests coming into play, and the government and corporate support is much more prominent now than it was before—much more important.

A couple of other things enrich the whole fabric. One would be the creative writing program at the University of Houston. A former student at the University of St. Thomas, Karl Kilian, had a lot to do with that. He had a good bookstore (Brazos Bookstore). That's another thing that Houston lacks...we have a few good bookstores, some big ones, but it has been difficult for the writers and book collectors in this city. Thank goodness we have the Detering Book Gallery and Karl Kilian's as well as some of the other big chains. Another facet would be the role of the city in the arts—the Municipal Art Commission, CACHH. I've never been deeply involved in that...there are other people who can do that.

William Camfield was interviewed on August 6, 1997. You can listen to the interview here[10]
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[10] http://cnx.org/content/m16172/latest/06 William Camfield.mp3

Chapter 9

Lowell Collins, 1924-2003[1]

Remembered by his son, Michael R. Collins [2]

9.1 Beginnings

He was born in San Antonio, and along with my grandmother and grandfather came to Houston as a very young boy. His grandfather—my great-grandfather—could draw ambidextrously, so I think the facility was possibly genetic; he saw his grandfather at an early age make drawings. My great-grandfather was Roque George, which is my middle name: Michael Roque Collins. I was named after him. And he would say, "Lowell, come over here; sit by me. I want to show you some things." So they would draw. After he showed some early ability, some of the first things that I recall being told that he drew, were that he colored in his Grimms' Fairy Tales, which I happen to have. After that he had an interest in cartooning, and shortly thereafter he started carving objects when he was in middle school, let's say, when he got his first pocket knife. After all of this evidence, my grandmother placed him at the Glassell School (formerly the Houston Museum School) when he was very, very young.

When the war happened he waited to be drafted—actually waited for his number to be called for training. He went to the Clayton Air School and he was getting his wings, ready to serve and probably be shipped overseas, when an inner ear problem grounded him. So he spent the war in Colorado Springs after a long stint in the hospital. But after this the Air Force based him in Colorado Springs, where he was fortunate to sign up with the Colorado School of Arts and Design. [There] he met Otis Dozier and had some experience with Otis' friend, Thomas Hart Benton. I think that he did this for two or three years as a scholarship student. I also believe he made contact with Robert Preusser who was an early influence on him. At some point after the war was over he came to Houston, but immediately went up [to New York] to the Art Students' League, where he met Edsel Cramer, a fellow student. Then he gets this cable, this wire that he was offered a position to teach at the Houston Museum School. I remember he told me Edsel was laughing and ribbing him: "If you have a job, you don't need to be a student. Go and teach."

So when he moved back from New York he became very close to my godparents, Ruth Uhler and James Chillman. I remember from my father's stories and their stories to me their both saying to him that he needed to take lessons—that he needed to study with people like Robert Joy; to take the experiences from Preusser and Otis Dozier and Benton and turn that into a degree or two. So he went into the University of Houston where he had a tremendous portfolio already; he got his undergraduate degree, I believe in short order, then he went through the MLA program. He was continuing at that time as an instructor at the Museum School, and he actually became an instructor—an adjunct professor—in studio art at U of H, and

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16165/1.1/>.

[2] Michael Roque Collins earned a BFA from the University of Houston in 1978. He later earned an MFA in painting from Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He has exhibited his paintings since 1974, in solo and group exhibitions nationwide. Since the mid-1970s he has directed the Lowell Collins School of Art in Houston.

an adjunct professor at Rice, teaching art for architects. He met my mother as he was a teacher at the University of Houston; she was a student there studying art. I guess after the MLA was completed he then started seriously as an instructor at the Museum School and at some point in an 11-year period was named dean under Sweeney's regime at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts.[3]

My father and others that worked there at the time were saying, you know, that we should look at Cranbrook and take it as a model for accreditation and expand and become more of a serious school that's accredited, so I remember my father's battles that he fought for accreditation and for it to be taken seriously—and for them to have a tremendous training system there. My father amassed people like David Parsons and Richard Stout (who he gave his first job to) and the whole litany of what later became the Rice and U of H backbone of their faculties. These all came out of his early mentorship and his deanship, where he tried to build the Houston Museum School to be formidable. He was a very fine teacher from my recollections of that period.

[3]Lowell Collins began instructing at the museum school in 1946. He served as dean of the museum school from 1957 to 1967.

Texan Town Lights

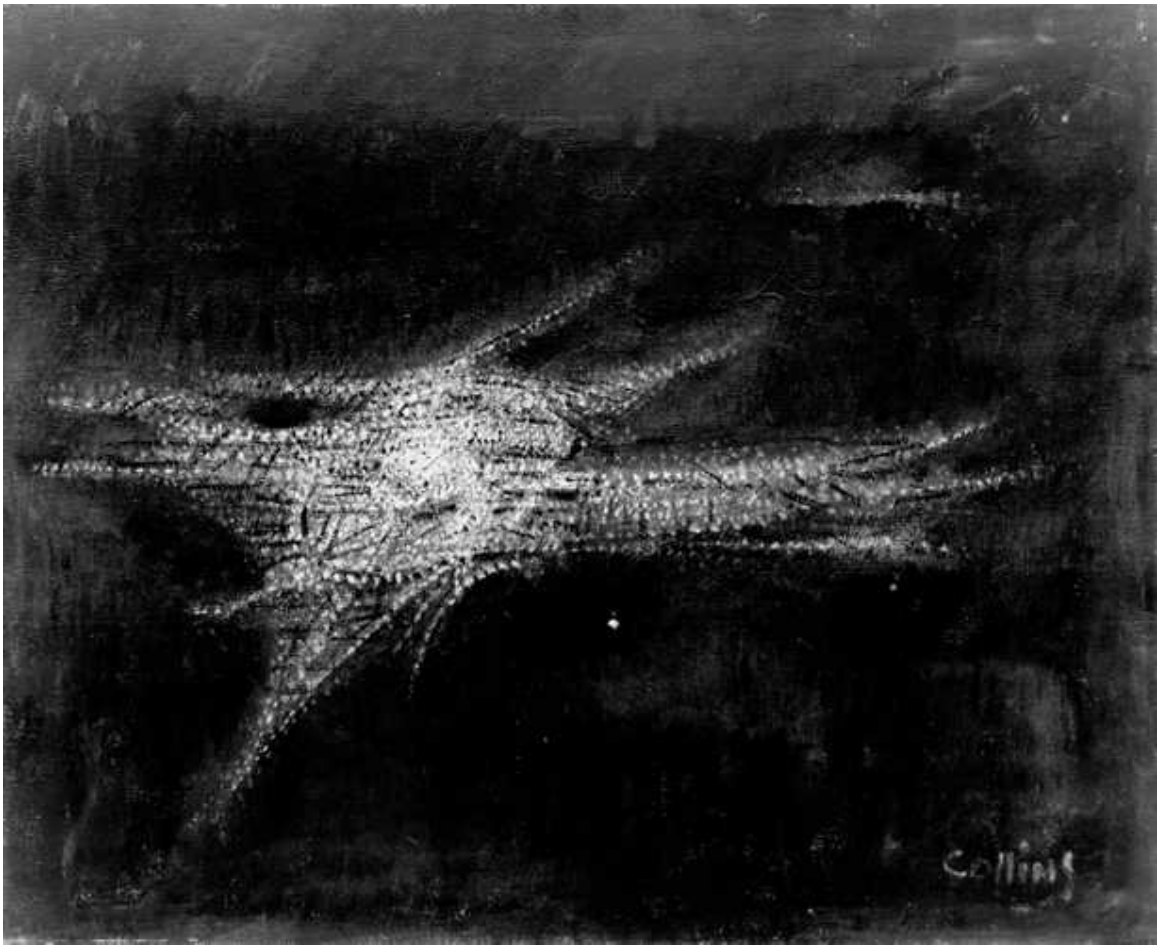

Figure 9.1: By Lowell Collins. 1965. Encaustic on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift from Mr. and Mrs. S.I. Morris

9.2 Students, Colleagues, and Friends

John Berry, who later became a neurosurgeon, was the first of many students my father had. I have early memories of John coming to live with us for a summer because my grandmother on my mother's side had taught John in Tyler and sent him down to work with my father. I remember other people that came to him both at Glassell (the Museum School) and also later. He had people, such notables as Dan Mitchell Allison, John Sturtevant, Curry Glassell and the Cooley daughters.

My father also had a non-stop grouping of friends which were people like Jack Boynton, like photographers, who had been best friends of his at a very early age, photographing the arts of Houston. I remember Charles Schorre[4] coming in, and John Biggers. I remember Biggers and Schorre saying that if my father's station

[4]Charles Schorre, 1925-1996. Abstract painter who served as an instructor at the Museum School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston from 1949 to 1955, and assistant professor of fine art at Rice University from 1960 to 1972.

wagon had died, then art movement wouldn't have made it to Houston—this was a quote from both John and Charles Schorre. They wouldn't have been able to move their art anywhere because they all used my dad's station wagon. And I think Jack Boynton was probably in that group of artists who needed the wagon to get their art from point A to point B.

When he passed away, my wife Gail Collins, whom he loved dearly, gave a life celebration for him in the gallery. We had 600 people show up that day, and my choked-up sentiments really weren't well-organized. I'm afraid I didn't eulogize him very well, at least not as well as he deserved. All of these people who had been students of his that I had no idea that had been students came up later that day to say what my father had meant to them and the things that are written in that book really made me realize that was only the tip of the iceberg. Since [his death] we've seen countless, just thousands of people calling and saying, "Well I'm going to need Lowell to appraise something; he was my old teacher." So I've had a continuing history lesson on what he meant to so many people as the dean of Glassell and as a continuing passionate person in art.

9.3 Glaring Inequalities

Dr. John Biggers won, and my father won, numerous local area artist exhibits that the Houston Museum would have, and I remember one of my earliest recollections was of him having a solo [exhibition] there. Well, other artists like John Biggers who also won the area art exhibit were not allowed to go in the front of the show, and were not able to attend their own award ceremony.[5] They had to go with their own African American group through the back door, which I remember my father threw a huge fit about. It was my father who stood up and said we weren't going to have that here. He said, "If I'm going to be dean of this school and we're going to be here teaching, all people will be equal and there won't be any favoritism or any kind of prejudice whatsoever towards women or African Americans." That's one of the things that colors a lot of my memories, because he had John Biggers over all the time. They were very dear friends. Several other people knew of Biggers' and my father's friendship, and I remember my father being also really upset by that segregation. He was just absolutely horrified at what he witnessed from childhood on, the whole problem of African Americans not being [considered] equal in so many ways. I was always raised up in an accepting environment, so for me to see it at school and then the n-words and all the other things that were used in culture so openly—it was just horrific.

I remember his love of the south—but not the south that would color and characterize hate, but a kind of exuberant resonance of hope and light and the kind of inclusion that our house was remembered for. And [this was] what got my father into such trouble with the right-wing establishment of the cowboy gentry of this city in so many ways. He was always an outsider and in some ways proud of it to the end of his life.

[5] Blacks were allowed to visit the museum only one day a week. Because the reception for the award had been scheduled for another day, the prizewinner could not in fact attend the function honoring him. Biggers and a colleague from the university were invited to a private viewing of the exhibition by the director. In the months following, Chillman was successful in abolishing the museum's segregationist policies, and in increasing its accessibility to the black community. (Source: The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room, 1995 by Alvia Wardlaw)

Figure 9.2: Lowell Collins teaching at blackboard, c. 1940. Courtesy of Michael Collins

9.4 Like Father, Like Son

After I graduated high school in '74 I began to teach with him and started a junior school in '75. And by the time I was about a sophomore at the University of Houston, wet behind the ears, not knowing anything, still struggling to make an "A" with Richard Stout in drawing (which was no small occurrence), he allowed me to start teaching. Lowell Collins, my father, allowed me to start teaching a children's class under his umbrella of a school of art. And so from that time period, the summer of '76, starting with ten students to I'd say to the summer of '79, '80, we ended up developing a hundred students in the afternoon and a large children's program under his adult program. He retired from teaching in 1981 more or less, and let me become his co-director. I had also by that time graduated from the University of Houston, and had become chairman of Strake Jesuit and Saint Agnes' art department. At that time during the 60s, 70s and 80s, we maintained from 100 to 140 students a week.

[My father] had an amazing ability to teach. It was so rooted in his early paintings and drawings and carvings and sculptures as an artist. He wanted to go down deep into the core of whatever it was in nature. His design courses that he taught were rooted in a type of theory which came right out of the core of nature. So one of the gifts he had was to recognize that most of the classical artwork from the Renaissance on, even prior to that if you will, really related to a rhythm in nature. So one of the things that he asked students to do is to embrace through nature and thought the use of line and gesture...to become more connected to nature's rhythms and surface texture and color and light—the traditional elements that so many artists of the 70s would later abandon. I saw much of his teaching rooted in the human figure and the drawing and

the painting of it, and the ability to capture a lifelike quality of a person in portrait. That probably came from Robert Joy and other people like Sargent that he adored, loved greatly—and a respect for [painting] the figure. He was one of those people amidst abstraction to always wrestle as a teacher (as he did in his own art) with the notion of figuration and abstraction and how best to present a platform of possible problems for a student to go into nature starting to see its rhythm.

Figure 9.3: Lowell Collins in front of his work "University of Houston Registration," 1952. Photo by Maurice Miller. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

9.5 Legacy

It's just amazing the kind of place he provided for people. His sense of generosity, of helping other students—I certainly have inherited that passion and interest and enthusiasm for helping and teaching—but I think that where he was really instrumental for me as an artist and a teacher was to set the example that you have to continue your craft. "Son," he'd say, "I did 30 years, but that's just where it gets interesting. You must continue it into the next 30 and that's when you make art...when you really get into the seminal groove of your thinking." So he, until the very end of our conversations together, was insistent and very critical of my work.

He'd say, "You're the painter in the family, I was really more of a sculptor...but you want a little critique? Can I help you a little bit?" And so we'd have this game back and forth. Finally toward the end when he was sick, he'd say, "I really can't tell you too much now—everything you're doing I'm really excited about." He said, "I've had a good life doing exactly what I wanted to do. I've been able to be an artist; I've continued that love to my dying day. I've drawn. I've painted. I've carved. I've been able to teach and help others, which was a wonderful thing to be able to do. But the greatest thing I've done was to help you become an artist, because I have the feeling that you will allow me to be the first chapter in a hardbound book that I know your dealer is going to have written." So he said, "There's no greater joy I have than my friendship with you."

So I think to sum up his life as an artist, and as a person, as a thinker, as a teacher, it would just be simply: Extraordinary. Giver. Curious. Learner to the end and an extraordinary human.

Michael Collins was interviewed about his father, Lowell Collins, on June 21, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[6] .

[6] http://cnx.org/content/m16165/latest/07 Michael R Collins.mp3

Chapter 10

Edsel Cramer, b. 1923[1]

10.1 Native Born

I was born in Houston, in the old, old Jeff Davis Hospital. They're renovating it now—you can see it from the freeway. Anyway, Houston...the art that did exist was like, as I remember it, people like [David] Adickes...and who else? The very famous [Ben] DuBose, he was featuring Adickes' painting, and some other artist that I can't quite remember. But Adickes was a big deal, and whoever did the flat metal things—[Charles] Pebworth. There were three biggies—operating in the so-called art limbo. The third person [was] Herb Mears, because they were doing the same kind of thing when it came to paint. John Biggers was drawing over at TSU—doing murals and all the people hated those murals. All the black people denied being African-connected at all. And that was Houston. Then all of the sudden something happened: the black power movement came along and every black person with money and a house couldn't buy enough John Biggers. They all wanted black art. They would ask me, "Do you own any black art?" And I would try to [tell] the difference between an artist who is black and having the subject be black. What exactly were they looking for? I actually felt it was a terrible period of hypocrisy.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16145/1.1/>.

Figure 10.1: Edsel Cramer with "Portrait of the Honorable Judge Peter Solito," Harris County Courthouse, Houston. Courtesy of the artist.

10.2 Long Way Around

Way back in the 40s they had the Museum school. They looked at my work and he [James Chillman] says, "Oh, yeah—you have talent. But we don't think it's a good idea to have a class for one person [due to segregation]. We recommend Chicago." So I took off for Chicago. At that point the Museum had one day open for black folks. And that was on Monday when the Museum was closed. I'd go to the Museum, walk all through thinking, "Where's everybody else?" I didn't realize that it was just open for black people [on Mondays] and not for white folks.

So I went to Chicago...the Art Institute of Chicago. I was still thinking I was going to be an illustrator, so I went to those commercial art schools and there was no way I could get into those schools. But the Art Institute...that changed my whole attitude about art. I got to see [artists] like da Vinci, Cézanne, Degas, El Greco, Monet, Sargent, Chagall. And they had a Georgia O'Keefe, a huge painting of flowers—the insides of flowers. All these people were a new experience for me. I had known them maybe in a book—but never in real life. And best of all, they had this wonderful art school right in the middle of the museum itself—same building—and you could always leave your painting, leave your drawing, and look at the real McCoy.

What else do I do after that? So I leave Chicago; I'm in the Navy. They realized, "Here's a man who's got talent for drawing." So they give me a project like painting numbers on chicken coops. That's the funniest thing in the world. Yeah, and once they gave me all the would-be officers, like lieutenants, captains, admirals. I started painting people and the sailors had families and they would bring little photographs—wanting me to paint them with the family. Just awful stuff. I enjoyed it because I didn't have to do anything but paint. I was getting kind of excited about learning to be in the military, but the irony was that they put me to work as a painter! I went on to paint people...you know, women, men, everybody. And finally I was transferred to the Pacific. Hawaii was the final stop. I got to create a little drawing class and it was a very wonderful experience.

After I got out of the service I went to New York City. I met people who said, "If you're going to go to an art school, you should go to New York City," and they were right. That's where I got involved in the Art Students' League. What [the instructors] wanted me to do was some primitive African stuff because I'm black. And my painting was more classical than everybody else. In my drawings you can see the influences of Rembrandt, Michelangelo to some degree—but my strongest influence was Degas. Why Degas? He made drawings of passion and he was "tight." And the funny thing about the Art Students' League—I heard this fellow talking about what a wonderful town he lived in, and they didn't have any problems with race relationships and so forth. So I said, "What town is this?" He said Houston. I said, "Well, I come from Houston." I thought he had to be kidding—but he didn't know about these restrictions and that was Lowell Collins. We got to be best of friends.

Figure 10.2: Edsel Camer at Drawing Board, Houston, c. 1972. Courtesy of the artist.

10.3 Back Home

It was 1952 that I came back to Houston, but I was not at all connected—but I started painting. The first portrait I painted in Houston was the daughter of de Menil...Adelaide [de Menil Carpenter].

Anyway, I came back to Houston and who do I see but Lowell Collins at the Museum, and John Biggers at Texas Southern—all these people who I had met in the Navy now come to Houston and they are doing great things. John Biggers said, "I'd like to work you into our system, but you'd have to cut your beard off." I said no way. Well, John Biggers was at Texas Southern and he was friendly with the McAshans—Susan McAshan—and Dominique de Menil. [Mrs. de Menil] saw one of the two paintings I had and said, "I would like for you to paint my daughter."

I did the painting of McAshan during that same period. She lived just behind a golf course. We talked about people like Stravinsky...we were listening to music by [him] and different people. And she said to me, "Would you be comfortable if you went to a nice restaurant?" I'm impressed with the silverware; she had this great silver with this fork with three prongs. All my life I never had a fork with three prongs. So that's how she got to asking me, would I be comfortable in a nice fancy restaurant. So I thought about it, and I thought, well—if I didn't have the money to pay I wouldn't be very comfortable. That's probably the only

thing I thought about, anyways.

She was very used to things going her way. I ended up painting her and I moved to the background about halfway down—beautiful background to paint—so I get over half done and she says, "No, stop. Don't do anymore." So I stopped...and unfortunately, I got the reputation for not finishing my work. But she meant well.

10.4 Faces in the Crowd

I was painting a whole bunch of people. I met Hugh Potter during that period. I met Emily Wells (Mrs. Marshall F. Wells) and I met the Joneses. I didn't know—I thought Jones was just a common name like the common name that you have if you were a black person. I was making drawings of all these people. I made drawings of George Bush's kids—yes, George Bush the current president—when he was about nine, or less than nine years old. And I didn't know they were anybody. They were all going to St. John's—they were just names. I painted one woman's daughter and she took the painting back in two days—wet—and she got on an airplane and messed it up. I painted the nicest folks at that time. Emily Wells, originally she was a Maverick, well, her mother was a Maverick. She was a very courageous individual. I understand she was an artist, but her daughter was also an artist but more than that she was a supporter. It was through Emily Wells that I met people like the Bushes and all the other people I can't remember. Anne Kent—who could have been a movie star. She was just strikingly beautiful and I did a painting of her in two days.

Figure 10.3: Edsel Cramer with children, c. 1973. Courtesy of the artist.

10.5 Houston in the Sixties

I'd go to the Museum...they had a wonderful library there, and I spent a lot of time in the library, not so much in the Museum itself. The library was in the basement at the time. The overall feeling of the Museum was a nice place to be, but I never got the feeling like I was part of that. Never did. But I liked the people. Like Ed Mayo, [he] was the nicest man. And Lowell Collins. I mentioned that. But I met a lot of people working at the Museum too. Like all the Museum guards just loved to sit with me and talk about paintings—talk about the paintings on the wall. A lot of these people came from Cuba. The guards were really professional people. And I had great times talking to them.

[In the 60s] they started a rash of galleries. They didn't have these galleries in the 50s. Kiko Gallery and the David Gallery. Moody, yeah, all those. They didn't have any of those [before]. The Museum was the thing. The first different look came to Houston in the Contemporary Arts Museum with the de Menils. Downtown they had a Quonset hut very close to the Heritage Society—somewhere in that location. And they later moved out by Holcombe behind the Prudential building. And then finally back to Montrose Street. But it was like small. Houston was small. The art scene was small. They didn't have a whole lot of the business that you have today.

Edsel Cramer was interviewed on May 16, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2] .

[2]http://cnx.org/content/m16145/latest/08 Edsel Cramer.mp3

Chapter 11

Charles Criner, b. 1945[1]

11.1 Popular Opinion

I never had any formal art class. My folks always told me I was good in art, and I got a few jobs in my little hometown in art. The only art I had is doing stuff for the church, and everybody told me that I was really, really good and that I should be an artist. So it was natural for me—after a while it just got to the point where that was what I wanted to do. It was just my mother, my grandmother, my sisters and brothers, the pastors, and people telling me that I should be an artist.

I'm originally from Athens, Texas, and we like to say Tyler, Texas, but Athens is thirty-something miles from Tyler. Tyler is just the biggest town close to Athens. At the time they had a good recruitment department at Texas Southern so one of the ladies came to my little town. We didn't have any art classes there at all. There was no art program. But she came there one summer and she introduced me to Texas Southern. Before I came to TSU, I had never been no further than 50 miles from Tyler.

I came to Texas Southern University in 1964, and really what brought me here was I wanted to be an artist. That was what I wanted to do. So I came to TSU. I had never drawn a black person in my life. The first day I came and went to the student union, I saw the drawings of Dr. John Biggers—a collection of drawings that he produced as a result of a trip to Ghana, Africa, that he had taken in 1957. And when I saw those drawings, it just completely changed me. And it's been that way ever since. That was enough information for me to draw until now...and I'm 60. These drawings, they were just so overpowering because I was wondering why the kids would be sitting up watching TV and just having fun and those drawings were there. I met him (Dr. Biggers) three or four days later, so we developed a very, very good relationship. I mean, he was kind of like a father really to me and (Earlie) Hudnall, Harvey Johnson, Kermit Oliver and Alvia Wardlaw.

[1]This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16136/1.1/>.

Emptying Minnows

Figure 11.1: By Charles Criner. 1969. Acrylic on canvas. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

11.2 Art Student Days

Day-to-day classes—our classes—they wasn't like [regular] classes, the art classes. They were kind of like overtures, kind of like an opera that we would all participate in in the evenings. We did our academic classes during the day, then at 9:00 p.m. we'd go straight to the art department. For some reason, most of the artists were janitors, so we'd take our classes during the day, then we'd have our dinner, then we'd go and work—clean the buildings out. Then at 9:00 p.m., like I said, Harvey Johnson, Kermit Oliver, all of us—along with Mr. (Carroll) Simms, we would work there until five-six o'clock in the morning. It was that way all the time.

Dr. Biggers, as I remember, had his freshman class on one side of the room, and he had his sophomore, junior and senior class on the other side of the room in painting. His office was up in the front, and he had his paintings mounted on the wall in his office. I remember he was working on Jubilee at the time, you know—that the Museum of Fine Arts has—and so what he would do, he would work up a while, and then he would come in, look at our work, talk to us, maybe model for us. Sometimes he would pull a student to sit on the pedestal, and we'd be drawing; he'd come in, get his charcoal and paper, and he would draw.

Then after the class was over, he would put all our pictures along the wall and give us critiques and let us critique. Then he'd bring the painters in, the upperclassmen, and they would work with us and so forth. I think that's how the family unity came about, because even now I'll be working on something and I'll call Hudnall and say, "Hey, come on and take a look—what do you think I need here?" And he'll do the same thing for me. I think this is what [Biggers] did: working with us, he chose us as a kind of family. And he worked with us until really the day that he died.

I did a lot of prints with him, his lithograph prints and woodcuts and so forth. Harvey Johnson worked with him on his murals. Earlie Hudnall did his photographs and photographed for him and with him. Alvia did his writing. And that's the way it was. We would meet over at his house every Sunday morning, and we'd discuss what was going on and so forth—and Mrs. Biggers, she would be there, and she's still there, kind of like our mother.

Where I Came From

Figure 11.2: Detail of mural. 1968>. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

11.3 Unrest in the Sixties

The city—our world—was Third Ward. That's the first thing. And it was a vibrant place on Dowling Street; you could get whatever you wanted on Dowling Street. There was a lot of black businesses. Everything was just really flourishing. None of us had cars so we would walk to Dowling and we would go to the movies, pawn shops, restaurants. It was really, really nice—and I think it was nice until about the time that Hampton was killed. Carl Hampton was a very radical person during that era. I think it was like '67, he took over one of the buildings on Dowling Street. And I'll never forget I went up there one time and I saw he had guards on the outside of the door that had machine guns. I mean right out in the daylight. And I said, "The police are not going to allow that." And sure enough, a couple of days later they raided the place, killed him—killed a lot of other people. It seemed like since that happened, things changed on that street.

We were just getting to the heart of the civil rights struggle. And Texas Southern was right in the middle of it. We had Stokely Carmichael, Lee Otis Johnson, Angela Davis, all those people. You could almost choose the group that you wanted to be a part of and get into it. We had the congressman—Mickey Leeland—when I came he was president of the student body...I mean he gave our administration hell. So that's the way it was.

I don't know if you're familiar with it, but the Texas Southern Riots came about then. For a long time [students] wanted to close down Wheeler Avenue. All the dormitories was on one side of Wheeler and all administrative buildings was on the other side, and the classes. So the students every morning had to go

across Wheeler to go to your classes. Well, Wheeler was a very, very busy street and so the students wanted it closed, and I think that was the beginning. That was the beginning of it, and it kind of snowballed into other things.

I will never forget we were doing murals at that time, and Dr. Biggers chose the civil rights movement as a subject for the people to do their murals. You see, at TSU before you graduate you had to do a mural. So he would tell us to do something pertaining to our home life or pertaining to the civil rights struggle. And then he would approve it, and that was part of what we did. So it was kind of entrenched in our minds to be aware of what was going on around us. The sketch was done during the junior year, and that was '67 for me. And then the actual painting was done in your senior year. [My mural] is up at Hannah Hall. In fact, if you go up to the second and third floor, that's a book all its own. It's like the Sistine Chapel up there. We used every wall; every corridor inside.

Well this is what happened: The students started protesting, and they started blocking Wheeler off and so forth. This was '66 or '67. I was in my dormitory—we were on the third floor and I was looking out the window. It was about maybe seven o'clock and I saw this little white lady driving her car because everybody else—Wheeler was vacant—I mean there was nobody on Wheeler because it was blockaded from both sides. But this little lady had come from somewhere and she was driving through. All of a sudden a brick hit her car; it just hit down on the door, and just dented it. Then another brick hit it but she kept driving and she made it through. If it had hit the window, someone would have killed her. So we knew it was something strange happening, but we didn't know what.

So about an hour later, we looked out the window, and we saw about a hundred police officers coming toward the dormitory, and they started shooting at the dormitory. I mean just shooting—just like an assault. So anyway, me and my roommate, we decided we would just get in our pajamas and lay down. I mean we had nothing to do with it. And they would come, and they would see that we were in bed and so forth. Well they finally got into the dormitory. We could hear the doors busting as they were coming in. So they finally busted the doors, pulled us out, took us and put us down on the grass, head down, face down—and took [us] to jail. Fingerprinted us all. And we stayed in jail that whole night.

Strange thing about this is that next morning I thought the black community would be outraged. I thought that when we walked through that little corridor and saw the sunlight it would be...but there wasn't. There was only just a few people. And I think that Dr. Biggers was one of them.

Figure 11.3: Charles Criner, 1978. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

11.4 Working Artist

After I graduated I got a job at Posters Inc., and I did their little billboard sketches, and they would take them and sell them and reproduce them. And then I went to work for NASA. I helped do the flight plan for Apollo 11, you know. Then after we finally landed on the moon there was nothing for us to do. They didn't fire us, but I mean up until that time we weren't even allowed to go home. We would sleep in the hallways because as the engineers change the flight plan, they had these great big books that looked like phone books, and they had a visual line drawing of every three seconds of how that lunar lander would be turned. Well if they changed the plans, all the drawings had to be done again.

I always liked to do cartoons, so I took some cartoons to the Houston Post, and they told me, "All we have are syndicated cartoons. We get them syndicated. But we do have an opening for an artist." So that's when I switched from NASA to the Houston Post. I was there for two months, then Uncle Sam told me to show up. I quit the Post, and I went to the Army for two years, then I came back to the Post. I was promoted to art director and I worked there during the 80s. And then I quit for a while, came back, quit and went into business for myself. Then I came back and worked there until they closed in 1995.

When the Post closed in '95 I went to the Houston Chronicle, and I worked there until '98. And then there again, Dr. Biggers called me and says there's a museum opening at the Printing Museum. They had these two presses, and nobody knew anything about them at the time. So a fellow by the name of Don Piercy was the director at this museum at the time, and he loved Dr. Biggers' work. So Dr. Biggers called me and says, "There's two presses, and they're going to give them to this museum. And I want you to come over and we're going to get them working. And they promised me that we could come here, and we could print in the evening after you get off work."

We got those presses going, and Don called me one day and said, "Criner, how would you like to come here and work permanently?" And I said, "Well, what am I going to do at a museum?" So he said, "We'll pay you what you're making at the Houston Chronicle, and we just want you to come here and do your work. It's called an artist-in-residence." So I came here and started off as an artist-in-residence.

11.5 An Artist's Subject Matter

When we were at TSU we were always pushed into creating things that we were familiar with. So I used printmaking as a means to just do the domestic stuff: you know, picking cotton and just where we came from as a black race. And I love fishing. Not just catching the big marlins and taking the picture with those big beautiful fish, but actually taking your kids down and fishing from the banks and creeks and things like that. And then with the domestic things, I think that picking cotton and peas and working that of our history is colorful, so I'd like to do that.

I love people that create prints by using different media...just art for art itself, but I use it just as a medium to express a story that I want to tell. There's a story. And I usually put a little paragraph with it because this is what I choose. Most people say that art should be interwoven in the viewer, but I try to go a little past that. I just want you to see and know what it is, and then you read that and you know why it is. I'm just a storyteller.

With black art I think that—this is just me saying it—I think that the black race is a race that wants to get art wise—wants to get away from where we came from. That's just me. More white people buy my art than black people, you know. You know everybody else that sells work, they paint jazz. They paint happy people all the time. Nobody wants to have a person picking cotton in their living room. So I think that you do kind of risk your life. I'm kind of blessed in that I can afford to paint and draw what I feel. A lot of people can't do that. If painting and drawing was my only income I would have to paint some of the things that people want me to paint rather than painting the things and drawing the things I want to paint. I would just say looking back that the art is just me. And you know Houston, as far as art is concerned, is just vibrant.

Charles Criner was interviewed on September 14, 2006. You can listen to the interview

here[2] **.**

[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16136/latest/09 Charles Criner.mp3

Chapter 12

Don Edelman, b. 1925[1]

12.1 The Long Way Around to Art

I was always making art. There was always a continuous pressing to make more time available to get more artwork done. I started out copying Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. When we'd go to church my mother would give me a piece of paper and a pencil, and I learned that drawing was an approved activity—and fun. I was born in Bowie, Texas, and shortly thereafter moved to Amarillo, where I grew up. Along the way I enlisted in the Navy, and went from there to Washington University in St. Louis for four years, and from there to the University of Illinois where I got my Masters in Fine Arts.

The faculty at Washington U had Fred Connelly who was quite well known. And Max Beckman[2] was there. So I had a very diverse faculty. I had abstract art, meticulous, traditional Renaissance-type art, and of course very good training in color. So it was a very diverse kind of background. I went to Washington U because it was the cheapest tuition. I think it was $262 or something like that. They had a great faculty. If I'm not a success it's not because they didn't try.

From there, I've been quite a few places. My sister invited me to come out and stay with her in Denver, so I moved out, went out there and lived in the officers' enlisted quarters where my sister was married to a Sergeant in the Air Force. I lived in the basement there for a year or two, then they decided to go out and find a better view—a fabulous penthouse on top of the Cornwall Apartments. I worked in Denver for a while doing odd jobs, making picture frames. Then I decided to go to San Francisco, and I met a guy who was selling encyclopedias. So I ended up selling Encyclopedia Britannica, again, always doing these things, trying to find time to make art.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16141/1.1/>.

[2] Max Beckman, German Expressionist painter, 1884-1950, immigrated to the U.S. where he taught and painted the last three years of his life.

Self-Portrait with Red Eyes

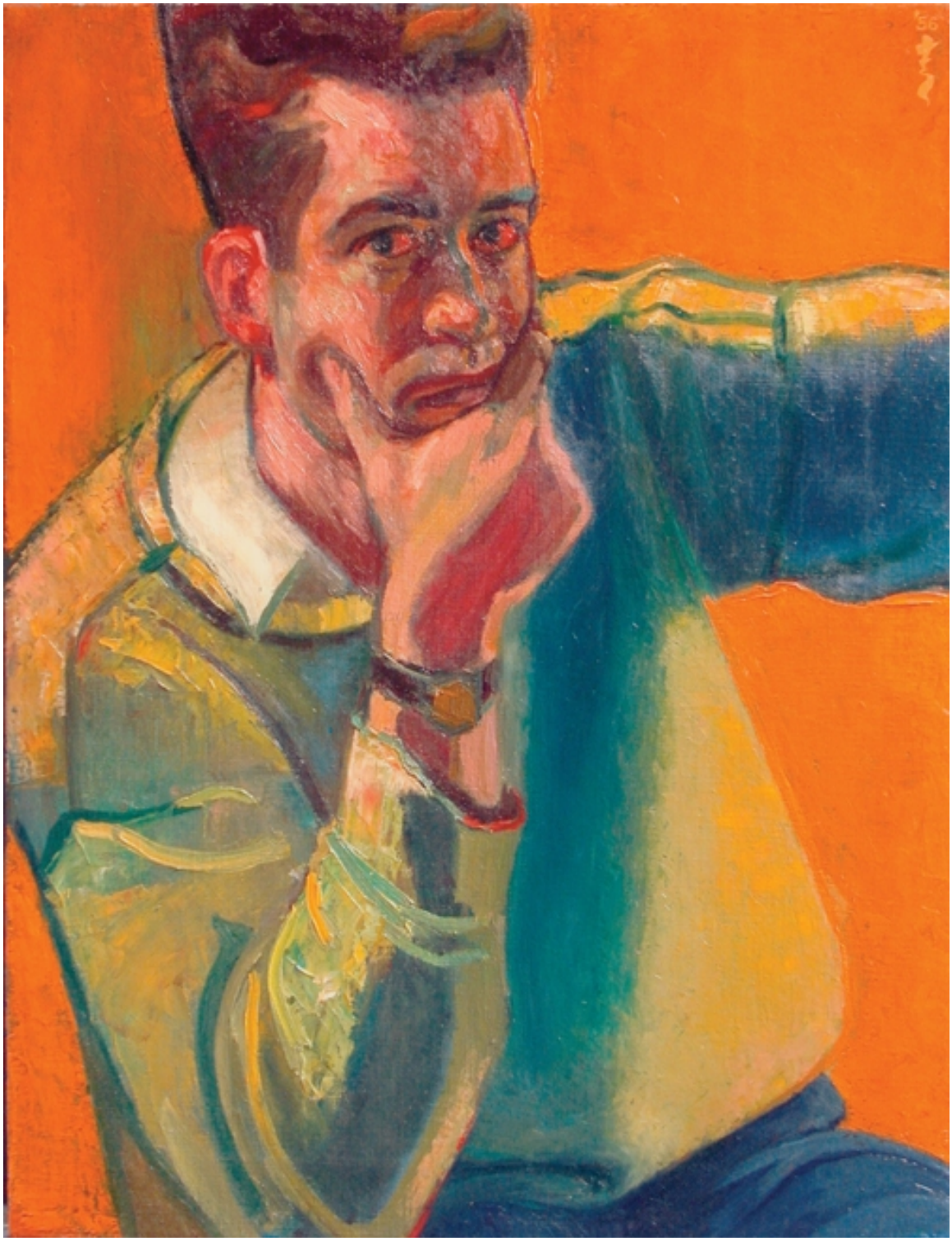

Figure 12.1: By Don Edelman, 1965. Courtesy of the artist.

12.2 Houston Connections

I came to Houston to sell encyclopedias and in the process met Jim Abercrombie[3] who said, "Hey, come to work for me." So I went to work for Cameron [Iron Works] and worked with them for ten years [doing] industrial advertising. In about 1975 my then-wife-to-be said, "If you're going to be an artist, be an artist." So I quit Cameron. I had a few accounts that I took care of, and did that for a while. Ever since then I've been moving around and creating art. It was '63 or thereabouts...in those times you didn't make a living with art. You either taught art, or you did industrial, commercial art. A few lucky people that maybe lived in New York were making a living [in art.] Back then the idea of making a living with art was kind of a wonderful idea to think about.

It's just been a very gradual thing...always painting, selling some now and then. People know about you, and maybe buy things. I always entered competitive exhibits, but even then my contacts with other artists have been very rare. I did have some gallery pieces...and I'd worked with some art consultants [but] I never knew where my next painting or sale [would come from].

In one show they did at the Hooks-Epstein Gallery,[4] Another Reality, Bert Long[5] actually used or borrowed one of my paintings to show people what he was talking about [in terms of] "other realities." That kind of brought me to that particular gallery...but that's a case of an artist helping another artist. And it was Ed Stokey who introduced the CASETA[6] people to me for [reasons that were] unselfish on his own part.

[3] James Smither Abercrombie, 1891-1975. Noted Houston oil man, civic leader and philanthropist, was for a time the unsalaried president of Cameron Iron Works.

[4] Hooks-Epstein Galleries, one of Houston's longest-running galleries, specializes in 19th- and 20th-century representational works of art.

[5] Bert Long was born in Houston in 1940 and was a sous chef for Hyatt Hotels before he embarked on a successful art career in 1976.

[6] Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art.

Houston, 1971

Figure 12.2: By Don Edelman. Oil on panel. Courtesy of the artist.

12.3 Now and Then

I'd say the art market has changed dramatically. If you want to do art today, do a lot of it [and] try to find the galleries that like what you do. Today there's a lot more people looking at art, and more importantly for the artist, there are [more] people who are buying art.

To the young artist starting out I would say to be enthusiastic. [There are] all kinds of possibilities, and probably being more connected with better artists is a good idea. I tend to spend so much time by myself that I feel it's not a good thing to be isolated. Pick up whatever information you can. I'm a member of the Watercolor Society and the Visual Art Association, and that's been good for me. One of my slogans is you can never tell where you're going to find a good idea by being open to what's around you. Like, going to the Menil Collection,[7] you know—I can't be complacent. Look at all the great stuff other people are doing. Don't be too proud. [Remember] when you go to a book about some artist and it has 26 pages of really nice reproductions—they didn't make it on 26 paintings. They've probably painted some bombs along the way. Don't be afraid to fail.

[7]The Menil Collection houses and exhibits the permanent collection of John and Dominique de Menil, including art from antiquity, the Byzantine world, medieval and tribal cultures, as well as important Surrealist and mid- 20th century works, pop and contemporary art.

Sink

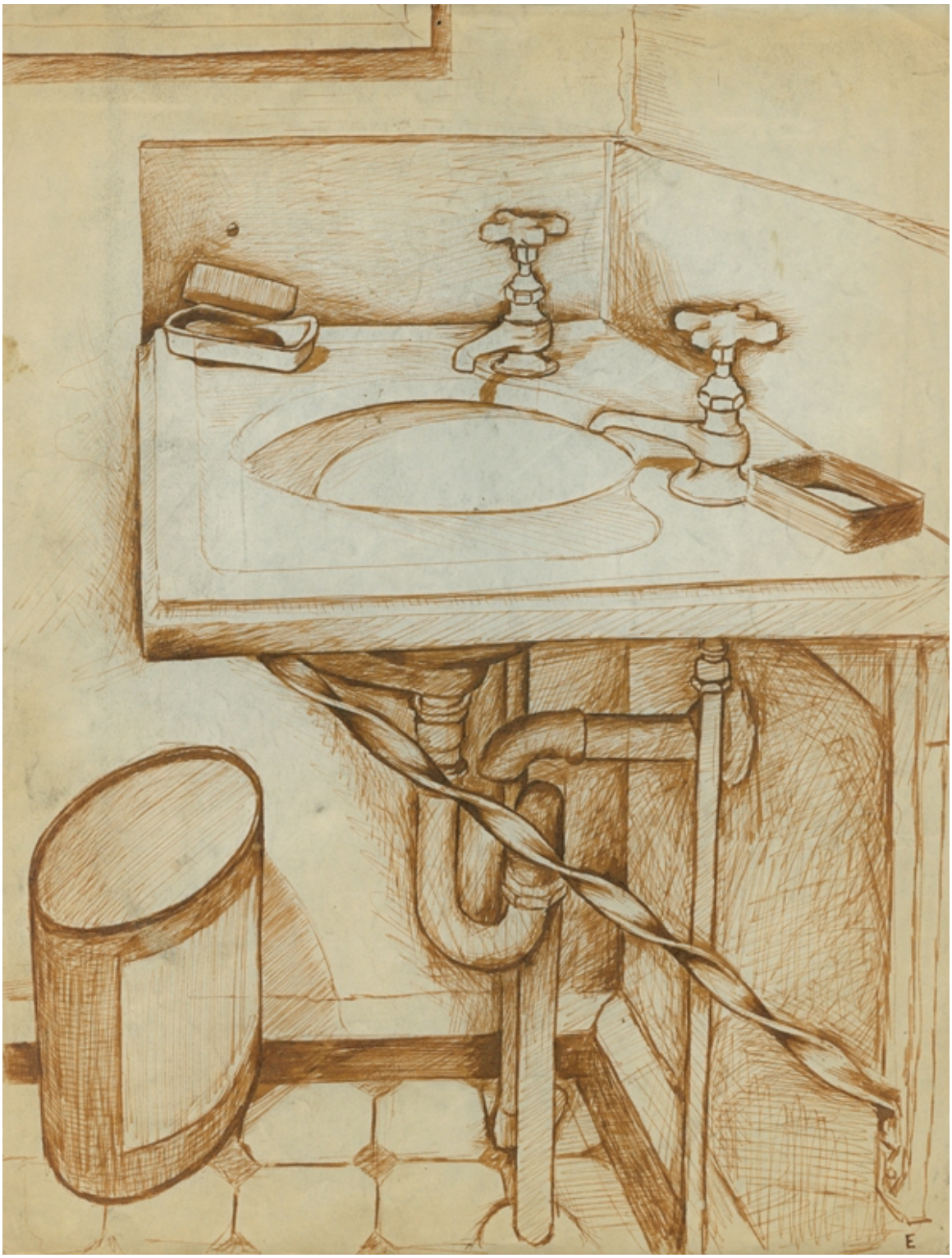

Figure 12.3: By Don Edelman. Drawing, 1949. Courtesy of the artist.

Don Edelman was interviewed on June 7, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[8] .

[8] http://cnx.org/content/m16141/latest/10 Don Edelman.mp3

Chapter 13

Eugene Foney, b. 1950[1]

13.1 First Acquisition

I came to Texas Southern University in the 70s to pursue an MBA. In the process of making that decision, I was walking down the street in Chicago and looked into the window of a small shop that made cabinets and furniture, but in the front of this space [the owner] had a little gallery. I saw a picture in the window and went in and engaged him about what the picture cost. We went back and forth and he told me it was $15, which I thought was an incredibly high price to be charging for something of that nature—and I left. But I couldn't get the picture out of my mind. A couple of days later, I went back. We continued our conversation and I told him what I was getting ready to do. I ended up putting the picture on lay-away and purchasing it, which kind of started a relationship. He told me that if I was coming to Texas, he had some materials—small reproductions—Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and others of that stature, that people in Texas had probably never seen, and that I could make book money while I was pursuing my degree.

So I came to Houston with an armful of pictures and the first person I met at Texas Southern was Professor Ron Bearden, who had been hired by the University to beef up the School of Business accreditation program. Me and Ron became friends at the University and I was his student assistant for a period throughout the program. I was selling these pictures on the side, and different people started coming to me asking how to get different pieces of art.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16149/1.1/>.

Figure 13.1: Eugene Foney. Courtesy of Eugene Foney.

13.2 First Collection, Fateful Meeting

An old friend of mine in Chicago got a purchase order to put together a 30-piece art collection for the City of Chicago, at one of their branch libraries. And in there were a number of notable African American names:

Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden, John Biggers—and she asked me, did I think I had the capability of putting this collection together.

Not really having any knowledge of how prominent these artists were, my first inclination was, "no problem." So I went to the library—this is maybe 1977—and I got a book, a bibliography on African American artists, and started going through the list. And of course, I came to John Biggers' name, and I looked and said, "Hmmm. He's at Texas Southern." I'm in the School of Business, which is at the far end of the campus, and the art department is at the opposite end. So there had never been any engagement between me and him, other than I had seen some of the murals on the wall. So I got myself together and went over and introduced myself to him, and I told him about the project that I was getting ready to do. He said no problem, that I could buy a couple of pieces from him and pay him down the line.

He went back and brought out a lithograph from the 50s entitled Cotton Pickers, and as soon as I saw that picture I got that same feeling all over again, that had brought me into this whole program. So we kind of cut a deal, and I was looking at it and feeling very good about the piece, and then upon close examination I saw a small triangular hole that was embedded in a piece of cotton. I queried Dr. Biggers about this and he looked at it, looked me in the eye and said, "Well, you know...I only did ten of those and that was where a worm ate through the whole edition. I think that probably makes it worth more money."

I was feeling so good about the picture that, hey, I bought it and ended up getting a Greyhound bus ticket from Houston to Boston and...knocking on the doors of the majority of the artists who were on that list. A couple said no; the majority said yes. And of course, this was setting a foundation for a long career: now I had face-to-face working relationships with probably the cream of the crop of the African American art world at this particular point in history.

13.3 Biggers' Perspective

The stories John shared with me [of Houston in the 1950s] were simply reflective of the times that were happening. Very recently, maybe within the last year [2006], I found what is probably John's earliest existing drawing...from 1941. He had just entered Hampton Institute, but was not officially enrolled in the art department. I spoke of it to Mrs. Biggers and she said, "You know, John was doing things in the evening and drawing." I do know that John had seen this drawing before he died [in 2001], and offered the owner anything that he had in exchange for the drawing.

It was in very poor condition, but certainly it represented a very significant memory point for Dr. Biggers. This particular drawing was a bus with a black person sitting in the very back of the bus, last row of seats; a man being lynched; a row house with a mother standing outside taking care of her children. So he was very aware of the particular elements of the time, people being lynched, the segregation on the buses, but yet still finding strength in terms of the family, of the female structure, which throughout his work has been very instrumental in representing strength and connectedness, of keeping families together.

For whatever reason, I think a lot of John's early purchasers were Jewish, but one of my thoughts about that is because Viktor Lowenfeld (professor of art at Hampton Institute) had imparted to John a certain technique and an understanding of how to convey his imagery using those techniques...that particular classes of people were sensitive to. I mean hatch marks, the ability to mix paint and produce different layers through very subliminal kinds of concepts—these are things that I think constantly came through and as a result, a lot of Jewish collectors saw those similarities, and were attracted to the work.

13.4 A Dealer Views the Artists

The excitement and enthusiasm [Houston artists] brought to the table kind of demanded that their work be recognized. They were going to make a living as artists. I was a business major, so for me art had been a product to market and some kind of exchange, but in terms of getting involved with these individuals, I think of an artist in terms of their abilities. Number One, to be able to convey their soul in this two- or three-dimensional kind of element and have people react to it. And second, this was a group of individuals

that, irrespective of whether they were going to sell one piece of art, they still had to get up and create something.

Jesse Lott and Bert Long started a newspaper called Art Scene that ended up having some elements of national distribution. And of course, Charles Criner was John's number one student in lithography, and he was a noted printmaker, showing at the Kauffman Gallery in the early 70s. Artists are very special people, and the world would certainly be a very poor place if not for them.

13.5 Of the Teacher/Artist

As well as being a first-rate artist, John [Biggers] always looked at himself as being an educator and a teacher. As I look back, it seems that Texas art in terms of an African American aesthetic kind of starts with John Biggers. Obviously there were other instructors and teachers and artists that were certainly plying their trade and craft, and it's very interesting that these are names that really don't come to light.

In the 60s there was a group called OBA [Organization of Black Artists] that I think existed through the late 70s. I'm not quite sure. I think that one of the high school instructors, Albert Blair, was the creator of that particular group. He has since passed, and I'm not sure what happened to the group after that, so it really seems that there is a big missing piece to the puzzle in terms of names and personalities that certainly had to have contributed to John's energy—because artists seem to exist often as a community.

I think that there is a real danger in terms of a generation growing up and not being conscious and aware of Dr. Biggers' contributions. I find that the younger students in other cities and other parts of the country probably know more about John Biggers than [those in Houston] do. There just doesn't seem to be [in Houston] a sense of what a great treasure he was, and how significant his impact was in terms of the art world in general—not only just on the African American stage.

Eugene Foney was interviewed on November 30, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2]
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[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16149/latest/11 Eugene Foney.mp3

Chapter 14

Roy Fridge, 1927-2007[1]

14.1 Houston Ties

I had been coming back and forth to Houston for years, because of my friendship with Jim Love. He came to Houston in 1953 or 1954, and started showing at the New Arts Gallery[2] in '57. I would come down and see some of his shows, so there was a lot of back and forth. When I moved to Houston in 1966, Jim had the front part of this little building he rented on Truxillo, and he let me rent two rooms from him.

In 1966 the Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts[3] no longer existed, so the exciting things happening were here in Houston at the Contemporary Arts Museum that Jerry MacAgy ran—and Jim of course was very important to her for installations and support.

What was exciting was the fact that the galleries like New Arts were showing contemporary Texas artists—so all that added together made it interesting to me to come to Houston, once I decided not to be a hermit on the beach.

As soon as I got here in 1966, Dianne David had David Gallery.[4] She had seen some of my things and invited me to put a show together there in September or October of '66. Some of the pieces were earlier works; most of them had movement of some kind. I called them "wooden machines" for lack of better terminology. The main piece was called "Singer," which was based on an old Singer sewing machine that I had built a top on, and by pumping the pedal, you made things move and also play the keyboard things. Every time you'd play it, things began flying off of it—so it was destined to destroy itself to some extent. It survives in a sort of tall totem piece which I call Memorial Singer.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16170/1.1/>.

[2] The New Arts Gallery was founded in Houston in 1956, and closed in 1974.

[3] The short-lived Dallas Museum of Contemporary Arts developed an audience for modern art in Texas and set trends nationally. It was opened in 1957; Douglas MacAgy became its director in 1959. Under MacAgy, the museum organized a number of innovative exhibitions that attracted national attention, but it was merged with the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in 1963.

[4] Dianne David founded and operated David Gallery in Houston from 1963 to 1983. She showed various artists, including Jack Boynton, Bob Camblin, Roy Fridge, Jim Love, David McManaway, among others.

Big Man Machine

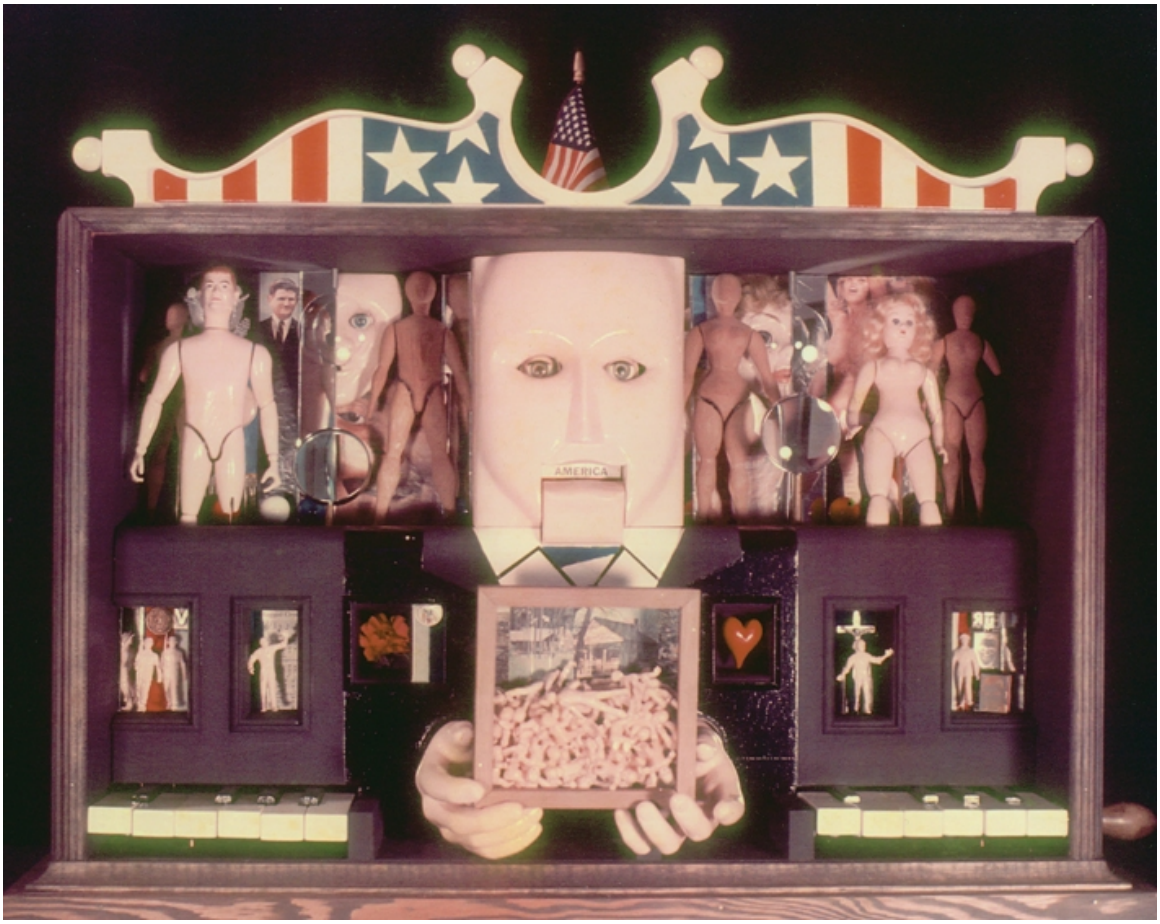

Figure 14.1: 1968. Courtesy of Roy Fridge.

14.2 Mixed Media

I was in Houston until August of 1969. Besides making sculpture during that period of time, I had two shows at David Gallery. And for two semesters in 1967-68 I was invited by John O'Neill[5] to be what they called a guest lecturer at Rice University. Every Friday I would work with both Bob Camblin's drawing class and Earl Staley's drawing class. I made a film while I was there just to show students the way to do animation. It was great fun. Also at that time, the Rice Media Center[6] was starting up and Gerald O'Grady invited several visiting lecturers to come in who were pretty well known. In those days they called it "independent filmmaking" and it was basically short, experimental art films, of which I made some. I did one of Claes

[5]John O'Neill became chairman of the Rice University Department of Fine Arts in 1965.

[6]The Rice University Media Center was founded in 1969 by John and Dominique de Menil with scholar Gerald O'Grady as a consultant. The de Menils' vision for the center was to use film, photography and art as education tools in research and teaching.

Oldenburg's[7] images, rearranging them into my own storyline and putting my own soundtrack to it. There was another film I made about David McManaway. But I made my first film in 1949 while I was still a student at Baylor University. I learned everything I could about making film, and invented my own style of animation. I started this film studio in Dallas in 1951, and did animated television commercials on film—did that for ten years.

I did a lot of set design while I was in Dallas...the first version of Waiting for Godot in 1956 with the Dallas Little Theater, it was called then. As part of the lobby exhibit, I put in some of my little set design models...and this man who had a gallery up in Dallas came to me and said, "You know, your sets look very structural and very sculpture-like. Would you be interested in making some more sculpture-like things...and I'll show them."

I did not intend that these sets necessarily be sculpture, but from then on the things I made I started calling "little theater" and they were very structural...they looked like there was a little play going on. If they were willing to call it sculpture, I was willing to call it sculpture. I always designated myself a whittler.

Figure 14.2: Roy Fridge posed with artwork for mailing poster photo for David Gallery show, Houston, 1966. Courtesy of Roy Fridge.

14.3 Thoreau-Inspired at Port Aransas

After we started the Rice film project, the head of the University of Oklahoma art department heard about it and invited me to come to the University of Oklahoma and start a BFA/MFA program in film. So I went up there for four years and did that. I worked on sculpture during that time, but I did more film than sculpture (and of course teaching). Then I came back to the beach at Port Aransas. I have a studio there, and I kept a studio [in Houston] through the 1970s, once again with Jim Love in the front part of that same building. Later he moved to Blossom Street and for a while I rented some space about a block down the

[7] Claes Oldenburg, b. 1929. A Swedish-born American pop sculptor.

street. I had a studio there from 1980 to about 1983, but I also had [my place at] Port Aransas, too, so I could run back and forth between the two.

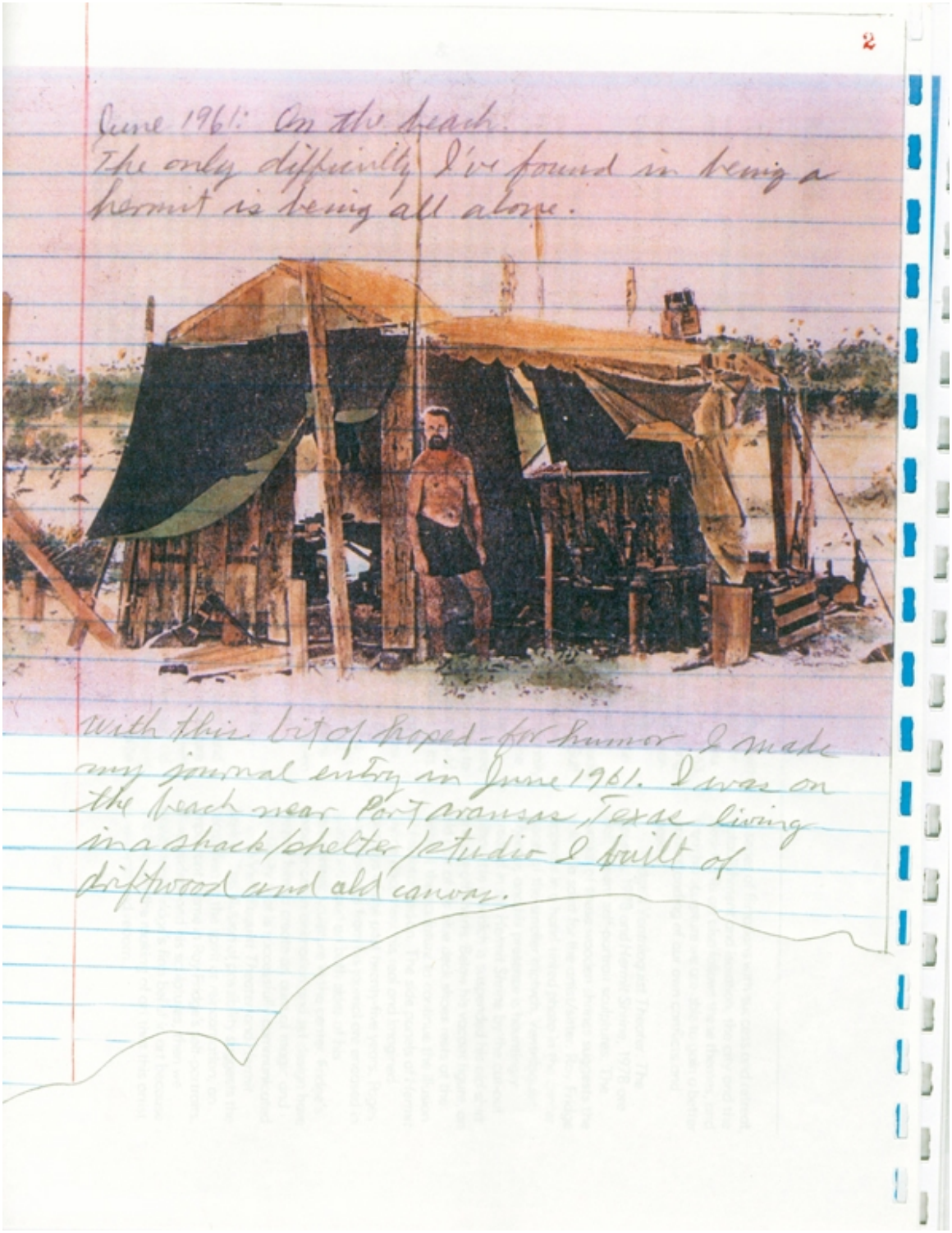

Figure 14.3: Roy Fridge pictured at beach with notes. Courtesy of Roy Fridge.

I ran away to the beach, as I like to phrase it, not so much to make art as to contemplate. Henry David Thoreau only did it for a couple of years, but I wanted to try it out as a living experience. I felt like whatever I made during those years was a reflection of the life I was living. It was not like I was doing this as a career or avocation or occupation—just as a description and reflection of the life I was living

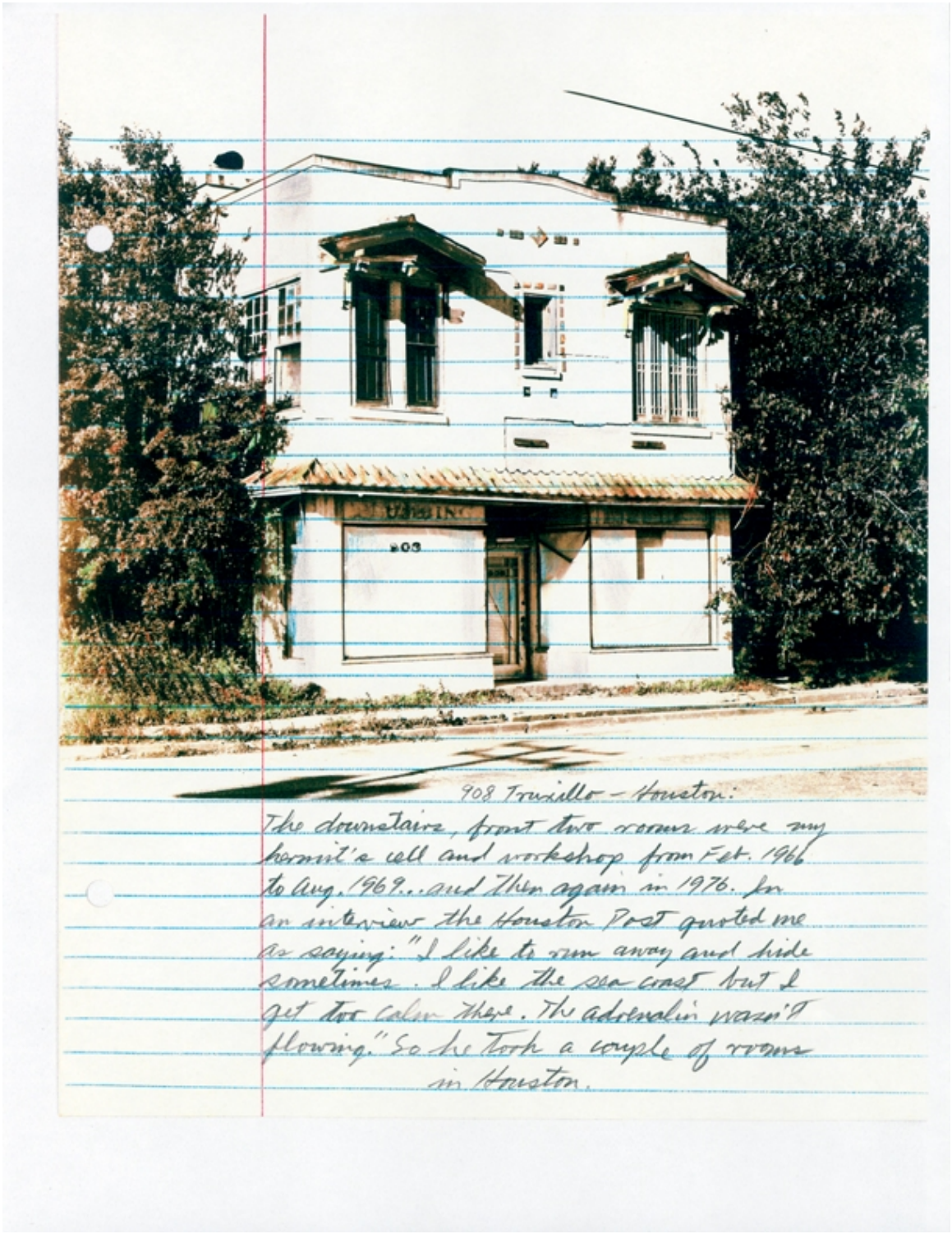

Figure 14.4: Studio at Truxillo with notes. Courtesy of Roy Fridge.

14.4 Looking Back

Most everything I've done are things I wanted to do when I was nine years old as a kid, but couldn't do because I didn't know how to do the carpentry, and I didn't have the money or the materials. So I built treehouses, all of those kinds of things...boats that used to stir my imagination as a child. When I was nine years old out on the old hill where my parents lived, there was no water within 50 miles in any direction, but I wanted to build a boat. I always wanted to build a boat so finally when I did move to Port Aransas, I built about 20 real sailing boats, rowing boats or fishing boats, and about 20 art boats. The excitement of the thought of it all is still there. I also got interested in Jungian psychology and had been keeping track of some dreams. In some of the dreams I began to see images that reminded me of the shamanic or sorcerer images in cave paintings in France, so I began doing some research and then began doing more shaman-related things. I built this tree house out in the woods—what I called the shrine grove—and so built several pieces that stayed in the woods until a big flood came along and washed them away. So my various steps were first I did heroes, then I did hermits, then I did shaman, and then boats. Of course the boats were actually before the shaman, but it sounds better to put it the other way.

I consider myself a very lucky person—some people might call it fate. Okay, maybe they handed me the ball but I didn't drop it, I had to run with it. The main thing I would say is that the art has been a great excitement to me, but art was never the thing in itself. It was just sort of one more wondrous thing in the life I've been so lucky to have lived.

Figure 14.5: Installation of Roy Fridge show at David Gallery, Houston, 1966. Courtesy of Roy Fridge.

Roy Fridge was interviewed on June 5, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[8] .

[8] http://cnx.org/content/m16170/latest/12 Roy Fridge.mp3

Chapter 15

Henri Gadbois, b. 1930[1]

15.1 Native Son

I'm a native Houstonian...a St. Joseph's baby. I grew up here in Houston; went to Lamar High School and then the University of Houston. I got my BFA there in 1952, and my Masters in 1953. My father was an artist, too, so I had been "exposed." He was a commercial artist who worked for Madison Southwest. He painted the big outdoor billboards—he could paint these huge, ten-foot heads from a small sketch and from a distance it looked great. I used to say he was one of the first pop artists, and he didn't even know it. He very violently objected to abstract art and we always had good arguments back and forth.

My father was in a group of men here that were commercial artists, and they had a studio down in the old M&M Building.[2] This was in the late 1930s, during the Depression, and the [owner] couldn't rent anything, so he gave them this space. These men would go down in the evening and paint. They did still lifes or they would hire models sometimes, or they would go out on field trips down on the bayou. I would watch him paint and I picked up a lot from my father.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16155/1.1/>.

[2] The Merchants and Manufacturers Building opened in early 1930. With 600,000 square feet, 40,000 window panes and 14 miles of floor space, it was the largest building in the city. It later became a part of the University of Houston-Downtown.

Red Tights

Figure 15.1: By Henri Gadbois. 1954. Oil on canvas. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of the Allied Arts Foundation.

15.2 Early Exposure

Probably one of my greatest influences was my high school art teacher, Norma Henderson, who also taught Jack Boynton and Dick Wray. Norma remained dear, dear friends with both [my wife] Leila[3] and me for the rest of her life. She introduced me to ceramics and the first thing I ever exhibited was a small bowl I did while I was still in high school...it was in the Texas General, in '47 I think. So I started exhibiting nearly 60 years ago.

[Norma] introduced me to Lowell Alden, a ceramist who had a studio here, and Alvin Romansky.[4] As a teenager, I'd be taking class. I took classes from Ruth Uhler[5] at the Museum...more for the fun of just going to the Museum rather than being serious about doing painting. But then I went to the University

[3]Henri Gadbois married Leila McConnell on August 18, 1956.

[4]Alvin Sylvan Romansky was a native Houstonian and attorney. He was one of six charter members of the Contemporary Arts Association (CAA) in 1948.

[5]Ruth Pershing Uhler, an artist, also worked as an instructor and curator of education at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from 1937 to 1967.

of Houston during a time of great change. Frederic Browne[6] was retiring in '48 and Bernie Lemmell was the new head of the department. I think when I was there I took from both Robert Preusser[7] and Lowell Collins.[8] Lowell was teaching a class at the Museum of Fine Arts School in the evening, and he got me a scholarship to go every Tuesday and Thursday evening to his life class, and it was a great group. Gertrude Barnstone was in the class. [So was] Andy Todd, who is an architect, and Bob Lynn, who is an architect. Eric Taylor, an Englishman who worked for Channel 13, was in the class, too. After class we would all go down to 2K's on Main Street and have coffee or raisin toast. George Fuermann who was a columnist at the Houston Post would come in also, finishing up his day. One time Lowell did caricatures of the people—quick pencil drawings maybe just two inches high in his sketchbook—and Fuermann saw and was so intrigued that he asked to "borrow" them. They appeared in the Houston Post one day, these caricatures of people. It was a very stimulating, exciting time.

Figure 15.2: Henri Gadbois and Leila McConnell at the James Bute Gallery, September 27, 1965. Courtesy of Henri Gadbois.

[6] Frederic Browne taught architectural drawing and painting at Rice University

[7] Robert Preusser, 1919-1992. Houston-born abstract expressionist painter and art educator, actively involved in the Contemporary Arts Association. He was an instructor and associate curator of education at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston during the 1940s and 1950s.

[8] Lowell Daunt Collins, 1924-2003. President of Lowell Collins Gallery and director and instructor for Lowell Collins School of Art. Collins taught fine arts at several universities including University of Houston and Houston Baptist University, and was instrumental at the museum school at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

15.3 Influential Friends

Another very influential, helpful person was Ben DuBose; he was in charge of the art department at Bute Paint Company. In the middle of the paint store there was one aisle that was all paint supplies and at the end of that was a room. It was a gallery, and I think probably one of the first commercial galleries in the city. He even gave the art club at the University of Houston space in the gallery to have a show. I even bought [a piece at] one of the early Herb Mears and David Adickes shows, when they first came back from France—so that must have been the late 40s, early 50s. Ben would give us leftover mis-sized frames or ends of the rolls of canvas—I mean, he was really generous to the students, the young artists.

In 1966 when Ben left Bute and formed his own gallery that was DuBose on Kirby Drive...most of us went, who were there with Ben. The Friday night openings at DuBose were very social...the place to go. I mean everybody sort of met there, and Ben did a good job of selling. He loved sort of a messy gallery where you'd have to go through and find something that was already there. He never told you exactly what to paint, but he would give you hints, like, "People are painting their houses bold yellow, so...." Or he'd sort of chide you if you hadn't been painting.

Houston's art scene was very different. I mean, it didn't have a strong leader like Dallas and Fort Worth [that was] pushing local art. The director at Fort Worth's museum really pushed the local people—it was almost like a school, and boy, they were exhibiting there. We never had anyone here that was really strong on local art. But then, it might be bad to remain too local—you've got to sort of spread your wings.

15.4 The Contemporary Arts Association

CAA was a volunteer organization; everybody did their part. I mean, if you were on the board you were probably program director, or you were in charge. People would come up with ideas for shows and they would be in charge of that. Norma [Henderson] was telling me about it when I was in high school, so it must have been the late 40s. Their first show was, I think, utility items like pliers and coffee makers and stuff. It was in the upstairs galleries on Montrose at the Museum of Fine Arts.

I got into the CAA a little bit later on in the 50s because I was drafted into the army, and then I was gone for a year and a half to two years. I remember Leila had sent me clippings of when they moved the Contemporary Arts Museum down Main Street after midnight to the new location of the Prudential [property] on Fannin. The Prudential Building faces Holcombe; the CAA faced Fannin. When I was in Germany, in Nuremburg, there was a neat little museum there that had traveling shows and they had a German graphics show that impressed me very much. I think Jerry MacAgy had taken over the CAA as director by this time, and I suggested doing a German graphics show. I would get the things from one of my sergeants, and I think the show was when I got back in May [1956]—or something like that. It was so popular that people were buying the graphics and I kept mailing back to Germany, and the CAA would send the money to the artists in Germany. We sold quite a few.

We had one New Year's Eve party at CAA for the members where the whole CAA had Christmas trees hung upside down from the ceiling with the decorations. I think we really wanted to try to be far out...on the edge. But we did have fun. The CAA had a craft show or something like that where you could buy [other artists' work]. I have one of Jim Love's—a bird. They were $10 apiece.

Figure 15.3: Henri Gadbois, 1959. Photo by Maurice Miller. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

15.5 Artists in Community

Handmakers was a whole group of artists together—Stella Sullivan, Frank Dolejska—they were craftsmen. It was a cooperative where they would sell their own things. Stella did fabric, textiles, and glasses with designs that she had drawn. And Polly Marsters had the Houston Artist Gallery, which is the same Houston Artist Gallery that Grace Spaulding[9] and Ruth Uhler had in the 20s. Dianne David had the David Gallery on San Felipe and they asked artists to submit a piece of work that had been influenced by a tattoo, which was pretty weird. Then that evening (of the show), they had a tattoo artist, and the first ten people who wanted a little tattoo could get it free.

Another thing was the Friday night print group that Bill Condon[10] had. He discovered something called paper lithography. Instead of using stones. . .a sheet of paper was treated and you would draw [on it] like you do on the stone with a crayon, then you would put some sort of acid on top and run it through a press—I think we [used] an old washing machine roller as the press. Gertrude [Barnstone] was in the group and we

[9]Grace Spaulding John, 1890-1972. Artist who studied at the St. Louis School of Fine Art, married attorney Alfred John and maintained a studio in Houston from 1921 until her death.

[10]William Condon, b. 1927. An abstract painter and alumnus of Rice University.

did etchings, too. Alvin Romansky, Leila, Stella Sullivan , Elaine Mass, and Bill of course. The Museum let us use its studio every Friday night. Bill was a remarkable person...we traveled to Europe with him a couple of times.

Leila and I were in the group together and I think something clicked just before I went into the Army. We were married after I got back, but we say we never met, because we always knew each other at the museum. She was a student at the museum school [and] she remembers me as sort of a teenager there. I remember at an Easter art show [she had] a wonderful little figure of a girl that I really did like. She wouldn't sell it. I keep teasing her that I had to marry her to get that!

Henri Gadbois was interviewed on May 19, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[11] **.**

[11] http://cnx.org/content/m16155/latest/13 Henri Gadbois.mp3

Chapter 16

Dorothy Hood, 1919-2000[1]

16.1 Early Sixties

[The art climate] was sparse. I think there were three artists...Jim Love, Dick Wray and myself. I mean, these were the artists that seemed to be together. The fact is we had to know each other because we were the only ones.

We came here from Mexico and stayed, oh, three or four months—then we came back again and stayed longer. Not until 1965 did [my husband Valasco[2] and I] come back for good. I had family here—my mother and my father. We really wanted to go back to Mexico but things started happening.

Kathryn Swenson had a gallery...she and Jerry MacAgy worked very closely together. Jerry was at the museum at that time; when we came to Houston she was working with Mrs. de Menil. Ruth Pershing Uhler had a big role there...she knew everything—every archive, everything that ever happened at the museum. She was the one you went to to find out the facts.

One day Meredith Long came by the studio and he looked at the work and said, "I want to go to Mexico and see some of your artists and bring some [work] back." So he went and visited in Mexico and he took some of my friends' work and brought them to exhibit here in Houston. That's how I knew Meredith. Then he took me on with his very first gallery, over by the railroad tracks. [We decided to stay because] things were slim in Mexico. I mean, one could hardly make a living there. It was all beautiful—I mean we had a nice apartment and so forth—but as far as the practical, it was more beneficial to stay here.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16142/1.1/>.

[2] José Maria Velasco Maidana, 1901-1989. Noted Bolivian conductor and composer, he was considered by many to be the leading nationalistic composer of his country. He was married to Dorothy Hood for nearly 50 years.

Haiti

Figure 16.1: By Dorothy Hood, 1969. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Meredith J. Long.

16.2 Factions

In Mexico everyone helped each other without hesitation. They would bring people into your studio. We had galleries which divided into groups, and we had common goals and everything. Here it was really disorganized. I felt as if there were groups that I couldn't see what their motive was. They seemed more political, if anything.

I think the Museum of Fine Arts [MFAH] has had a variable position in the art realm. I think every director has come in with their own agenda, and I think it depends greatly on the director of the museum how the art community lives, or does not live.

The de Menils became from the very first an example of excellence. A lot of people think that they, by showing really fine art, did their duty to the community—and I'm sure that they have. I don't believe at any time, though, that they got involved with the creativity of the Houston scene.

The CAA (which became CAM) had a place out on Main I think it was—a little building. I think they were very close, all the people that organized it at first. It was a closely knit endeavor, and I thought it was a very good thing.

Figure 16.2: View of MFAH installation of "Dorothy Hood Drawings," February 27, 1975-March 20, 1975. Photo by Allen Mewbourn. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

16.3 The Houston Scene

I see [the art scene in Houston] the way I first saw it: You can work at your own pace here, and you can either participate or not. You've got a lot of free choice. I do think that I haven't seen any impulse toward local pride and wanting to push art from Houston in other places. I really have seen very little self-assurance that they have good talent here, with groups of artists really being proud, on a high level. To a lot of the dealers the locals are a token and their real interest is very expensive—either old masters or contemporaries from New York. There's a lack of adventuresomeness among the collectors to a certain extent.

There's a lot of freedom in Houston, though...mental freedom...because you had to work alone. I mean you had to think alone, and of course you could set up your own values. It was great for art...because you could be anything, you didn't really have to fit into anything. In that way it was very, very creative.

[Socially] you really had to "toe the mark." With men it didn't matter, but with women you needed to be sure that you came across as a proper person. I came back [from Mexico] determined that I wasn't going to do anything eccentric and that I was going to honor their values, you know. Which I did. It made me pretty much of a loner. I mean, I felt like a loner, which might have been good. But then of course, I had Valasco as a companion, and we were okay. He was composing [then] and he wasn't conducting. He had entered his passive phase, which was very hard on me. When we were in Latin America, he earned the living and when we were here it changed because he just could not keep up with the pace. It was too rapid for him. So I became kind of the boss at that time.

Figure 16.3: Dorothy Hood, c. 1960s. Photo by Hickey and Robinson. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

16.4 Accolades

[Being awarded an honorary PhD at Rhode Island School of Design] was one of the nicest experiences of my life, I think. I never expected it. I never knew they followed me, or my work. This thing came, and I went—there were many French directors there, and it was a nice feeling. I've kept a history of art in Houston from all my scrapbooks. I've kept them from the first.

I've been given a great chance. I think the first thing an artist should [consider] is not whether you will be successful or anything like that. You have to think of the creative first. If I can do well, and I have the freedom to do well, that's about the best thing that can be offered. [I have that here] without too many restraints, and it's comfortable.

Dorothy Hood was interviewed on July 18, 1992. You can listen to the interview here[3] .

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m16142/latest/14 Dorothy Hood.mp3

Chapter 17

Earlie Hudnall, Jr., b. 1946[1]

17.1 Arriving on a Greyhound Bus

In '68 I came to study art at Texas Southern University, and I actually rode a Greyhound bus from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to downtown Houston. I took a cab to the campus, to 3201 Wheeler. When I got out of the cab I was carrying my Marine Corps duffel bag and the guys said, "Hey man, let's not mess with this joker right here." That was my introduction to Texas. I guess you could say that the first ground I actually stepped on in Texas was at Texas Southern—because you know, stepping off the Greyhound bus and then catching a cab you're still on concrete, but the actual ground I [first] touched was Texas Southern University.

A friend of mine [from high school] who lived in Hattiesburg was home on academic probation. Dr. Freeman, the debate coach at TSU at the time, was the assistant dean to the College of Arts and Sciences, and students whose grades were not up to par were expelled or sent home on academic probation for the semester. I had just gotten out of the Marine Corps in January, so it was too late for me to enroll in college at that particular time. I had applied to go to the University of Southern Mississippi and to Southern University in Baton Rouge and I had been accepted, but following a visit to [this friend's] house his mother encouraged me, "Why don't you go to Texas?" And he said, "Yeah, man—Texas Southern has a good art department."

And so I did. I filled out an application, was accepted, caught the Greyhound bus and came to Texas. This is how I ended up at TSU. Building and making things was something that came very naturally. . .and something that I enjoyed doing. So art became a natural kind of phenomenon with me. It was a way of expressing myself and a way of using excess energy.

My first teacher [at TSU] was Kermit Oliver.[2] I can remember after enrolling in the art department Dr. Biggers spoke to all of the freshman students, and the statement that he made is "art is life." He said one must draw upon his experiences from family, community and life—the things he has experienced. We had to write about our families, where we was from, for him to get an idea as to who we were and what we was all about.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16144/1.1/>.

[2] Kermit Oliver, b. 1943. Born in Refugio, Texas, he began studying art at Texas Southern University in 1960. He received a BFA and teaching degree from TSU in 1967, and painted and taught in Houston until 1984, when he moved with his family to Waco, Texas.

Ready to Wear

Figure 17.1: 1971. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

17.2 Images of Life

My father was an amateur photographer and my grandmother kept a photo album of his photographs while he was in the military service, and on...Sunday, sometimes on special holidays...special occasions, he would make pictures of us, my brother and sisters and I. My grandmother would sit on the porch during the summer and show it to us, back in Hattiesburg.

In high school our physics instructor was teaching us about chemistry and physics, showing us the difference between chemical change and physical change. One example that he used [for chemical change] was to show negatives, because most people took them to the drugstore to have them developed. But he took the negatives into a darkroom with a light box, dropped them into the developer and then magic came forth. At that time the seed was planted...of a boy wanting to be like his father, and the instructor planting the seed of the experiment, of actually seeing an image come to life.

I was hooked at that point on being a photographer, and during that summer in high school I remember going to the community swimming pool, taking my father's camera that he purchased while he was in the service and making photographs—but lo and behold, I dropped the camera in the pool. The lifeguard dived in and got the camera out. I tried to dry it out—I took it home and hid it in the attic. And for some particular reason, my father never asked about it. Later on in life we talked about it and I told him what happened. So the seed of photography was basically planted. Going and joining the Marine Corps, I purchased a small camera and began to make pictures of the guys that was around and our activities, the places we traveled. So this is how it started, never knowing that I would pursue photography as a profession, but having that experience.

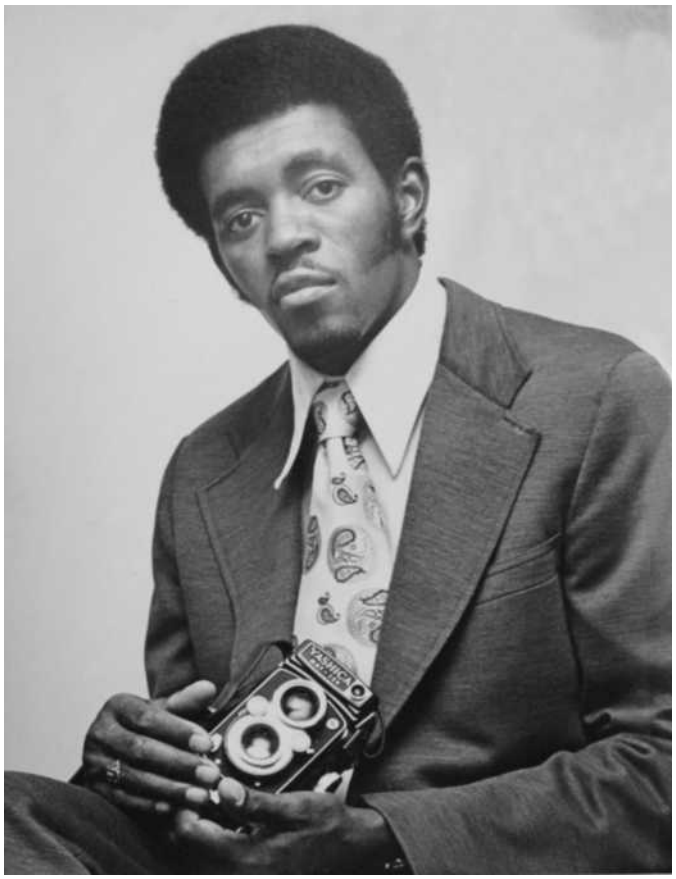

Figure 17.2: Earlie Hudnall, 1973. Photo by Ray Carringon

17.3 Campus Connections

On campus there was a guy named Nathaniel Sweets, from East St. Louis, Illinois. His father was a newspaper editor and he was a photographer. I met him and I said, "Hey, man—I have a camera up in my room. I made a lot of pictures while I was in Vietnam." He said, "Man, why don't you get your camera and shoot some pictures? I can develop the film." So I went up and got my camera and that day I made photographs. He developed the film in his room, using water from his aquarium to cool the chemicals down. This was my first introduction to actually developing film. Almost within a couple of weeks of that time, I discovered that there was a darkroom in the art department. One day here comes Dr. Biggers down the hallway, dressed in a white dashiki and white pants and sandals, and I said, "Dr. Biggers, I heard that there's a darkroom here in the art department and I would like to know if I could use it." He said, "Sure man—go right ahead." And he provided the darkroom for me.

So from there on, Nathaniel Sweets and I would go down to Southwestern Camera Store which was located on Main Street and buy a box of paper for $12, [then] come back and use the darkroom in the art department. This is where I began to learn and experiment. There at TSU at that time we were able to work in the art department till 10:00 at night. We was able to come over there early in the morning...people would play their music, and there would be people in the painting room...four or five people in the ceramics

room. . .somebody in the weavings room. Almost any evening at any time students would go back to the art department and work. There would be an instructor around, or one would be in and out. You could come right off the street—the door was open—go in and work till 10:30 or 11:00 at night.

I think having the ability to create absorbed a lot of energy rather than finding places to go. That was a time when integration was just beginning to blossom and students began to branch out from campus. This was right after the time that Martin Luther King had been assassinated, and the Kennedy assassination. Students were in this new renaissance mode of working and producing, and the faculty was encouraging students to work. We was able to observe Mr. Simms[3] throwing pots, building sculpture; John Biggers painting.

I started painting in my freshman year before I took painting due to the fact that Kermit and Katie Oliver always came back to the art department in the evenings. They lived close to the University in a small apartment, and they would come back in the evenings to work. Kermit would paint, and I had the opportunity to watch him. So that was motivation. . .there was always that demonstration of what was taking place. It challenged you to be active. It challenged you to be responsible for what you was doing.

17.4 Shooting for Model Cities

I was in school painting a mural in Hannah Hall and a man walked up and said, "Are you Earlie Hudnall?" I said, "Yes I am." He said, "Are you a photographer?" I said, "Yes I am." He said, "Well, Mr. Evans [TSU photographer at that time] told me that I should come and talk to you. I need you to come to my office and see if you would be interested in being a photographer for Model Cities Program." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Well, come to room 102, Martin Luther King Center, and I'm Dr. Thomas L. Freedman."

So I went and visited with Dr. Freedman. Working with the Model Cities Program, which provided city services to residents within the community—various communities—allowed me an opportunity to view Houston and see the various neighborhoods by shooting and making photographs. I was able to relate to Houston as a very rural and modern city, as well as somewhat of a Western city. Coming to Texas I was thinking that I was going to see cowboys and Indians and horses and all of that. But working for the Model Cities Program the blanket was pulled back, and the real Houston was revealed to me: Fourth Ward, Fifth Ward, Trinity Garden, the Hispanic community and all of that.

Being able to see all of this and coming from a working community has motivated me and inspired me to document life as it is. The simple things in life. How we live from day to day, what we do on special holidays, family kinds of things and so forth. And this has been my mainstay in photography.

[3]Sculptor Carroll Harris Simms, the first black graduate of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, joined John Biggers in the art department at Texas Southern University in 1950.

TSU's Ocean of Soul

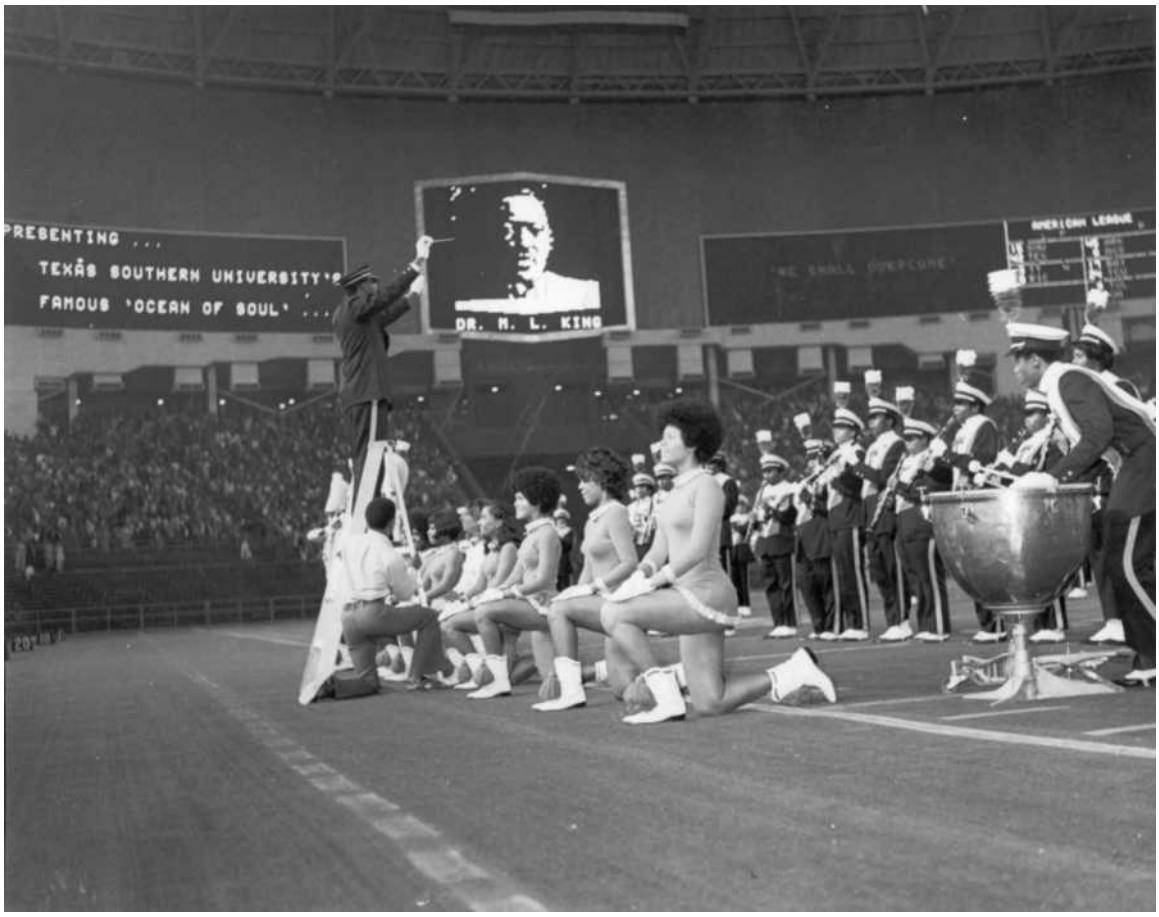

Figure 17.3: 1973. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

17.5 A Powerful Influence

John Biggers really pushed me. He took an interest personally in me and to this day, I still don't understand why. My first job in Houston was to clean up the painting room in the art department, and he provided that for me. He always challenged all of his students, but I kept coming back. I started to visit him in his studio. He started asking me to make photographs of certain pieces of sculpture for him and he allowed me the opportunity to experiment until I was able to get it right.

If you asked me the question, what one person touched you more than any of the others, I would have to say John Biggers, but then again, I had a supporting cast.

I went to Mr. Herbert Provost[4] and got information. Dr. Freeman provided us during the Model Cities Program with cameras, with supplies with which to experiment. Mr. Provost opened up his studio to me so that, during the down season, I was able to stay at the studio. I was there at night. He provided me with

[4]Herbert Provost was a tennis coach at Texas Southern University and a portrait and event photographer in Houston.

this opportunity to hone my skills and my craft. But there was also, you know, the students. Nathaniel Sweets...Ray Carrington.[5] Beyond that, it's just a generality of people, the respect of people.

17.6 Seeing Past the Lens

I never feel sorry for any of my subjects. I've always had respect for the individual, no matter who they were. Wherever I've been able to travel I've met people, and in every community there are so many similarities that we can find...and that is so wonderful.

It's a rush, it's an excitement, when you see the images of the picture and something sends off a signal that this is the moment to snap—to make the picture. That moment is very sacred and a very special kind of excitement. You are creating—you are freezing a moment in time, but you are having to work with the subject. You don't have to speak...but there is this magical timing that [brings] you and the subject into orbit. Then that subject contributes to society in a way without even truly knowing that the image he provided at that precise moment can have an impact. To me that's power. That's the power. That is something given to you by God and it is the result of hard work and perseverance. It is something that is sacred and something you don't abuse and you don't misuse. I have to live up to that. To do less than that is not putting forth my best effort. My father used to always say if he was sick, or had to leave or go out of town, "Hey look, I have to leave, I'm putting you in charge." And he said, "All I ask for you to do is your best." And this is what I'm trying to do each and every day: to do my best.

Earlie Hudnall was interviewed on December 1, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[6]
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[5] TSU graduate Ray Carrington III has photographed the Third Ward community in Houston for more than three decades. Together with Earlie Hudnall, he was a photographer for the Model Cities program as a college student. He has taught photography at Houston's Jack Yates Senior High School since 1993.

[6] http://cnx.org/content/m16144/latest/15 Earlie Hudnall Jr.mp3

Chapter 18

Harvey Johnson, b. 1947[1]

18.1 Eyes Opened

I was born in Port Arthur, Texas, in 1947 and so I was there during the 50s. I grew up in a family of four—a small family—and my mother raised us. We were poor but didn't know we were poor because of the warmth and attention and love that Mama provided for us. But it was a struggle for African people. During that time we lived on the west side of the railroad tracks, and Caucasian people lived on the east side of the railroad tracks. We had no idea of discrimination or anything like that because Mama never said anything to us about it. Black and white, green, yellow, whatever. We were just poor, and trying to survive.

We were very innocent, like I said. We didn't know. When I rode the bus downtown, Mama would walk to the back with us. We didn't question it, you know. Or when we went to the water fountains, we drank out of the colored water fountains. We didn't question it because she never did say anything about it. So we thought that was supposed to be...until Willie Moore.

Willie was my teacher at Lincoln High School in Port Arthur. I took art class from Willie in the tenth grade; I would go to his house often—every day—he and Anne. Seemed like they were doing art 24/7, you know. He introduced me for the first time to two very significant people: James Baldwin and John Biggers. From then on, that's when racism became a reality for me. That's when I woke up from being a child, mentally and emotionally. He introduced me to John, and he showed me a book by Cedric Dover, American Negro Art.[2] John was in that publication with his mural he did at the YMCA in Third Ward on McGowan Street for his doctorate degree, and it moved me. It moved me because I saw a relationship between what I was looking at and the way I was living.

It was good for Mama to protect us, especially the male children, because the male children were the ones most threatened—and she did not want our lives to be cut short or changed by racism. So that's why she didn't say anything to us about that. But Willie blew the lid off it. It wasn't really a conversation. It was things unveiling before your eyes every week or every month through his own work.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16154/1.1/>.
[2] American Negro Art, Cedric Dover. Greenwich CT: New York Graphic Society, 1960.

All God's Chillun Got Wings

Figure 18.1: By Harvey Johnson, 2003. courtesy of the artist.

18.2 A Means to an End

I saw art as a means to an end because during that time, black kids were supposed to be teachers for the most part; to aspire to being a teacher, nothing beyond that. I wanted something different, and I wanted to express who I am as a black man. I started researching and questioning what I was reading, what I was being taught in school. The images I saw were not images of me. They were images of others, which is all well and good—don't get me wrong. But where was I? That was the question.

My mother, Anna Bell Thornton—maiden name Pitre—she was so influential. The love she expressed...she actually taught me through her own ways my African culture. She taught this through spirituals because spirituals were sophisticated explanations of scientific laws that help us understand the ordering of the universe and the ever-evolving cycles of life. This is the way she exposed us. It did not matter whether we were intellectually sophisticated [enough] to understand it; through her own expressions of love which involved not just providing for us food, clothing and shelter but transmitting values to us, [she transmitted] values that I found out later on were parallel to African values that certainly were universal. That to me was—it blew my mind.

I came home from school one day and sat down on my bed (we had a rollaway bed that all the children slept in) and I prayed. I said, "God—you can take anything away from me except my art." Because I knew art was a vehicle to express anything I wanted to express, and nobody could take that away from me: not the president, congress or anybody. And I knew it was the key that would open up many doorways to the cosmic understanding of life and nature and allow me to find out what, where, who am I? Why am I here? Why was I born in my mother's womb? And what am I supposed to be doing? I knew that art could help.

So when I was sitting down telling God all of this, God revealed to me what I was supposed to be doing and when it was going to happen. I knew that I was about to go to TSU, undergraduate. I knew that I was going to graduate school, and I knew I was going to come back and teach at TSU. I saw all that when I was 14. So that much I knew about my destiny.

18.3 An Angel In-Between

There's a wonderful woman in-between that I must mention: Dr. M. Jordan Atkinson. Dr. Atkinson. She knew Willie and Anne, and she came to Port Arthur and I just happened to be at Willie and Anne's. I met her—a short lady with silverish yellow hair—and she said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I'm going to TSU." She said, "Well, I tell you what. When you get there, you look me up." And she prepared a package for me when I got there to Houston. The package included where I should go, who I should see—and I got a scholarship and I also got a loan. It was really wonderful embracing this Caucasian woman, you know. She loved art. And she wanted to help serve. She was a doctor of history at TSU. She taught for many years at TSU. My mother met her. My mother came to Houston—we all came that time—and met Dr. Atkinson at her home, you know.

Figure 18.2: Harvey Johnson at TSU Art Center working on "Umbrellas, Sunshine and Rain," 1969. Courtesy of the artist.

18.4 At TSU

John met me one Sunday with my mother and he saw my work that I did in the tenth grade. I did a portrait of him and some African figures, and if he wasn't impressed, he acted impressed. So as soon as John and I met each other—our eyes met—immediately we started reading each other's mind. I mean I could read his mind and he would read my mind and we believed the same things. So he took what my mother gave me in

terms of my culture and he helped me to articulate it—to crystallize it—into visual imagery. That's what John did.

I had no idea that art like this existed in the whole wide world, and that students were doing it. That was awesome to me. I was awestruck by the talent, by the sophistication of its use, and by the self-identity, the self-respect that I would see in the expression of these students' works. I would go in there every day—even on Sundays—and just sit on the steps and put my nose to the window and look until the window fogged up with my breath.

TSU was like a dream to me. I mean the campus was so beautiful; the buildings were so well made—the architecture, the greenery, the trees. It was a land of milk and honey to me, my early days at TSU. Of course it changed later on, you know. The Museum of Fine Arts had a relationship with TSU and with John. And Rice, too, to some extent—and the Jewish Community Center. Because you know, John had won the purchase prize in 1950 at the Museum of Fine Arts, even though he wasn't allowed to go in there and get it.[3] So those kinds of relationships—art and people involved with art—this is what I experienced instead of just the metropolitan city, so to speak.

18.5 "Something Happened to Me. . ."

When John came back from Africa, the University of Texas Press published in '62 the Ananse book.[4] John talked to us about Ananse and as I was searching for my expression John spoke of Ananse and the spider, the web of life. He talked about how this Ananse [was] the web of the spider with its concentric circles, expressing a personification of the energy and grace of the sun and of the cycles of life relative to the different seasons of the year. When that man spoke like that, something happened to me.

I went back to my dorm and I produced three pictures. I'll never forget them because he framed them and put them in the hallway foyer of the art center. That's when I started understanding life in terms of circles and understanding ourselves in terms of a circle. And that's how my expression developed from John's Ananse. The web of life.

John was not selfish. John was a giver. And he loved his students and the giving to us. He wanted us to find ourselves and express our culture, not to diminish the importance of others' culture, but to find ourselves, you know? So he gave as much as he could that way. This is how he taught us. How he taught us skills—but it was his being a man that gave, at least me, the most in regard of fulfilling myself as a poet. Yeah, John was an incredible man.

18.6 Women in My Work

Women are so important. They serve as a guiding light for me because men are so selfish in regard to women, and their power has gotten them into trouble. In a spiritual there's a six-pointed star and that star has to do with a woman and her responsibility for everything that exists that has proof. For me my mother was so important in that regard. I would say you know, respect women. I don't think they get enough respect in society today. And I think they have the key not just to creation, but to love. They are the key to the continuity. We are their resurrection, and they teach us about not being selfish, and stability of family and community. That's why I create women a lot in my work. I don't be dissing men. I mean, I don't mean to diminish the importance of men at all, but women are not put on a pedestal in this country, you know?

[3] Blacks were allowed to visit the museum only one day a week. Because the reception for the award had been scheduled for another day, the prizewinner could not in fact attend the function honoring him. Biggers and a colleague from the university were invited to a private viewing of the exhibition by the director. In the months following, Chillman was successful in abolishing the museum's segregationist policies, and in increasing its accessibility to the black community. (Source: The Art of John Biggers: View from the Upper Room, 1995 by Alvia Wardlaw)

[4] Ananse: The Web of Life in Africa, John Thomas Biggers. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1962.

18.7 All God's Chillun Got Wings

My mural in Clinton Park Community Center, All God's Chillun Got Wings, truly exemplifies my belief about the spirituality of the African family in America. That's what it's really about. So in the mural I start off talking about the Bible. "In the beginning is the Word, and the Word was with God. . .." This is the first of a triple middle passage that the mural embraces. That first middle passage is about the womb, the mother's womb, and the birth of the child. So I use the African drum to speak of the word as the child comes out of the womb. The second middle passage in the mural has to do with the passage of the African through the transatlantic slave trade. The third middle passage has to do with the transformation of our children coming out of the fires of life and using their crowns as keys to the infinite possibilities of us as spiritual beings and defining us therefore as human beings. And of course the children in the mural—and it's about the children—are the resurrection of ourselves. The elderly you see serve as a restoration of balance to life, and that's why the young and the old have this bond, this commonality. That's why they understand each other.

I was over at Francis Scott Key Middle School one time and I asked them, I said, "Do ya'll know what a spiritual is" And this young black child, she said, "Yeah, mister. I know what it is." I said, "Okay, tell everyone what a spiritual is." She said the most profound thing I've ever heard in my life. She said, "Spirituals are secret messages in song about God." I had never heard a spiritual defined like that before. And from hence on, I use that expression. I use that. It's the most sophisticated.

18.8 Collaborating with Biggers

The president of TSU came over while we were working on Salt Marsh at the University of Houston-Downtown. She wanted a mural in her business school and she wanted it to be about business. So John and I looked at each other. Said okay. John was the lead on this. We got back to his house and we would just look at African art. We wouldn't say anything to each other for quite a while, then John would ask me, "Johnson?" (He called me Johnson. I don't know why he called me Johnson, not Harvey.) "What is that saying over there?" I looked at it and I said, "Well, I don't know right now, but it's coming."

Through the silence comes the answer to the question when you are still and look—because the idea is that the ability to see is always a dilution of what you see, and what you see is usually a translation of your own limitations until you're taught how to see.

With business we said, "We have to go to Nubia," because this is where business as we understood it began from a humanistic point of view, not from a Wall Street point of view. It was based on a sacred reciprocity between giving and receiving. This was business. This was the business of life. So John and I collaborated and he said, "I want you to go home and make a sketch, and I'm going to make a sketch." So I went home and made my sketch and he made his sketch, and we came together and brought them together. And as we were working on the mural we would sit down and we would just look. We'd look and look and look and look, and then we'd turn our heads and look at each other and we'd say, "Yeah, that's right." And I could go up there and start working.

There aren't any words to express what I had with John, what we had together. And I'm just so happy if anyone can have that with another person because that's the best—I don't know, the words just don't come to me right now to express that. It's one of the most wonderful conversations that any man or woman could have with another person.

18.9 Full Circle

I graduated from TSU in 1971, then I went straight to Washington State University [to get a graduate degree]. John knew the department head at the time, and they were looking for black kids because they had all this money they had to do something with. I received my MFA there in 1973 and published a thesis called A Black Aesthetic. And in '73 I came back to TSU and I started teaching. I was 25, I believe. That's

pretty young—but John, my mother, everybody had prepared me for it, you know. We were more than ready. I thought it was going to be very difficult, you know, but John prepared us very well.

I think our children are truly our salvation because they are the resurrection. And I think we need to nourish them. That's why I mention the woman in the family. We have to bring that back. That's our only salvation is our love—love for our children. They must find their own way—and we're supposed to nourish that way. Art is only a vehicle for these things—for us to become better as human beings. I think this is supposed to be the purpose of education. Not for marketing and money and commercialism and greed—but to find our way in life, and to find our destiny in a greater scheme of things.

Harvey Johnson was interviewed on October 30, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[5]
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[5]http://cnx.org/content/m16154/latest/16 Harvey Johnson.mp3

Chapter 19

Karl Kilian, b. 1943[1]

19.1 Introductions

I grew up in Houston. I wasn't born here, but we moved here when I was two or three. My mother's family had been here for a while. My connection with the de Menils came rather flukishly. George (de Menil) and I were in a carpool together when we were probably in the sixth grade. I laid out of school for a semester in college and came back to Houston, and my sister and her roommate who was in the art history program [at University of St. Thomas], said that there was a class in Netherlandish painting, so I signed up. Then everyone said, "Hey, don't you be taking that course. You should be taking the survey that's being taught by Jermayne MacAgy." So I did both. That was the second semester of my sophomore year. Jerry died at the end of the first semester of my junior year. But in the meantime it was a small group of people and the de Menils took sort of exceptional interest in some of us—we just began to be friends. And then I worked for Dominique, I guess, on a couple of shows. Well, I stayed at St. Thomas and graduated from there because of the art history program. Then I went to New York to go to the Institute of Fine Arts, but I continued to work for Mrs. de Menil on several of her exhibitions, so we stayed in touch there as well. Some of [the help I gave her] was with writing. For a person who wrote very well, she was a little insecure about her English. She always wrote in pencil. You could see where she'd been because there was always a little pile of eraser dust on the table where she was working.

I worked with her on an exhibition called Made of Iron for some time in Houston, and it annoyed her that sometimes she would walk into a gallery and confuse bronze with iron. She would ask about a piece and she didn't want the person in the gallery to have to say, "Well, that's not really iron." So she gave me a pair of tiny pocket magnets, and we'd walk into the gallery and she would nod at me, then disappear with the gallery owner while I would go and see if the magnets stuck. If they did, then the conversation would begin about that piece. To her, this was something she was serious about that was very funny, too. Nothing was conventional.

When I moved back to Houston to begin school at the University of St. Thomas, Helen Winkler (who had become a friend by then) and some others took me to an art gallery to see the work of an artist they liked a lot. It was Kathryn Swenson's gallery, and it was Jim Love's second, or maybe third show there. And that kind of really threw me in to all of this.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16162/1.1/>.

Figure 19.1: Dominique de Menil with Karl Kilian. Courtesy of the Menil Collection.

19.2 Seeing and Doing

Jerry MacAgy was involved in so much of what was going on at that time, and was also sort of a conduit because I was not only aware of what she was doing right then, but would [also] learn about what she had done earlier. In addition—and this would be a little bit later—Rick Barthelme was a close friend, and his older brother Donald Barthelme was the director for a year of the Contemporary Arts Association. So kind of depending on who you were or how much you wanted to do for it, there was a lot here to see and to do. St. Thomas at the moment I was there was really kind of the nexus for all of this. I mean, if you look at the openings of one of Jerry's shows, or later—well, really more Jerry's than Dominique's—everybody went because it was probably the only thing going on that night in the arts. But it also meant that you were right in the middle of things.

19.3 A Time to Learn

One of the nicest things about that period was not that it was slowed down, but that it just hadn't gotten that fast yet. You had opportunities to talk to people which we would probably never have now. For example, Fred Hughes, who had become a friend in sixth grade at St. Anne's School, was always interested in art, and his grandmother would give him for Christmas lessons at the Museum School which was then in the basement of Cullinan Hall. And I would go with Fred. The assignment was to go upstairs at the

Museum and look at the exhibition that was there and write something about it and draw something. [The exhibit] was Totems Not Taboo, and obviously that was extraordinary—really extraordinary. Fred and I remembered that. We walked around together, you know, sort of looking at architecture and so on.

And St. Thomas was a place that was interesting to us because it was modern. It was sort of my first experience with the meaning of "aesthetic." And because my sister was there, we went upstairs to the art department. Part of this was trying to see what Jerry MacAgy was doing, because we had heard she was at St. Thomas. So we went in and sat down, and Louise Ferrari was there and we began having a conversation with her. Later in the afternoon Louise went to the back and called Jerry and said, "If you're not too busy, there are a couple of guys who seem pretty interested in what's going on and I want you to come out and visit." Jerry sat there for easily an hour—maybe more—and I think that was one of those transforming moments to Fred. He probably would have gone to St. Thomas anyway, but it was something that might not have been able to happen even ten years later when five phones were ringing and all of that.

I remember the New Arts Gallery as it was called; Kathryn [Swenson] was great. She talked for information and she talked in a very sweet and engaging way...but not with that very, very intellectually based playfulness that Jerry [MacAgy] had. We went to New Arts because I loved the building that Bailey Swenson did. I could never quite figure out what was the house and what was the gallery. Sometimes Kathryn would take us around and show us. She was very generous about that, but everybody was so, to my mind, grown up then, you know. Everyone wore a jacket and a shirt and tie, and you dressed up for art the way you dressed up for church or anything else.

19.4 MacAgy's alchemy

Jerry was an oversized individual. There's no other way of saying it than that. It's astounding to think that she was 50 when she died. So I guess she must have been 46 or 47 when I met her at first. She was welcoming. She taught wonderfully. She really did everything there at St. Thomas that now whole art departments would do and she built a book library and a slide library. There was an exhibitions program. She did talks. Her talks—I guess they began with Giotto and sort of moved forward. She delivered these from legal pads which I saw after she died. Really, I think maybe the first serious art history classes taught by a PhD—which MacAgy was one of the first women in America to get—were in Jones Hall at the University of St. Thomas. But those—the city turned out because it was sort of the only game in town really, in some ways, as were her openings. I mean, Cullinan Hall was there, but I really couldn't speak for what the Museum itself was like. I mean, I know more about it after Sweeney[2] came because the de Menils brought him as well.

Jerry invited people to hang around. She loved being the center of attention. She had these two dachshunds that were with her all the time; Jerry and the dachshunds, being carried usually. Jerry would hold court at lunch. Conversation was welcome. She really encouraged you to do it, and there was a game she did. I hadn't been there long enough to take a couple of her programs, but one of the classes that was taught was called The Art of Painting. The book that she used was Albert Barnes' book of that very name—and she talked about and used Barnes' terms like "plastic" and all that. It was a big deal to get into that class...there were only three or four people. I asked her if I could sit in, and she said, "Yes, but you're not allowed to say anything." She devised this game where she would be painting and you were supposed to guess what it was. In this game you would say, "If you were a symphony what would you be?" Or, I can remember one day it was a Rubens painting—a wonderful painting called The Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus—and I think Fred finally got it. But the question that gave it away to him was, "If you were a piece of furniture, what would you be?" And she said, "A piece of bentwood furniture," and that was perfect for Rubens. There had also been a piece of music, or, "If you were a play...." I mean, she was encouraging a sort of open-mindedness, a sort of free play of the brain in every way she could.

I don't know if Jerry and Mrs. de Menil collaborated on theme ideas for exhibitions. I imagine they had the sort of business meetings in which Jerry would go to Dominique and say, "I'd like to do an exhibition of flowers. Here's some of the pieces that I've thought about." And the de Menils traveled so widely because

[2]James Johnson Sweeney had served as Director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art (1945-1946), and as the first professional Director of the Soloman R. Guggenheim Museum (1952-1960).

they were buying a lot for themselves. I think that they helped pick out things—suggested that Jerry [could use] what they could buy. I'm thinking for example of an exhibition that she did on cubism called Art Has Many Facets in which there's a set of very cubist—if you could call them that—playing cards made of whale bone or something. And also these sort of very M.C. Escher looking things...the two intertwining wooden staircases...I think it might have been bought for that. Similar things, too, things that were decorative or everyday arts—Jerry was very interested in geometry.

But it was as magic to Mrs. de Menil as it was to everybody else when the carts with cases began to arrive, and she stood there and stuck her head in front of everybody else who was watching Jerry install the exhibition. I think that she was very attentive. She had sort of an eye herself, Dominique did, and she had been working for many years, looking, buying, working with Jerry, working with John de Menil, and her inspired sort of imagination, her visual instincts—she honed them watching Jerry.

While Jerry was installing she became very serious, very quiet. She didn't mind you being there, but you didn't touch and you didn't ask questions and you gave her a lot of room. I think that was probably because she had this great visual instinct and memory so that she just collected images the way somebody might do on a much less professional level: you choose the colors you wear, you choose things for the way they look—a piece of furniture or whatever. I mean, Jerry was all about arrangements. She saw everything in terms of arrangements. Her house was an interesting mix of things that reflected in many ways her friendships and her economic status. Jerry would collect something that was a shape that maybe reminded her of a Cycladic piece, or reminded her of a tribal arts piece that she then either couldn't afford, or whatever—but these other things, it's not that they were surrogates, it's just that in their way they had the same beauty that these other things did and probably for very similar reasons. In the catalog that Dominique wrote to commemorate MacAgy after she died, she talks about MacAgy as if she was an alchemist. Having been in California with her then-husband Douglas, Jerry knew Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb and some others, and she brought some very interesting early work by those artists to the Menil Collection. It was a kind of divine clutter in a way.

19.5 Sweeney Remembered

James Johnson Sweeney was bigger than life. I mean, I knew him more through his work than other things, but the Museum then was just totally amazing. Those installations—the Picasso bathers, the Tinguely show, the Olmec head. I mean, that was a moment that no other city at that time could rival. It was really just extraordinary that somebody had that sort of imagination and would think about doing those works in there.

[As far as leaving Houston] he wasn't happy here. It was much too small a pond for him. His wife didn't want to live here and I think he was gone a great deal. I don't think that the trustees then—who were thinking in this sort of long-range way—[saw] what Sweeney was doing. I remember a complaint from some friends of my parents who were involved at the Museum saying, "Well, Sweeney goes to New York all the time. In fact, goddamnit, he has his catalogs printed in New York. Look—here's a Sweeney catalog and here's another one. Does that really look like it was worth a trip to New York?" But that's what he knew. He could only work in a certain level of quality, but it was great.

19.6 The Institute for the Arts

It's not that the de Menils were not deliberate in what they did, but a lot of what they did was in response. I don't think they might have done [these things] on their own. For example, Bill Camfield had just been hired by Jerry MacAgy—he came to work at the department [at St. Thomas] when Jerry died. The first two weeks of that really galvanized Dominique. She decided that instead of just helping to fund this department that she would run it. Bill would take care of the academic part and she would take care of the exhibitions, bring in the guests and all those other things that needed to be done. She said—and I'm sure other people would quote her—that she might very well have been happy to stay at St. Thomas. But John de Menil...we

never talked about Black Mountain but I can't believe that wouldn't have been a model to some extent of what an art school could be like—and his concern at St. Thomas was that there was a very prescribed series of religion and philosophy courses that [might] keep potentially interesting students from coming to the University. And he said to the administration that they really needed to drop those things, or maybe they would not stay at St. Thomas. I think he was stunned when they said, "See you later."

Just those two things brought the end of the art department and sent [the de Menils] to Rice. And at Rice I think as they got closer to their mission they realized they really wanted to do it on their own without having to explain anything to anybody—sort of like the Institute for Religion. So at Rice, it seemed like there was a necessary next step—I know that there was talk at one point when the Shepherd bequest was made to Rice, that there would be perhaps a fine arts building where there would be a Rice museum and the Shepherd School of Music and something else...and I think they just didn't want to be partners in anything anymore. They wanted to do what they wanted to do.

19.7 The de Menil House

When I was at St. Thomas after my junior year and senior year, John and Dominique really liked to have students around and we would be invited to dinners at their house—the Philip Johnson house—with artists, or to go out to dinner just after a show opened. Then we began to go over to the house a great deal, sometimes to work, sometimes to deliver things—I mean, we were employees, but we were also friends.

Turning off of San Felipe into that driveway was like going into a foreign country in the most amazing way. The architecture was different. The art was different. The food was different. The language was different. The smell was different. Everything about it was transporting and I think for all of us that house as much as anything got us all involved in art in a way. It was so freeing because there were no rules in a way. Things were beautiful or weren't, and if they were beautiful, they were beautiful together. It was something we were all working toward on our own sort of individual levels that we could afford. You saw the degree to which art, architecture and design could really take over your life, and I think it's a very significant place.

19.8 A Postscript

I never felt any deprivation [in Houston]. I didn't feel that things were provincial or any of that. They may have been, but there were examples of everything that was going on here and I guess the great luck was that we had access to it.

Karl Kilian was interviewed on September 13, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[3] .

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m16162/latest/17 Karl Kilian.mp3

Chapter 20

Bill Lassiter, b. 1932[1]

20.1 Getting Here

I wasn't born in Houston. My mother married a second time and the man she married was from Texas, so I originally came back in '42 but I was not really active in the art world in Houston until probably mid-to-late 50s. But I do remember the MFA and some of its exhibitions—and I remember the old Contemporary Arts Association when it was still downtown.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16134/1.1/>.

Figure 20.1: Edward Mayo (left) with Bill Lassiter. Courtesy of Bill Lassiter.

20.2 Reflecting on the Early Days

There was one [exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum] that was kind of outrageous. There were cages of rodents and roaches and there was this huge construction on the diagonal...of colored bread. That group of women—high kickers or something, sort of like the Rangerettes—were performing and somebody started some kind of argument about something or other and the bread got tossed around and it turned out to be just a real mess. I think the whole idea of the show was largely disparaged...the feeling about it was that it was just a mess. I'm sure there were people who didn't feel that way, but I think the majority of people felt that it should probably never have happened.

There wasn't a lot going on [in the 50s] as far as galleries. There was a gallery on South Main that was next to a shop called Handmakers, and there was Kathryn Swenson's New Arts. I can remember just a fantastically beautiful show of Saul Steinberg,[2] and they also had a show of Corbusier. It was the first time I'd ever seen anything like it—any of it. They did some rather wonderful stuff. Handmakers dealt a lot with things that were crafts. Frank Dolejska for instance showed. He used to do mosaic table tops and then he did a whole series of fountains, outdoor fountains. And [the shop] had wooden things and ceramic things and folk things from Mexico and Peru. There were textiles...weavings. It was beautiful.

Across the street there were three shop spaces that were all designed by the same architect; they were very handsome, very, very simple, very contemporary. One of those spaces was occupied by a shop that dealt in flatware, silver and crystal...and another shop called Wells Design. It was Herb [Wells], his brother and their mother. It was over on Mt. Vernon in a great, sprawling house. They lived upstairs and the shop was downstairs, and there was nothing like it in Houston. They were showing the best furniture, the most beautiful things in crystal, flatware—all contemporary. It was just a really wonderful place.

20.3 The Art Scene, Then and Now

[As far as the art scene] it was the same people who went to the museum openings [who] also went to gallery openings. It was kind of exciting. I mean I was new to the art world and for me—it was another world. I must have felt that I was a part of the Houston art scene as far as I understood the Houston scene. And it was a wonderful introduction. There was also the Louisiana Gallery which was...Joan Crystal and Adrienne Rosenberg...and they had some really good things...Mexican and pre-Columbian art and odds and ends of Bentwood furniture. She had artists from out of town and it was an interesting mix.

The old CAA building was a triangular sort of shaped building and the space inside I would imagine was difficult to deal with as far as installing exhibitions. I'm not sure who was in charge [of that], maybe it was Jim Love. I know he did installations for them for the longest time. There was another gallery here that Meredith Long had. When I was first introduced to his gallery it was on Westheimer, where Highland Village is now. There was a gallery on San Felipe—the David Gallery. It was in a building that I believe Charles Tapley designed. Grace David had a daughter and a son, and her son had a bookshop which was in front of the little complex. The gallery itself was in the back and Grace had a rather wonderful apartment upstairs and the book shop was pretty splendid with a big spiral staircase. [Grace's son] dealt extensively in rare editions and first editions...things like that.

You ran into the same people at museum openings and at gallery openings, and there was an intimacy that doesn't exist now because things have changed so and gotten so much bigger. There are so many more galleries, so many more openings. You know the city of course has gotten so big. There's just a whole new world of people—there's lots and lots of interest in young people—and they're going to the museum openings...the gallery openings...and they're buying art and that's all well and good. But things have really changed. When I first came to Houston it was a very small city and the feeling was small. It was more laid back—just a lot simpler, it seemed to me.

20.4 Remembering the Shows

I remember a wonderful show at the MFA which had to do with Italian design and it was just full of wonderful things: Fornasetti, marvelous silver, marvelous glassware, beautiful fabrics. It was a real eye-opener. There was another show that had to do with de Chirico which was one of those extravagant products with things floating around in the air, like musical instruments. I don't know who was responsible for the installation, but it was quite a show.

Another show that Mr. Sweeney was responsible for that was just stunning was when he had done a pool outside on that lawn and he had the Picasso bathers—that was the installation. He had—oh, he was

[2]Saul Steinberg, 1914-1999. Romanian-born illustrator and philosopher who used a variety of media, including collage and mural painting.

extraordinary—he had such an eye and such a feel for exhibitions. He did Three Spaniards, and I think there might have been three works of art in Cullinan Hall in that vast space—the old Cullinan Hall. He had Picasso...he had Miró...and God, who else? Maybe it was Chillada. You know he used to hang paintings from the ceiling on wires—freestanding. They weren't against the wall necessarily. And then of course, the famous Totems Not Taboo, which was Dr. MacAgy's installation for the CAA. Miss Cullinan's stipulation I think about Cullinan Hall was that it was to be used by CAA when necessary, when they needed it, because their space was so limited and she wanted them to be involved.

20.5 On MacAgy

She was another person who knew how to put things together. I mean, it was extraordinary. And her shows when she was at St. Thomas were breathtakingly beautiful, and Mrs. de Menil had the same knack—just wonderful. Karl [Kilian], of course, was very much involved with Dr. MacAgy and the de Menils, I mean he was in school when they were together and I think that's when he fell in love with the whole world of art.

Bill Lassiter was interviewed on June 5, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[3] .

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m16134/latest/18 Bill Lassiter.mp3

Chapter 21

Jim Love, 1927-2005[1]

21.1 To Art by Way of Theater

In 1952 I was going with a girl who was in the theater, trying to get me to work there. I went, got intrigued, and junked the business part of my education and stayed that summer in the theater. Then I stayed the following year, working. The theater was building an addition and I worked with the contractor on that construction job during the day, and in the theater at night for that next year. Then [the director] brought me to Houston, probably to get me out of his hair, because there was an opening for someone to do lights which I knew nothing about...and so I did lights for a period of time—probably less than a year. After a while I called Nina Vance[2] to see if there was a job at her place and I got a call from her asking if I would come and do sets. I did that for probably a year or so. I quit the Alley eventually and was doing [construction on] a house—a nice job. While that job was going on I got a call from Jerry MacAgy, whom I did not know. And we agreed to talk. Frank Dolejska had quit the Contemporary Arts Museum as technician, and she needed someone and we talked and agreed to try each other out for a month, and of course, we never talked about it again because it was pretty terrific. I went to work for her at Contemporary Arts in about August of 1956, and we were together there until she died in '64.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16161/1.1/>.
[2] Nina Vance was founder and artistic director of the Alley Theatre.

Paul Bunyon Bouquet No. 1

Figure 21.1: By Jim Love, 1962. Iron. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of D. and J. de Menil.

21.2 Work at the CAM

Jerry had been hired by Jean and Dominique de Menil to be the director of the Contemporary Arts Museum, and previous to that time it had been a staff of two: the technician and the secretary. In essence, the shows were planned and executed by volunteers. Jerry came on in that situation and of course, wanted to do all those things herself, plus the publications. And in my view, she did all of them extremely well.

All the shows that she did were themed. She did catalogs of each one, which are a little hard to come by right now. There was always the money problem. I guess the museum's forever...with money problems. As far as I was concerned it was a pleasant place to work. I enjoyed it. It was a staff of three: Jerry, a secretary, and myself. It was very small, at least relative to now—a small audience, so to speak. You'd see the same little group of relatively close-knit people at various openings around town. There was still an effort as far as volunteerism, but not to any huge extent.

21.3 With MacAgy at University of St. Thomas

There was a faction there who wanted to keep it like it used to be before [MacAgy], and then, of course, there was the faction that wanted it to continue on with MacAgy. So I suppose there was friction all along. In my memory, I think that Jerry was offered to the Museum of Fine Arts by the de Menils, and I think a long time passed with no decision—I don't think they had a director at the time. The de Menils were also involved in the University of St. Thomas. At any rate, I think after having given up on MFA, or after being frustrated there, they asked the president [of the University] if they wanted an art history department and Jerry MacAgy...and he said yes, you know, a five-second decision.

So we began to work there, the three of us, and at the University of St. Thomas. Jerry taught art history and we began doing exhibits. I don't remember whether there was a studio aspect to the art department or not, but the de Menils were never involved with studio at UST. They had committed for the Art of the Machine from MOMA in New York way the hell back—while they were still at St. Thomas. Even not knowing how they would install it, because there certainly wasn't room in the gallery that we were using in Jones Hall. So whenever the decision was made [for them to move to] Rice, they started building what was called the "barn" in preparation for this Art of the Machine show which was going to be huge. Even at Rice there was not agreement or total welcome. But the building was built in time for the show and that was the only time that one exhibit took up the entire building, I think.

Figure 21.2: Jim Love (right) with Roy Fridge. Courtesy of the Menil Collection.

21.4 Remembering the Commercial Galleries

Joan Crystal was there. Kiko was there. Kathryn Swenson had a gallery that was called Andre Emmerich because she got pre-Columbian [art] from Andre Emmerich in New York. Jerry [MacAgy] and Catherine became friends, and Jerry agreed to install Catherine's show. Catherine decided she wanted to start handling the local people, and Jerry agreed. This was back in '57 or '58. As soon as she started handling local people, Andre Emmerich didn't want his name on it anymore, so she called it New Arts Gallery. Jerry knew a bunch of people in San Francisco where she had come from, so there was Hassel Smith, Walter Kuhlman, a sculptor, myself...and she showed Jack Boynton. When Jerry died it was basically the end of the New Arts Gallery because Jerry's the one that picked people, hung the shows, etc. So it faded after that.

Figure 21.3: Jim Love exhibition at New Art. Courtesy of the Menil Collection.

21.5 The Collectors Group

The de Menils had talked roughly ten people into putting into the pot roughly $10,000 each, then Jean de Menil would buy with that money a group of paintings. And they would meet—I think it was once a month—and have a meeting, a dinner. And I would have to hang or prop up [what he bought] wherever

they were eating—a restaurant, or usually a home. They would have a meal and each one would pick one of the pieces to take home for a period of time, one month or two months. So the pieces rotated from home to home and presumably, at the end of some time, if anyone had taken a fancy to any of those items, they could make an arrangement and own it. I don't remember how long this went on...how long the group stayed together. I don't even know how successful it might have been in terms of sparking interest in other people owning art.

Figure 21.4: Jim Love. Courtesy of the Menil Collection.

21.6 The de Menil Influence

The Houston art situation from the very beginning has been relative to the de Menils and what their influence here and with me has been. A comparison between what it is—what it has become—and what it might have been had they not been here I find extremely bleak. Because in my view, the quality of what has been presented here in exhibits and has come to be owned is extremely higher than it would have been, say, if all we had had all this time was the Museum of Fine Arts and the Contemporary Arts Museum. And since I was so closely involved in all this and to some extent still am—both with them and with MacAgy—I think the look of exhibits is still affected by their involvement. The quality of the look of an exhibit has been so much more than it might have been otherwise. So I'm extremely prejudiced in that sense. But I shudder to think of what it might have been without them.

Jim Love was interviewed on November 6, 1997. You can listen to the interview here[3] .

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m16161/latest/19 Jim Love.mp3

Chapter 22

Edward Mayo, 1918-2005[1]

22.1 A Registrar Remembers

James Chillman, Jr., as he was known, was the first director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston—founding director. He was also a professor of art at Rice (then the Rice Institute), and he was one of the teachers who knew me when I studied architecture at Rice. I graduated just in time to be drafted into World War II, which relieved me of the necessity of trying to be an architect for at least three years. I came out of the Army air force and went to work for an architect learning what I knew to begin with, but I really did not have architectural talent and had too much respect for architecture to become another bad one. They had plenty of bad ones already; they didn't need any more!

I floundered around and did a number of other things and finally Mr. Chillman (who had noticed this floundering—this is now in the latter part of 1960) asked me if I would like to come and work at the Museum as the registrar. I think I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Well, I have a book here. If you will come to work you can read the book and learn how to be a registrar." And he offered me a little more money than I was making where I was. I went to work there on January 15, 1961.

About the time he hired me, he was the interim director. He had been Director Emeritus when Lee Malone became director of the Museum; the first full-time museum director was Lee Malone. Mr. Chillman never considered himself full-time director because he had what he felt was a full-time job at Rice. But he devoted as much time as almost any other director—surely the next couple—at the Museum. He and Miss (Ruth) Uhler and one janitor—three people—kept the Museum going by themselves in World War II. When he left he took the title of Director Emeritus and he was gone about four or five years when Lee Malone was there. [Then] Lee Malone was retired, was resigned, and Chillman came back and was there for a couple of years while the board searched for and found a new director, James Johnson Sweeney. So we were both hired about the same time.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16146/1.1/>.

Figure 22.1: Edward Mayo (left) with Thomas P. Lee prior to the installation of the Anthony Caro exhibition, December 3, 1975. Photo by Rick Gardner. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

22.2 Sweeney's Tenure

Mr. Sweeney did not hire me, but I'll tell you—it was an experience that I shall absolutely never forget. I think I remember more about it than I do any of the subsequent directors, though every one of them had memorable characteristics and were very, very different in many ways from each other. Peter Marzio said once, "We shouldn't think about how they were different; we should think about how they might be the same." I found out that they did have one very, very salient characteristic in common: they were all dedicated to art. Each in his own very individual way...but it made working there a lot more interesting than just working for one person.

I probably never knew an individual like Sweeney. I don't think there was an individual like Sweeney. It was a very stimulating experience. We were told that when he was hired he was given the opportunity to do whatever he wanted with the staff; he had the notorious reputation of having fired if not all 99, then 44% of the staff at the Guggenheim when he went there. There weren't too many people to keep when he came, except for Miss Ruth Uhler. Sweeney didn't fire anybody when he came. He augmented the staff a little bit, not a great deal—because what money he was given I think he had been told that it was for acquisitions. That was the money that he had to add to the collection, and he added to it by some very fortuitous gifts, mostly from Mr. and Mrs. de Menil, and then he bought some. He may have bought some

tribal or primitive art, but he didn't have much money for exhibitions or for staff—he wanted to really do it himself. He felt quite able to. He didn't hire any curators. He didn't want any curators. He didn't hire a business manager. He got rid of one by constant battering on him so the man finally resigned; he was an extremely strong personality and a very, very interesting one.

Figure 22.2: Cullinan Hall with Olmec Head, installed on lawn by James Johnson Sweeney, June 1963. Photo by Hickey and Robertson. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

22.3 Brief Stays

Sweeney was followed by Mary Buxton.[2] She was there as the docent director when Sweeney came—her salary was paid by the Junior League. Mary was there a long time, and when Sweeney left I presume S.I. Morris who was president of the board at the time put her in charge. Because of her educational background—or lack of it, I would not call her 'acting director'—she was called administrator. Mary had a lot of very good things going for her—if you can't be anything else be born beautiful—and she was a very good-looking woman with an unbelievably charming personality. She was from Georgia and had gone to the University of Wisconsin. Her name was Mary Hancock in her Georgia days, and then she married Mr. Weaver and had two children. By the time I knew her she had shed Mr. Weaver and married Fred Buxton, a rather prominent landscape architect in Houston.

Mary took care of the Museum's business for about two years while another director was chosen who turned out to be Philippe de Montebello. Actually his full name was Guy Philippe Lannes de Montebello. When he came south he dropped "Guy." So he was Philippe and everybody of course called him Philippe except Mrs. de Menil, who has the same sort of Gallic antecedents. Montebello was a great pleasure for me to work with. He had really no experience as a director, and he wasn't the curator of paintings at the Met[3]—how he got here I'm not positive, but I think it was through the good offices of John A. Beck.

I think the directors felt it was time to get rid of the Sweeney image—it was too modern—and to get back to the basics, old masters. That was where he focused his attention and what acquisition funds he had bought a lot of things. They were not great old masters, but they were very solid additions to the collections of the Museum. He had no experience, but he had a lot of savvy; French savvy. And he was bright—he was a smart man. He was Harvard-educated and learned Russian while at Harvard. He conducted one of the Museum tours to St. Petersburg or then Leningrad and Moscow—and I think he acted as their interpreter along the way.

Montebello hired E. A. Carmean, [Jr.],[4] who is now director of the Brooks Museum of Art in Memphis, Tennessee. E.A. stayed at the Museum of Fine Arts until Bill Agee came, and his area of expertise and Bill's particular interests overlapped a bit. I think he felt there was no reason to stay here, particularly when he had a chance to go to the National Gallery as their first curator of 20th century art. If I remember correctly, the next curator that Philippe hired was Jack Schraeder.[5] He was from Kansas and did his undergraduate work at the University of Kansas; his specialty was Medieval Art. . .not too long out of a graduate program—I think it was Princeton. He left the Museum before Montebello left and went to the Metropolitan also.

22.4 Under Agee

(William) Agee[6] came right after Montebello. I think there were doubts on the board that Agee could administer. Agee was a wonderful art person. I don't think anybody there has been any better or in many ways come up to him as an art person. He really knew his field, and he knew a lot of other things, too. Bill was hampered by the onerous task of administering, and administration was not something he enjoyed. He met lots of roadblocks in the art community. Why I am not sure because he of all people was dedicated to the more recent art than any of the others. You know he's a teacher—a full-time teacher. Teaches at Hunter, I think. He got his undergraduate degree from Princeton and then he got his masters at Yale. He did not have a PhD; we never had a PhD director until Dr. (Peter) Marzio[7] came.

[2] Mary Buxton Cain served as Interim Director of the MFAH between 1967 and 1969 with the alternate official titles of Administrator and Administrative Director. She concluded her tenure at the MFAH as Curator of Exhibitions in 1970.

[3] In Museum: Behind the Scenes at the Met, which has a chapter written by de Montebello, he notes that he was associate curator of European paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art before accepting the directorship at the MFAH.

[4] E.A. Carmean, Jr., served in the curatorial department of the MFAH from 1971 to 1974.

[5] Jack Schraeder was on the MFAH curatorial staff from 1970 to 1973.

[6] William C. Agee served as Director of the MFAH between 1974 and 1982.

[7] Peter C. Marzio has been Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, since 1982, the longest tenure of the museum's full-time directors.

Figure 22.3: Edward Mayo (far right) and unidentified woman with William and Virginia Camfield at the opening of the Hans Hartung exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, April 23, 1969. Photo by Hickey and Robertson. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

22.5 Good Progress

Progress in the visual arts today in comparison to the last 30, 40, 50 years is phenomenal. It's phenomenal progress. In '45, let's see, you have to consider Ben DuBose because Ben was really the first person to do anything about providing a venue for the exhibition of contemporary artists, local artists, except the Museum of Fine Arts. For like 32 or 33 years the Museum had an exhibition called Houston Artists Exhibition.[8] It was not only a place for them to show their work; it was the only place of significance. Every year there was a purchase prize and that collection remains intact. So far it's not been touched. I can't remember when the Texas Artists Exhibition[9] started, but it was going on in my time, and it lasted a little bit longer than Houston because Houston wasn't in control of it. It was held each year in conjunction with the Texas State Fair in Dallas and the exhibition was exhibited there first, then in Houston and San Antonio. The Museum continued to acquire works from that exhibition. There was a purchase prize there also until Sweeney stopped acquiring works. He put an end to the Houston Artists Exhibit, much to the distress of Houston artists, some of whom have never forgiven him for doing that. Mr. Sweeney was a one-man band in many ways.

[8] The annual Houston Artists exhibit ran from 1925 to 1960. Its name varied somewhat over the years, but its most common official title was Exhibitions of Works by Houston Artists.

[9] Exhibition of Texas Painting and Sculpture 1940-1965. After 1961, MFAH did not participate.

Edward Mayo was interviewed on November 4, 1997. You can listen to the interview here[10]
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[10] http://cnx.org/content/m16146/latest/20 Edward Mayo.mp3

Chapter 23

Leila McConnell, b. 1927[1]

23.1 Always an Artist

When I was a senior in high school I went to the Museum of Fine Arts and took Robert Joy's class. I was 16 years old and very silly—going to teas and coffees every Saturday—so I don't really remember my experience with him, but I did take his class. Anything I wanted to do—sewing, whatever—my mother would see that I had the supplies to do it. People ask, "When did you start [painting]?" and I say, "I never did start. I just always took it." I guess I've never thought of myself as anything else [but an artist]. There's a point when you're in school and studying and everything—you know, sometimes people are perpetual students—and they've never decided that they are an artist or a painter and somehow or another it has to click in your head that you're through with school and you know what you're doing—that you're not dependent on anybody else for what you do. I think I always had it!

We came to Houston when I was six, and I was at Montrose Elementary School in the first grade. We had done some watercolor paintings on old yellow paper—all sort of pink and blue—and the teacher put them up on the blackboard. Then one day she was pointing out something and she pointed to one of them, which was mine, and said it was somebody else's. And I said, "No—it's mine." She said no. It was the first time that I had ever encountered injustice. And I am still painting what I call sky paintings, so I don't know if that's related or not, but I think it may be.

I never really liked anybody who painted on my paintings or touched them, and Frances Skinner (at the Museum school) would work on people's paintings, just to show them what the painting needed or something; a few strokes or something like that. But I never wanted anybody to do that to my painting. It was mine. I certainly wondered what I would do if she tried it with me, and she never did.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16164/1.1/>.

Blue Painting

Figure 23.1: By Leila McConnell, 1961. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

23.2 Student Days

I studied architecture at Rice. I would have studied art if they had had an art department, but I studied architecture and never regretted it because I thought it was a really good background for art also. And Mr. [James] Chillman was my greatest influence. He taught freehand drawing where you draw with charcoal and you're looking at plaster casts—what you're doing is you're learning to see realistically. And I remember one day crying because it was so hard, and you know, he could be very kind but he was the professor. He was a friend in a way, but he was [also] the teacher. Then I had art history, architecture history, watercolors, design and freehand drawing, all from Mr. Chillman. I consider him the greatest influence on me as far as taste and design sense—things like that. He was half the time at Rice and half the time as head of the Museum.

I graduated in '48-'49, a B.A. then a B.S. in architecture. And I had taken a year off in 1946, just because it was so intense, you know. My background at Rice was very realistic and I could paint anything I could see, so that's the way I started out. In 1949 I visited the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco for the summer term. I had planned to go to Stanford, and when I got out there I thought, "This looks just like what I've been doing at the Museum—the work I saw there." So then I visited the California School of Fine Arts and boy—it was built around a courtyard—and they were having a student show and the paintings that I saw there were abstract, and I thought, "This is where I need to be." All the famous California painters and teachers were there. Mark Rothko came out for the summer term and I painted some apples—a white

background and green and red apples—and he said, "Why don't you do another painting and abstract that?" I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Well, do flat patterns of color." So that's what I did. I did another painting, and I've still got those two paintings. That experience of just those couple of months was what I wanted and needed to shake me up a little bit.

Ruth Laird's Pots

Figure 23.2: By Leila McConnell, 1959. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

23.3 Other Artists

We all knew each other at the Museum and we had a group...the Museum provided a room for us and we traded paintings—that's how we got other people's work. Then the CAA [Contemporary Arts Association] came along and so we all worked in that also. In those days everybody dressed up for the Museum openings. They were fun to go to; you saw everybody—artists and others who were collecting—and everybody knew each other. I met Mildred Dixon there (she's Sherwood now), and Stella [Sullivan] I'd known from Rice. Lowell Collins taught a class. Robert Preusser taught a class. Miss [Ruth] Uhler taught a class. Frances Skinner taught a class. So I studied with all of them.

Mildred, when I met her she was a little bit older than I was and I called her Mrs. Sherwood once at the Museum class and she said, "For God's sake don't call me that. Call me Mildred." And Stella and I were good friends and Bill Condon, he came back to Rice after the war. He had a car at that time and he piled as many people in as wanted to go; we'd all go to lunch and things like that. Bill was really a very remarkable person. He's lost both legs in the war, stepped on a landmine. But he never made you feel bad about it or

anything. One time we were sitting around talking about how much we weighed and he said he weighed 115 pounds. I said, "Bill, that's ridiculous!" because he was six feel tall or so. And he said, "Not without legs." That was the way he said it.

Frank Dolejska was a really fine artist. You know a lot of people thought of him as being Bohemian and stuff like that, but he wasn't. He was a true artist. He and Preusser were great friends and then when the CAA opened he was the man behind the shows—decided how they would be hung and everything. Ruth Uhler—Henri always said she was like a ship, and she was full sail. She was an imposing figure. I don't think she was really that tall, but she had the big, high hairdo, and you know, she was an imposing figure. She would come into a room and you knew she was there. She was great friends with Grace Spaulding John.

Figure 23.3: Leila McConnell, late 1950s. Courtesy of the artist

23.4 Showing Work

I showed with Ben DuBose in 1960...I guess it was '66. He opened the new gallery, his own gallery, on Kirby, so that's when I went there. I had been with Polly Marsters and the Houston Artists Gallery down on Main Street in that building where she had the downstairs place on the left, and Handmakers was on the right. Handmakers was a sort of wonderful thing at this time also. So she was the first [gallery] I was with. Then after Polly closed, Mrs. Cushman asked me if I would come to exhibit at that gallery, so I did—until I picked DuBose.

Ben was always bright and happy and full of life; this is the way he treated customers and he kept you going. He'd say, "So-and-so wants something of yours," so yes, he was a great catalyst. After DuBose, I don't know what the timeline was on it, but I went with Leslie Muth and I think I had a couple of shows there. And that was good for a while. She was very interesting and knew what she was doing. Then after that I've never been with another gallery since.

23.5 Supportive Friends

We [artists] were friends and so far as supporting [each other], I don't think I ever knew of anybody working against anyone else. No acrimony that I ever knew about. I think that's why all the painters are so different. In the other cities like Fort Worth and Dallas, there were schools of painting, and [here] there never was a school of painting. I mean, we went to the Museum, but there was not a school of painting where you could tell that this person was probably from that school or that group—which I think is good. That was sort of a wonderful time.

Leila McConnell was interviewed on May 19, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2] .

[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16164/latest/21 Leila McConnell.mp3

Chapter 24

Herb Mears, 1923-1999[1]

24.1 Transplanted Texan

I came to Houston in May of 1951. I'd been living in Europe for about three years and David Adickes and I had met in Paris and decided to open an art school in Houston. He came back maybe six months earlier than I, and we corresponded some and then I came down in May. He picked me up at the old Union Station and we drove to Main Street and went to a barbeque that night. There were a lot of people interested in the arts then that we met very soon because we started building on this place on Truxillo Street—an old building, an old wooden structure. David lived downstairs and we tried to make the upstairs into a studio.

Eventually we opened the studio—it was called the Studio of Contemporary Arts. We had half a dozen students and they'd come and we'd work, talk to them and so on, but it was pretty beastly because of the summer. In the summer of '51 we had a terrifically hot summer—really awful. There was absolutely no air conditioning in this place, and no insulation in it, so it was horrible, just horrible. We determined to get the hell out of there and move to another place on the corner of Main and McGowan—a huge old building, a wonderful old building—and that's where we theoretically were going to have classes. I don't think we ever did. I think we gave up. By that time we were both broke and needed jobs.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16156/1.1/>.

Construction

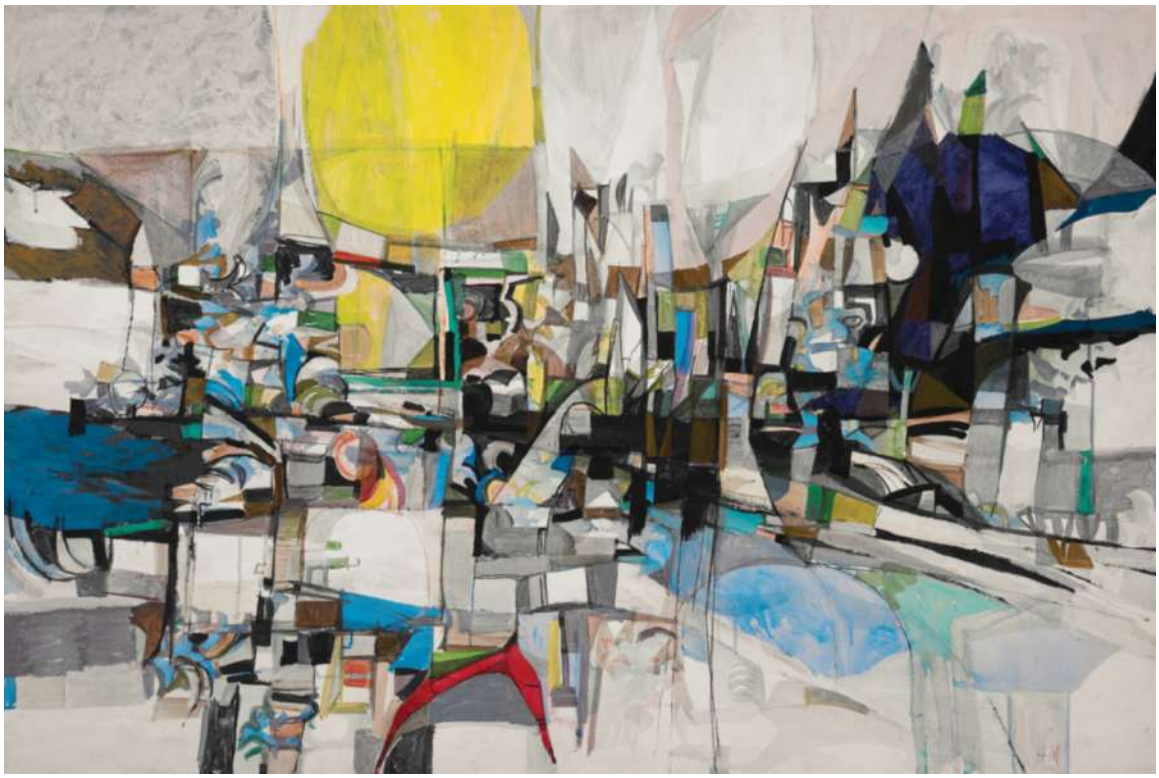

Figure 24.1: 1960. 35th Annual Houston Artists Exhibition, museum purchase prize, 1960. Acrylic polymer on masonite. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

24.2 Part-Time Artist

Dave answered an ad for some kind of job in the oil patch and I went along with him, and the woman at the agency said, "Are you interested in a job?" I said yes, and she said, "What can you do?" I said I was a draftsman; somebody had told me to say draftsman, but I didn't even know what "draftsman" meant. I filled out the application, and they sent me right away to the Houston Lighting & Power Company, and I got a job doing map drafting in the engineering department and loved it. I was good at it. I could always print very well—very small—the way they needed.

So I worked there, and David worked at a place called something like "Exploding Guns" Atlas—they'd send down bullets through the casings to let the oil flow—so he was involved in that, and I had met Ava Jean and then she left for the whole summer in Oslo. Ava Jean was born in California, but she lived here after she was seven years old, and we met right away—she was the second employee at the Contemporary Arts Museum. Dave and I went down right after I came and gave a demonstration of silk-screen printing. I met Ava Jean, then she left, then came back, and we were married in December of 1951. We married in the chapel at St. John's on Westheimer.

We didn't have any shows around that time, but we were painting and talking to people about it and so on—so I was terrifically occupied with this eight-hour job and learning about the city. Believe it or not, I didn't know how to drive. I had never driven. When you live in New York or Paris, you don't need a

car. So, it wasn't until I got married that my mother-in-law started teaching me how to drive and then Ava Jean, we bought a car, and my mother-in-law had to drive it home! Ava Jean taught me how to drive going around and around on the Rice parking field. So after that, I had to learn about the city, you know. I had to learn streets...everything.

Figure 24.2: David Adickes (left) with Herb Mears at Studio School of Contemporary Art on Truxillo Street in Houston, 1951. Photo by Jim Erwin. Courtesy of David Adickes

24.3 What Galleries?

Well, there really weren't any galleries. I can't remember any galleries except Ben's [DuBose] at the Bute Paint Company. The company owned the whole square block, and Ben's portion of it was about half the block, selling paint. Inside there was a room that was empty so he decided to make into a gallery, and he showed works by—I'm not sure—I know Dave [Adickes], and maybe Bill Condon. Not me—not at that time. I didn't meet Ben for a year or two. I don't know why, I just didn't. I finally went with Ben when he moved out to the River Oaks Shopping Center. They took two bays in that shopping center and one was for the paint business. My first show with him was in 1954.

Ben got the idea that a frame shop would be a good thing for a multitude of reasons; most of the people who bought at the paint store were contractors. They'd buy ten gallons at a time or something—so at the

front end, people would come in and select the type of paint they wanted, then hey, [the frames] were right there. People were coming in and getting frames and it became a good business. Ben died in the 70s. He was an extremely impulsive guy and there were occasions where you'd bring some work in and he'd get so excited he'd take it in the back and have them frame it right then! He'd call somebody in River Oaks and they'd come over and buy it that day. It was just really something. He'd never say, "Oh, that's a beautiful painting...I love that painting." He'd never say a damn thing, but he was crazy about selling work and manipulating customers, you know. He'd grab them by the arm and say, "Listen—if you don't take this you're going to regret it forever. This is a really important piece for you to have. This will change your life."

He had studied psychology in college—not art—and so it was funny. He was marvelously successful and he really wasn't interested in the art scene in New York or Paris. He was interested in the people here in Houston, which was lovely for us. We were youngsters and all kind of broke—and he made it an interesting time. We routinely dropped in there to see what was going on and to have a chat; there were always people coming in there.

Around that time it seems to me that Meredith Long expanded or moved into that building that he did. That's the only two galleries that I know of. There may have been some little ones. Kiko and the David Gallery, they all came later.

Figure 24.3: Herb Mears at the Museum School of Fine Arts, c. 1960. Photo by Hickey and Robinson. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

24.4 Contemporary Arts Association

The CAA built this building on some property that the family that owned the big lumber yard owned...it was on West Dallas and Bagby. That's where I met Ava Jean, and they had wonderful shows. There were only two employees and that was Ava Jean and Frank [Dolejska]. They had wonderful shows, all put on by volunteer help. We had a show—Miró and Sandy Calder came. I have pictures of Ava Jean and Calder dancing. I mean, it was great. And [there was a] Max Ernst show—a terrific show. They had Art in Nature, one of the most thrilling shows imaginable, just a wonderful show of things—showing how formations of rock or plant life were actually the inspiration for artwork over the centuries. It was just a terrifically interesting show.

That's around the time Jim Love came, and he did a terrific fence with pieces of sculpture built into a fence. We were down there all the time, painting the walls, hanging this or that, opening crates, closing crates. We were so involved...involved to the point where we were on call if the ADT went off. So as that damn thing would open up, they'd be calling us in the middle of the night to go down and check the place.

24.5 The Art League and the Museum

The Art League[2] I guess always fought the uphill battle being a prestigious group, you know, an important group in the city, because a lot of the people were frankly beginners. They were interested, but they had limited resources. They were Sunday painters. But of course they did not think of themselves as professional in any way. The Museum, of course, when I arrived it was just the old U-shaped building and then the Cullinan wing was added in 1958. And that changed things quite a bit.

Chillman was director when I first came. He ran the show and used to teach at Rice. Ava Jean took classes with Chillman. They used to have a show every year for Houston artists. The prize was about $500 for about five years, [then] they upped it to $1,000 and I won it on a great big abstract painting—a non-objective painting I should say—and that was the last year they had the exhibit, in 1960. They later had shows, but they didn't have competitions as I remember.

24.6 The View from Here

There is a heck of a lot of variety [today], but at the same time, I understand a number of galleries have closed and are about to close. They just can't make it. They can't sell. There's just not enough traffic. You know there will always be a market for $50 and $100 paintings, but for more expensive things you need a certain amount of income to do it, and the people that have that are just not buying art. Listen—the ballet, the opera, all of these organizations are hard-pressed. They've had to cut back here and there in different ways and the same with the galleries. It hasn't been easy, and I think it's kind of a pendulum maybe.

So we have more people who are millionaires and billionaires than ever, but we need the people who are upper- middle class—not giants. It has to do with education, too, what goes on in the schools. When I went to school [the arts] were a very important part of everything. I went to a very unusual school of music and art in New York and once a week we'd all go down and listen to a symphony. They had three symphony orchestras—can you imagine?—in this one high school. When you walked through the halls you'd hear instruments practicing...and it was a fabulous thing. There were studios full of kids painting and making jewelry, and I felt this was what life is all about. But you go through the schools today and it's just not happening. I don't know what the hell is going on because they don't seem to be studying math or geography or anything else.

It's inconceivable to me that somebody can live a life and never be interested at all in music or art or literature or something—but apparently a lot of people [do]. One thing that just drives everybody I know crazy is this business of putting down intellectualism. What is an intellectual? An intellectual is somebody that knows something! So don't make fun of them, for crying out loud—make fun of the boobs. We depend on the doctors...the lawyers...the engineers, scientists and lawyers. All of them you can group as intellectuals. We do not depend on rock stars at all for any kind of education, and the public spends billions of dollars on that stuff.

Television hasn't helped. Gee whiz, it sure as hell hasn't helped. You know when I was growing up all I could think about was that I wanted to be an extension of the art of the centuries. Hell, I didn't want to overturn anything. I don't believe that the artists of any era way back felt, "Boy—I'm going to overturn everything that's been done. I'm going to make a brand new start." They wanted to take what was there and do something with it, and they revered the work before. If their personality and character changed it, that was alright, but hell—they never thought about revolutionizing technique or something. It was a very gradual thing. Now we've got an "ism" change monthly. In our century they have gone crackers about newness.

Herb Mears was interviewed on November 30, 1995. You can listen to the interview here[3]
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[2] Art League Houston, one of Houston's longest operating non-profit visual arts organizations and the first alternative art space in Texas, was founded in 1948 and incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1953.

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m16156/latest/22 Herb Mears.mp3

Chapter 25

Edward Mills, b. 1941[1]

25.1 School Figures

I was born in Huntsville, Texas. We came to Houston in 1949 when I was about nine years old. I attended Atherton Elementary School in the Fifth Ward area of Houston, and the school wasn't very far from our residence. I always loved art and I liked math and science. And I loved history. Art was my priority because [through it] I could express history; I could express science. I could express those things in society that I liked or disliked. So art was my preference.

The artwork [I did] in the beginning was basically stick pictures and airplanes...three lines, horizontal and vertical—so that was the subject matter. Then [I] graduated to putting little lines on their heads representing hair and circles for the eye, circles for the mouth, omitting the nose. Then I began to put clothing on those stick figures. I started that at an early age because I never liked to play with children my own age. I always liked to get with adults—with men—and talk with them.

I met a teacher at Atherton—her name was Mrs. Armstrong. She was also interested in art and she was a good instructor in that she taught me what I should stop doing. I would copy cartoons, and she told me I should stop copying cartoons and be creative; create something that was mine. So I didn't create a cartoon character, I just started painting landscapes. That's all I painted. Now, when I got to Booker T. Washington High School, I studied under Miss Ruth May McCrane. She was a student of Dr. John Biggers. I began to paint sports scenes: basketball, football. And relationships between boys and girls.

Then I went backwards, and when I say backwards I mean kind of ancient. I saw my mother picked cotton. I saw my father picked cotton so I began to draw about that. I was the only person drawing about cotton. And I painted about planting gardens and going to church, things like that.

[1]This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16147/1.1/>.

Self-Portrait

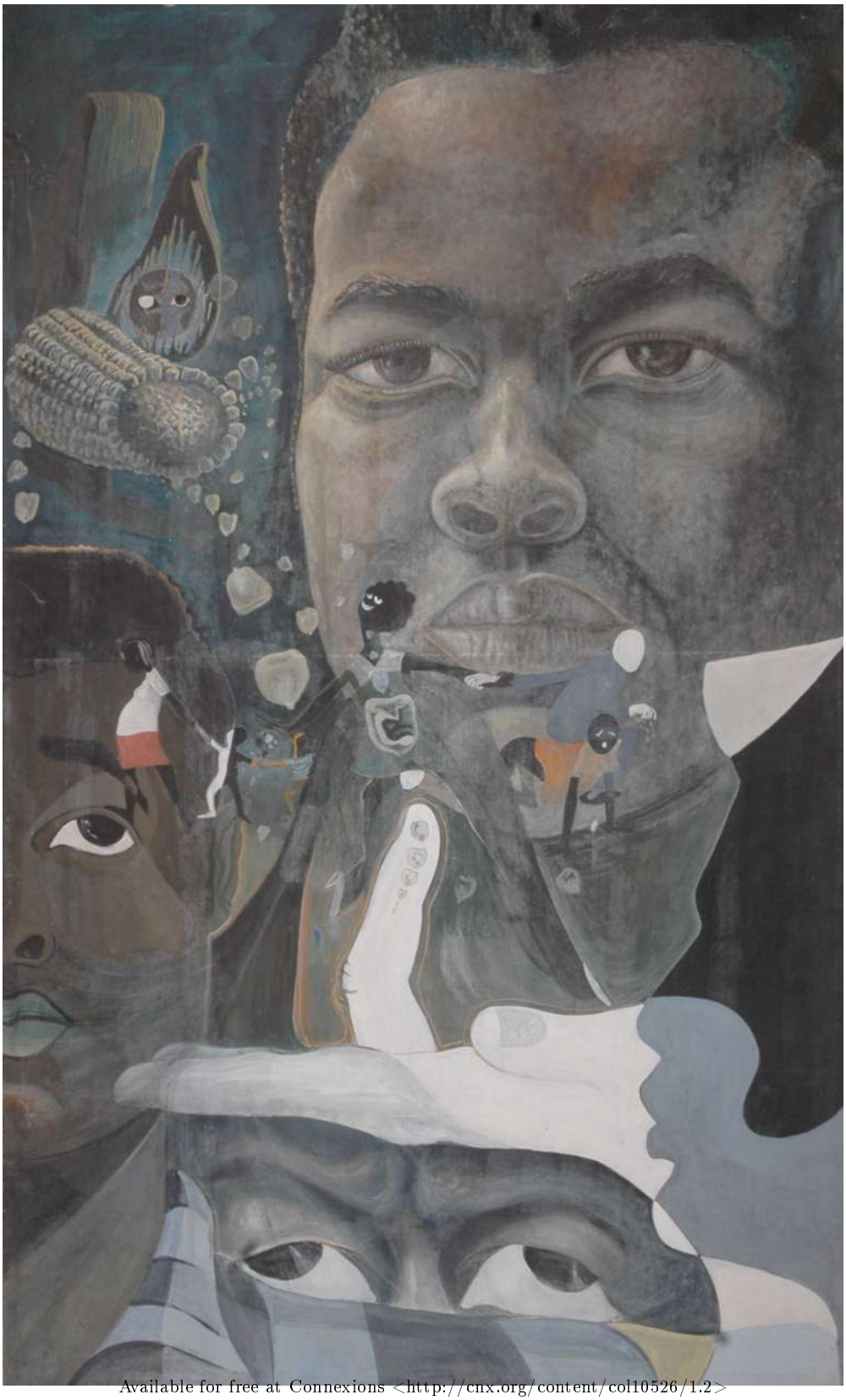

Figure 25.1: By Edward Mills. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

25.2 From Booker T. to TSU

After I graduated I went to Texas Southern. I didn't attend immediately; I didn't want a loan, so I worked. I worked for a year, saved my money, and in 1961 I enrolled in Texas Southern University majoring in art education. At TSU I did meet Dr. Biggers. The first time I met him it was like I had known him all my life. It was wonderful. He told you straight. For instance, once me and him was talking and he said, "Man, why did you come to Texas Southern?" I said I came to TSU not to graduate, but to paint a mural on the wall. Upperclassmen painted murals on the wall before they graduated—the hallways of Hannah Hall and other areas. And he started laughing. He said, "After you leave, what are you going to do?" I said I was going to open a sign shop and paint signs. And he laughed harder. He said, "Man, do you think you can make it painting signs?" And I didn't have an answer. So he said, "I suggest that you graduate and have some income coming in [before you] open a sign shop." This is what I mean when I said he talked straight. I got his message—which was, you can't make it with just a sign shop and no money coming in.

In my freshman year he had us drawing from nature. He had us drawing pine trees, so as we went outside we painted and we drew pine trees. We came back in and he said, "Put your work up. We're going to analyze it." So we put the work up. He analyzed everything. He started from the left, and I put mine up on the right at the bottom—last one. So when he got to me he just looked and he put his hand up and he squinted his eyes and turned around and he said, "This student, I can't teach him nothing. I can't teach him nothing." He said, "You're just wasting your time in this drawing class." So as a freshman he put me in a painting class. This is the essence of how he was. He didn't hold you back.

Figure 25.2: Edward Mills. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

25.3 A Student of the Sixties

I spent my days at TSU painting. I spent my evenings at work. The only thing we could do at the time was basically [be a] janitor, so I was a custodian. I would get home at 12:00 a.m.; sometimes I would paint until about 4:00 a.m., something like that, then I'd go to sleep, wake up and go back to school. Just a circle. I didn't go to any museums then. The first museum I went to was the Museum of Fine Arts, and that was about five years ago. I saw what I was missing. Most of what we had done at that time was go to exhibits that would come to TSU. This is where we familiarized ourselves with other artists and their works. Now I did read. My favorite artist is Leonardo da Vinci and what's his name—Michelangelo. These are my two favorite artists, then comes Charles White,[2] and I would say now, Dr. Biggers.

There were happy times and sad times. In the 60s the police department came on the campus of Texas Southern University and shot at a men's dorm. About maybe three students had a gun and they shot back. A policeman was killed. They had a trial and all this. And I don't think the students had anything in mind about attacking the police department. So that was a negative—one of the biggest negatives. I've always been interested in the history of those things that were negative, as far as I'm concerned, in society: the injustices that I felt were perpetrated toward black people. So I began to draw about that which is negative in society. Something about the turbulence of the 60s...this is when I got a little deeper towards painting about things in society that I again felt was negative. Now, many people who view my work would say, "Mills, you don't like white people." But [what] I'm transmitting is [the] negative that some whites have done.

[2]Charles White, 1918-1979. African-American social realist painter.

Requiem

Figure 25.3: By Edward Mills. Oil on canvas, 1975. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

25.4 What It Means To Be an Artist

At one time I tried to paint a cloud in the evening. The cloud was so beautiful, and I thought I could reproduce that. And I sat down and looked at it about three times and the cloud had changed. So you also have to grasp your memory. You have to take a mental photograph of what it is you see and then reproduce it as best you can. And in my opinion, that's what an artist is.

To be an artist you would actually want to go to the top and that simply means that you become a master. And if you become a master, then you're anointed with what I would call spirituality because God is a creator and we are created to [reflect] his artwork. In the Bible he speaks of the potter and he relates that to man, and actually [to] dirt. [An artist is] simply one that I feel is true to himself. He looks into society; the only thing he can do is paint a negative or a positive from society.

The reason I focus on the subject matter that I focus on in my artwork is because the history that I read is not true as it relates to black people. There is no true record, and even though I get negatives from people who say, "Why do you paint about these things," I paint about the things I paint about, draw about the things I draw about because this is what I would call a carryover from reading history. So I chose to paint

about negative things in society. Like I've said before, basically as a record. I'm not a total record-keeper, but I do it for that reason—so it can be passed on to youth because they have forgotten.

I've noticed that most of the exhibits that I have exhibited in, they gravitate to my work, and I'm thinking they gravitate to it because it interests them. They can relate to it. It's something within that they feel, but don't see. And once they see it, something in them is dissatisfied. They come to me with questions and I can see [their] questions. I can see a void in their eyes as they look at me and question me about the subject matter and how it was during [my] time. And I often tell them that it's the same way during your time, it's just a different form.

Edward Mills was interviewed on September 8, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[3]
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[3]http://cnx.org/content/m16147/latest/23 Edward Mills.mp3

Chapter 26

Annie Moore, b. 1938[1]

26.1 Childhood Dreams

I knew I was an artist from a small child. Daydream and night...go to sleep creating, get up in the morning and draw in the sand with a brush or a rake and paint the windows when they were wet or frosted in the wintertime. So I knew I was an artist from the beginning. I came to school to Texas Southern after graduating from high school, knowing that I wanted to be an artist. But I came with some trepidation and fear because I came from a small town (Beckville, in East Texas) and a small school, and here I found myself among graduates from larger high schools who had studied art already.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16132/1.1/>.

Mama Played Guitar Too!

Figure 26.1: By Annie Moore. Pastel on board. Courtesy of the artist.

26.2 New in Town

I came [to Texas Southern University] in 1956. And I found myself having to do a lot of catch-up at the same time trying to maintain myself. This is one of the things you're taught. So coming from a small town—whatever you do—you go off to the big city but maintain yourself. I came here and found myself during the middle of the struggle...of the civil rights movement...so I found a niche for myself to paint and to draw and not get caught up into some things those others were. But I did not really find myself having anything that I really wanted to speak and say. This was formulated much, much later.

What I remember is just being so amazed. I said, "My—I am a part of Houston now. This is where my roots are." We were not allowed off campus (I lived in the dormitory as a freshman) except in groups. We'd go downtown and go shopping—window shopping, really—and just looking around in groups. I'd just look up at the tall buildings. I guess they could tell we were new, and probably from the country. So mine was a learning experience for me, more or less about life and my position and where I stand, rather than the promotion of my art at the time.

I would say I was a good all-around student, and I had a whole lot of encouragement. I even received a scholarship, and it was for my being a good all-around student. My art grades were good, but I held me back. [Dr. John Biggers] helped me with the scholarship. You know we considered him somewhat like our father—and his wife, she was the same way. [If] she found out any of us [was] in trouble with finances or anything, she'd let him know it. And he called me into his office and said, "Miss McClennan, it's a good thing you were a good student. You got a guardian angel." So he told me about a scholarship, and this was after I had to take a break and go home because my father was ill. So I came back and he had a scholarship for me.

Figure 26.2: Portrait of Annie and Willie Moore from 2003 TSU Museum exhibition. Photograph by Maya Imani Watson.

26.3 Roots and Threads

I would say I've been an educator. I'm very concerned about communication between generations, and I know that I am of a generation even in art that is passing away, and I feel that I must leave some of what influenced me to explain to those today who might not realize it, what and who they are. So I like to bring out a bit of our past, a bit of our history into it, and especially women—because I was so influenced towards education by my mother. She said, "I didn't get it, but I want every one of you to go [to school]," and that's the way the women were in East Texas where I grew up. The men were very supportive. They worked hard. They cut logs. They did pulp wood. Whatever it took to send us to school. So I see the need to communicate to [the next generation] that we know they have a struggle today, too, but I want you to know that you are because we were. And we were because they were.

My mother died at about 96 years old. I still remember her words and she was still encouraging me. You must walk—but you must crawl before you walk. And she was always encouraging, so I feel this way about my artwork even though I'm just really being productive much later. But the ideal [that] is instilled is don't stop—you just get up and walk again.

26.4 The Power of Story

A lot of [my art] is based on folk tale, folklore coming from my particular area. I grew up in East Texas where there was a great fear of bears and other things that roamed the woods because we lived in a somewhat wild area. So there were many folk tales. There was always this fish you couldn't catch. He was so wily...so smart that he could outsmart everybody around. Nobody could catch him. I want [stories like these] to bridge the gap of communication with the younger people. I want them to know what it was like when we grew up. I want them to know that we had our moments of excitement and these things were really new and just as thrilling to us as their video games might be to them. But I want it to be a teaching experience and I hope that I have not written out the fun part, because I like to explain things that they have a disconnect with today.

26.5 A Hole in Art

There's one very important thing that I'd like to leave for artists coming along today because I do respect them so very much. And a lot of their work I'm just in love with, but I went through what we call "a hole in art." There for each one of us, for each generation, is a hole we must go through. This is a term that we learned in school, especially from Dr. Biggers. He says we're all being led deeper into the labyrinth of our minds. We must not be afraid to seek the answer for this pull and this struggle for our mind's attention. Fear and trepidation in the realm of uncertainty for an artist can be a very scary thing—and it could be a very dangerous thing, but it must not be. We must not be afraid to explore. Others feel the same way, but have not the expression given to the artist. So don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.

Annie Moore was interviewed on June 14, 2006. Listen to the interview here[2] .

[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16132/latest/24 Annie Moore.mp3

Chapter 27

Willie Moore, b. 1935[1]

27.1 Art Instruction Inc.

Hampton, Arkansas, was my birthplace. Ever since I was a little child [I was] drawing at the church—that's really where I used to hang out—and that's one education, and the other one is when I first recognized that there was such a thing as "art" that I had been doing. The problem wasn't the term...there weren't any artists in the little town, so I didn't have any art teachers. Secondary education was a correspondence course: Art Instruction Incorporated. I took part of it. I was I guess about 15, 16, about that age. I'm not quite sure. Drawing got my attention and everybody said, "Willie can do that. He can draw good just like it is." At first they would not accept me. I was a little young. Eventually the salesperson came from Minneapolis, Minnesota, Art Instruction Incorporated and he got to talking with my dad. Before I knew it, I was signed up for Art Instruction Incorporated, which I enjoyed, and began to recognize this field of art from the samples that they showed me. One thing in particular was the artists which they showed me on the covers of Look, Time, Life, or I think it was Saturday Evening Post. I would be allowed to take time out in the school day to go and practice my art. That was one good thing. My instructor was open-minded to see that this was the gift I should develop.

[1]This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16174/1.1/>.

Aunt Tee

Figure 27.1: By Willie Moore. Wood assemblage. Courtesy of the artist.

27.2 Houston Bound

When I came to Houston I lacked one year in high school, and I didn't go immediately to high school because I wanted to make a little change; have some jingle in my pocket. Matter of fact, when I came here I left my cotton sack hanging on the fence from the cotton patch I had been working in. Houston was a hayfield. All out by the Astrodome, they had cattle out in there and I was by chance off for the summer. I met a man who loaded hay on his truck and I started talking with him and he offered me a job. I had been around

hay—but I had never pitched hay. I kind of enjoyed it because it was like taking me back to my raising or rearing. I did the farm chores that most boys do, baling hay, picking cotton, plowing—the whole works. Then came the night life. The Eldorado Ballroom. I was crazy about the music. I used to think I was going to be a guitarist with my own band. I never did—but I did make acquaintance with some of the musicians who made it. When James Brown was a singer he used to come to the Eldorado Ballroom, and this group called the Midnighters. James Brown and the big-time singers we all had records of, they'd come into town and they'd stop at the Eldorado before they'd go to the Coliseum. This was a time when it was highly segregated as far as public places; when they came to town they went to the black places.

Fabric of Life

Figure 27.2: By Willie Moore. Prismacolor on museum board. Courtesy of the artist.

27.3 To Texas Southern by Way of Yates

I went to Jack Yates High School for that one semester that I lacked. Before graduation day we had different people come, you know, out of a profession, and John Biggers came to be a speaker for the artists and art-intended students. My instructor, who had known John Biggers for a while, spoke to him particularly about what I was producing in her class. And John was marvelous at it, you know. He says, "Now, I'll tell you what—as soon as you get out of here you come and see me at TSU, and I think something can work for you."

I got a scholarship. I received the Jesse H. Jones scholarship that got me through TSU. I had one teacher, Dr. Mary Jordan Atkinson—she was a history teacher and philanthropist—who helped me financially. Dr. Atkinson was the person who pushed me to submit some of my [written] work to the program that was at TSU so far as art, and I ended up—never having competed before—with two pieces of my work accepted as second place. And I had one professor, Dr. Smith, who recognized my poetic potentials enough to [let me] write my oral exam as a poem.

I'm an artist first. And them I'm a writer, and I guess I'm a poet—I can consolidate writer with poet. No one wanted to recognize me as a poet because I was so good as an artist. At that time they could put a label on you, and unless you were strong enough you would submit to that. It ended up that a lot of my time at TSU was what should have been: just treading the water, you know, seeing what all was out there. And thanks to John Biggers, he did not push me to be like John Biggers with his crosshatch. I was in my freshman drawing class and he took me out of my freshman drawing class and put me on a mural—and I

thank him for doing that. I didn't have to do that freshman drawing class because, he said, "You're already doing the things that I'm teaching in that class. So you get a ladder and get up there." And he was showing me how artists through the ages have remained artists and still spoke their piece and influenced a whole bunch of people. He was teaching me the philosophy of art. I didn't know it, but he was teaching me that, rather than simply drawing pictures. He let me have that kind of freedom to express myself and he wanted me to see what it's like to be up on that ladder, which is an expression, you know.

27.4 Looking Ahead

I can say what my thoughts are about the future...and I think that sticking to my guns between the writing and the art [is a part of it] and mostly painting and drawing would be the graphic part of it. I feel like I'm going to be successful at [a] late age because I have done something about it with the help of someone who saw some of my work in a book that was done back in the 50s. I'm thinking that I will be successful...I'll become known, and am becoming known. Then I won't be surprised if it does happen. I'll have this experience that got me ready for now—really got me chock-full of things that I want to draw and paint.

Willie Moore was interviewed on June 6 and June 14, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2] .

27.5 The Fireplace

27.5.1 by Willie Moore

Folks go huntin'
'neath th' harvest moon
T' get meats f'r their "vittles"
-like possum 'nd coon,
They eat turtle soup, armadillo, dirty rice
shrimp-gumbo 'nd crawdad pies
It's goulash, frog legs, alligator tail,
Wild goose, turkey, duck 'nd quail!
It's the taste o' budan (stuffed in chittlin')
"Kansas City wrinkles," 'nd dry-salt middlin'
(A streak o' fat 'nd a streak o' lean),
Fried, or boiled in a pot o' greens,
It's fresh pig feet, 'nd hog head cheese,
Smoked-jowl-boiled in black-eyed peas,
It's rabbit stew f'r supper
If th' fish won't bite
-'nd "A chicken on Sunday
is a preacher's delight!"
Now when supper's over,
They move with haste,
'cause it's story tellin' time...
'Roun' the ol' fireplace!
See a rockin' chair a-stoppin'
(Y'u c'n hear a fallin' pin)
There sits a little gray man
With beards on h's chin:
-He's th' kind o' Uncl' Remus

[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16174/latest/25 Willie Moore.mp3

-He's th' master o' his art
-He's creator o' oration
-'nd th' actor o' each part!
He goes "Once upon a time. . ."As th' tales begin
-It's t' giggle n'd t' sigh
As ya listen t' h'm "spin,"Y' forget it's 'maginary
When h's hands start floatin'
'nd conductin' th' response
O' those a listenin' an' emotin'
-It's silhouettes stilled
Afront th' hearth,-Barefoot chillunSet f'r fear or mirth,
-Inchin' closer t' each other
While sittin' on th' floor
-gazin' at th' old man,
Glancin' at th' door.
Comes Aesop's Fables –
Like th' Turtle 'nd th' Hare
Th' Fox 'nd th' Cock –
Now get ready for a scare!
It's a bat zoomin' down
Or th' growlin' grizzly bear -Or an angry "haint"
On th' loose out there!
"Sshhh—something 's movin' in th' brush!
Fireflies hide, crickets hush!"
It's t' jump when th' north wind
Whistles through th' crack
'caus y'y'r 'fraid that th' Booger-Man
's tippin' 'hind y'r back!
-It's enough t' make y'r hair
Stand straight up on ya head –
It's t' duck b'neath th' cover
When ya hop into th' bed!
It's morals mixed with pleasant fright,
'nd ghosts still walk on a rainy night!
It's vast retrospection
(T' be used f'r prediction)
It's a whole lot o' facts –
Mixed in with th' fiction
It's t' read th' message between th' lines
Before we make decisions
Discerning truths that at first glance
Escaped our normal vision
It's a record o' th' past
(held fast in rhyme)
By poets, scribes, and sages
From way back when—t' present time!
Th' wisdom of the ages!

Chapter 28

Robert Morris, b. 1933[1]

28.1 Discharged...and Hired

I had just gotten out of the army, and I was stationed at Fort Hood of all places. And I thought about where I should go after I was discharged and said, well, I'm pretty close to Houston and it sounds like an interesting town. At that point I didn't feel like going back to New York or New England because I had been there and done that, to a certain extent. So I drove down to Houston and—this is kind of weird—I thought I could find a job teaching. I went to the University of Houston because that was the place I had heard about, and I asked where the chairman of the art department's office was. I went there and I walked in and Bernie Lemmell was sitting behind his desk, and his wife was there—Gladys—and I told him who I was and said, "Can I have a teaching job here with you?" I mean, I presumed that's the way things were done. I had no clue. And Bernie turned to his wife and said, "See, Gladys—I told you somebody would show up."

They were looking for somebody to teach design...I believe it was color and painting. And so I started teaching and I did pretty well. I did that for a year and a half or two—I can't remember the exact time frame—and then someone asked me if I would—this is really bizarre because I just kind of fell into these things—be interested in [being director of the Contemporary Arts Alliance]. I think it was Polly Marsters. I got to know her because I had showed her my work...and she was on the board of the CAA. She said, "We're looking for a director because Jerry MacAgy has quit and would you be interested in that?" I said, "Well, okay." And so I was interviewed and they asked for my transcripts and a whole bunch of other stuff and recommendations from the University [of Houston]. And they hired me. Those two jobs just seemed to unfold.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16169/1.1/>.

Untitled

Figure 28.1: By Robert Morris, c. 1960. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

28.2 At the CAA

Bruce Monical [had been a] student of mine [at the University of Houston] and I hired him to work at CAA to do the installations there. I guess I started in '58 at the CAA. It was a lot of fun, actually. I mean, it was like a little family. Everybody knew each other and I had Bruce working for me. I hired a secretary who had just gotten out of Radcliffe as an art history major and [like me] had come to Houston because she thought it might be an interesting place to be. My wife would come in and do publicity for us because she had been a reporter and I remember our first child was born at that time and so this little infant would be in the office.

Putting the shows together was a little tough because I had to sort of scramble to catch up. I hadn't done this before and they didn't have any plans for any shows. I had to come up with the plans and I knew Don Barthelme because I had met him at the University of Houston. We just became friends, so I think Don and I sort of brainstormed ideas for shows and came up with a quick repertoire of stuff to do and we just started doing it. And everybody sort of pitched in. It was very congenial.

There was a show called The Ugly Show. [Don and I] were talking and he said, "There are so many ugly things in this world...why should we always be showing what we consider to be beautiful things?" So he said, "Let's show some of these ugly things because we can teach a lesson." So he and I went around town to look for something like an ugly piece of furniture, and he had all kinds of ideas about it. He [managed to find] an army helmet [that] was pretty ugly...and there was a huge box of laundry soap—just all kinds of kitschy things. It got a lot of attention, and it got a lot of bad comments. At that time, there was a big communist hunt, witch hunt, going on, and there were "minutemen" and "minutewomen" who would come into museums and other institutions, to check out the libraries and see if there was anything subversive in there. And we had people actually come here. I think we had a plastic American flag in The Ugly Show, so this "minuteman" guy was going to have us all closed down. He sort of went stomping out. Nothing ever came of it. But it was that sort of very conservative period. I think the board was always a little worried that we would overstep and go too far and offend too many.

[Back then] if someone gave us something we were grateful. We didn't have much of a budget so were not really out there collecting, as I remember. We had a small collection. There was a Joseph Cornell in my office that the de Menils had donated—I think they probably took it back at some point in the future. We had a very small collection and I think we kept a few things from the various competitions that we put on annually.

[Our membership] was pretty much from all over. I would say there were people who were terribly interested in art because it was a small museum. I mean it wasn't like the MFA now where they have big programs and everything. It was "clan-ish." I mean, the artists and the people who were interested in it and collectors and the board [were] interesting people. We wanted people who would throw themselves into it and volunteer and help out and show up and proselytize and, you know, make people think about art. That's why we were doing The Ugly Show...throw sand in their faces, you know, just kind of get them thinking.

I had to go and speak [on behalf of CAA], PR sort of stuff. God, I spoke at high schools and Kiwanis Club things, and frankly, I began to get a little tired of it after a while. And the board meetings were a little bit taxing because you know, they had their own priorities, and they didn't always agree on things. But actually John [de Menil] stayed on the board even after [Dominique] had left...and he seemed perfectly fine. He didn't get rude with me or anything like that. He was very nice.

Hangers On

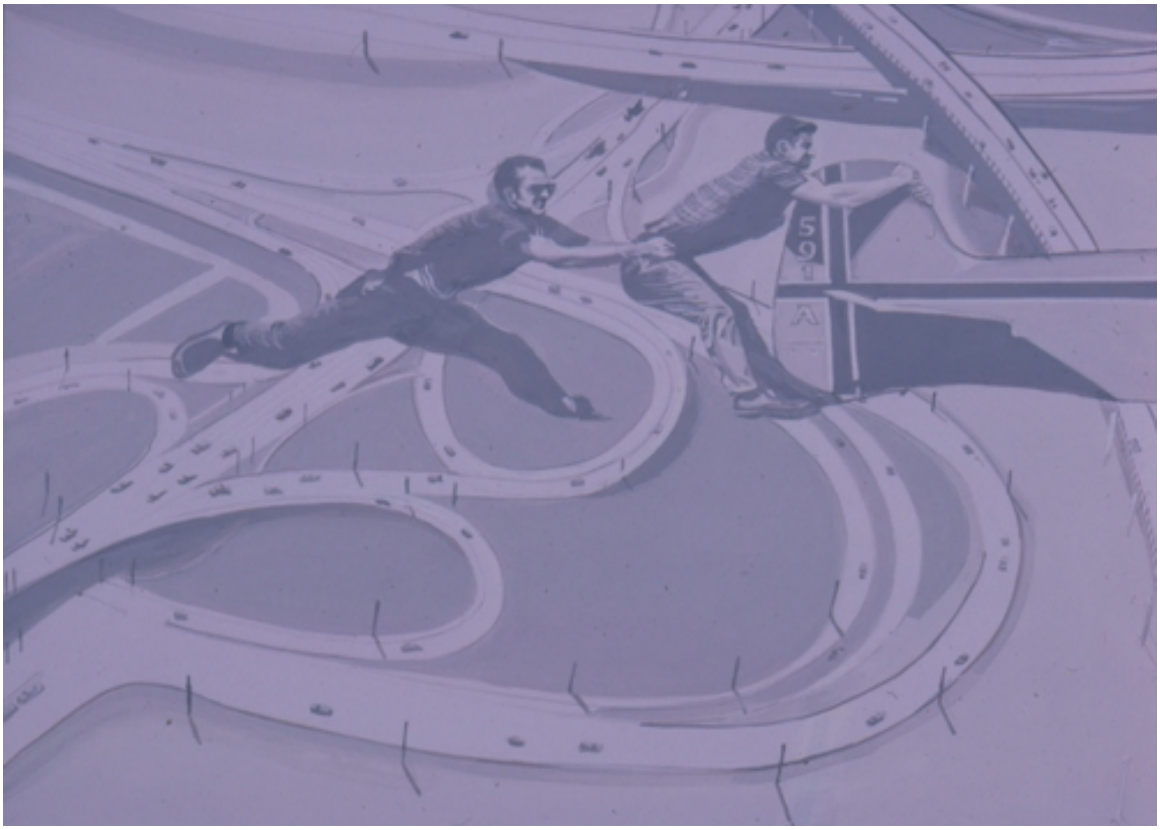

Figure 28.2: By Robert Morris, c. 1960. Acrylic on gessoed panel. Courtesy of the artist.

28.3 Meanwhile, Locally...

It was a pretty small art scene, it seemed to me. I mean, the gallery I was with was Polly Marsters gallery, Houston Artists Gallery. And I think it was on Main Street so you couldn't quite miss it. At the time we were living on Caroline, right near the Museum of Fine Arts. So there's Polly, and she seemed like a wonderful woman—was, in fact. And as I showed her my little pathetic stuff she said, "Oh, I'd love to show your work," and so I had at least one show with her, maybe two. I can't quite remember. I knew of Kathryn Swenson and her gallery, and that was I think a little bit more, shall I say, upscale. It was in a different part of town, over San Felipe or near that. Jim Love was showing there, I think, and it was nice space. And other galleries...I guess Meredith Long was there, but I just never quite connected with him. And the David Gallery.

[As far as artists who were our friends], Lowell [Collins] was the best man at our wedding when we were married in Austin, so he was like a really tight pal. I mean he was my closest confidant, and then I moved away and we just didn't keep in touch anymore. John Hackney, who's an architect here, was a very good friend. And the Mears—the Mears were very good friends, very good friends. And Campbell Gisland who wrote for the Houston Post, then he went off to Rochester and worked for magazines and other newspapers. Between them, I guess those were our really closest friends.

Figure 28.3: Robert Morris at 1972 exhibition, Bridgeport. Photo by Joseph Brignolo. Courtesy of Robert Morris.

28.4 Remembering "the Mies"

I watched the Mies van der Rohe addition to the Museum of Fine Arts being built. It was a gorgeous, gorgeous space, and it took a long time doing the plaster work on it because Mies was actually there at the final part, sort of pointing out the things that weren't perfectly smooth. He had a cane—was wearing a suit—and was very much a fussbudget about every little detail in the welding and so forth. So that was interesting to me, and when Lee Malone asked me to design a show there, I said, "Okay I'll do that." It was called Corot and His Contemporaries[2] and it was very traditional French, 19th-century works, and so I did a thing with trees—I had trees brought in. As a matter of fact, Polly Marsters' husband Lee Marsters, I think, acquired the trees somewhere. So it was like a little forest. And I never did another show after that!

I think [the Mies addition] got a lot of attention for the Museum, architecturally as well as artistically. I mean, a lot of people came to see it. And I think the space was gorgeous. It was a little difficult to work with because it was so vast, and you had to keep putting up walls and things of that sort. So it was a rather expensive thing to have. But I always loved it and I remember working in there one day and Richard Stout I think was there. I don't know what it was he had with him—I think a portable radio—and he was playing the Dialogue of the Carmelites[3] in this vast space, this echoing opera. Only Richard would be listening to

[2]Corot and His Contemporaries, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, May-June, 1959.
[3]Dialogue of the Carmelites, an opera by Francis Poulenc, 1956.

the Dialogue...it was like the Saturday opera at the Metropolitan on the radio. And it was playing at top volume, just echoing in this place—the nuns were all going to their death at the guillotine. And you could hear them singing and their numbers were diminishing, and oh, it was incredible.

28.5 Postscript

My years in Houston were really fabulous from the standpoint of the people that I got to know, that I knew the rest of my life. Donald Barthelme, Jim Love, Jack Boynton, you know. Jack came and visited us [when we moved to] Connecticut. Don moved to New York so I'd see him more—quite a bit more at the time—but he was busy doing his thing and I was busy doing mine. Despite the fact that I wasn't here long and got sort of itchy and left, and wasn't enamored with everything about Houston, I still love being here and thinking about those years. I really like the fact that we have so many lovely people here. It was sort of like a pod that opened up and showed me what I could do. It was great training for me because I got other teaching jobs on the basis of what I had done here. And I got attention and it helped me with galleries and I was reasonably happy with that. It was a perfect workout: kind of exhausting, not always a pleasant experience, but absolutely enriched by good friendships.

Robert Morris was interviewed on March 12, 2007. You can listen to the interview here[4] .

[4] http://cnx.org/content/m16169/latest/26 Robert Morris.mp3

Chapter 29

Kermit Oliver, b. 1943[1]

29.1 From Pen to Brush

I thought I was good in literature, but a friend of my brother's encouraged me to come to Texas Southern [University] and major in art. He took me to the mural in the administration building and we went over to the science building and I saw Dr. Biggers' murals. It was a mural that convinced me that yes, I would become an art student.

[That was] the beginning of a long career of trying to graduate. I completed my first semester, but didn't have the money for the second semester and Dr. Biggers got me a Jesse Jones scholarship. So that started the long travail of trying to graduate [while] having a family. I met Katie in the fall of '61 and we were married in the fall of '62, then I think it took me until 1967 to graduate.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16163/1.1/>.

J.J.'s Calf

Figure 29.1: By Kermit Oliver, 1975. Acrylic on masonite panel with frame. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Museum purchase with funds provided by an anonymous donor at "One Great Night in November, 1991."

29.2 Diverging Influences

At Texas Southern we were there to expose ourselves to educated young black students because integration was not very extensive in Houston, so we were very isolated in that context. I did not have the associations with African culture [that Biggers and others had] so that put me at odds with the art environment there...almost to the point of being persona non grata because my work was not concentrated on the black American urban ethos. Then the civil rights movement and [later the] black power movement became more prominent, and so I was never considered "black enough" with the work I was doing or the motifs I was working with.

My high school teachers had always encouraged me to think of my art from a narrative standpoint. My second semester of college, I had been out and idle. I spent [that] semester in the library, going through all the encyclopedias on art and all the research books I could manage each day—and it gave me a sort of basis in art history and stimulated all the understandings that I had of myself and what I wanted to do with my art.

It was very difficult for me to distinguish between the two elements of visual expression and the narrative point of view. As part of my upbringing, we were rich in oral traditions and storytelling, but as I got into college a larger picture—that of man's inhumanity to man or his relationships with his fellow man—was involved. Then I came across mythology. I guess [it was] in 1964 when I started concentrating on the idea of the parallel religion—religion in terms of comparative religion, mythology, legends and my own background. So this was the leading motif that formulated my work—and it also separated me from [the African] narrative which Dr. Biggers' experience had brought into the department.

Figure 29.2: Kermit and Katie Oliver, 1971. Courtesy of the artist.

29.3 Converging Ideas

An exchange instructor [who had been] with Dr. Biggers at the University of Wisconsin noticed [what he felt were] some inherent, compositional advantages that I had acquired through observing illustrations and art history—then a year later I came across a book, The Painter's Secret Geometry by Charles Bouleau, and right away I saw what he was speaking to in terms of the compositional aspects of the picture plane and the geometries that were involved. I started [intentionally] using geometric schemes and musical ratios as opposed to the golden ratio of Renaissance art. I wouldn't say I created, but I distorted the formal elements into something that was more pertinent to what I was doing.

This instructor, Junkins was his last name, he just recognized the dynamic—how much of it was in my work, and my intuition—and a year or so later I came across this book and saw that you can purposely do this. It was an epiphany. We went to West Oaks Square quite often, and there was a bookstore there. Two books [there] were out of place: The Painter's Secret Geometry and Jung's Symbols of Transformation. Those two books were really prominent in the formulation of my [work] and they were [found] in the same night.

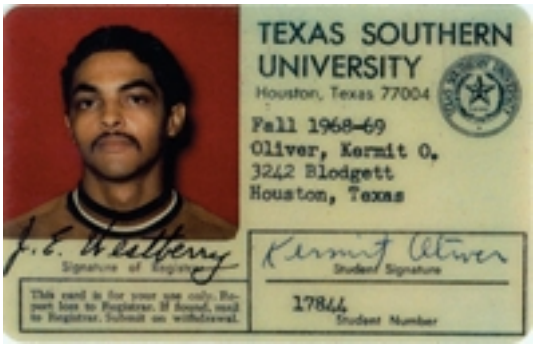

Figure 29.3: TSU ID. Courtesy of the artist.

29.4 Recurring Themes

My work deals with the metamorphosis of ideas as well as objects. The idea[s] of birth, death, rebirth or resurrection...these elements I use really reflect from the standpoint of my religious upbringing. Basically I was looking at themes that dealt with the idea of immortality, the transitory [nature] of life, the idea of growth...the butterfly, the cocoon, the fish...all these are images that deal with the advent of a God that sacrifices his godliness to bring about salvation to humanity. And this idea of rebirth, you know, redemption...that especially.

I was never an exceptional artist, even when I got to college. We had people [at TSU] that would make me feel very embarrassed. I mean I struggled. My work is a long, long struggle. Dealing with larger purposes you [have] a larger responsibility. Talent to me was a mechanical thing that was learned, but [there] you had students that were just...it was embarrassing. I would bring work in and I'd be almost in tears, you know. It was a highly competitive thing because it was [about] ideas. Dr. Biggers had his reputation and his status in the art community was built on his '58 trip [to Africa]. It was overwhelming. We saw him work. We saw the results of his work. His drawing especially. I mean, it was just depressing to see things like that and you're not able to do them.

I was not old enough to have the connections he had with the old African American experience, so it would be a surface aspect for me to deal with the image of African art and what Dr. Biggers was doing. As

a matter of intellectual honesty as well as cultural honesty I could never feel comfortable [with that], and never did. I don't think I ever did an African theme.

Figure 29.4: From right to left: Kermit Oliver, Herb Mears, Ronnie Avery and Ava Jean Mears at DuBose Gallery, Houston, c. 1969-70. Courtesy of the artist.

29.5 Commercial Art

When I was going to work I rode a bicycle several miles to a framing shop, and there were a lot of galleries [along] Westheimer that I would stop in and look at. Robinson, David, Meredith Long and DuBose I would go too, and each week I would make one trip to the Museum. [This was] 1970, right at '70, and it was a different experience because everyone was doing art, it seemed. The Art League of Houston—I would always go there and they were at another location. I think it was South Main, near the Contemporary Arts Museum, the old Contemporary Arts Museum. I was always looking at art at the University of St. Thomas; they had a lot of lectures. It was like being inspired or motivated because we were isolated. We were reclusive. But we could go into those places in an anonymous situation. Once a month we would stand out for about an hour before we were dragged into the galleries, but that was our own social hour.

I had been showing with Diane Smith I think a year and had a one-man show, and then Dr. Biggers asked me about going to commercial galleries. [I went with DuBose] in '69 because my first show was in

'70 if I'm not mistaken. Ben was a person who placed great value in collecting...that was what makes art communities grow. He began to collect young artists and then let them grow. Some were recognized as some of the leading artists that were in the city and that was the compliment I had; it was also the intimidating aspect of being in that gallery.

You see, when you're isolated you're in a very small environment. It was exciting because you were seeing things—you could see what was beginning in terms of what was going on. There was a vitality, I think...and you were part of it, but not part of it.

Kermit Oliver was interviewed on June 29, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2] .

[2]http://cnx.org/content/m16163/latest/27 Kermit Oliver.mp3

Chapter 30

Charles Pebworth, b. 1926[1]

30.1 Getting Here

In 1953 my wife and I were students at the University of Oklahoma, and then we decided to get married, so I came to Houston at the end of the semester. I got a job at Foley's and my wife came down to Houston on the train from Norman—she came into Houston at the station which is now the entrance to the Astros ballpark. She arrived at that station in 1953 and I had a job at Foley's where practically all the young people in Houston got their start in those days: in the display department. I was going to the University of Houston, so I graduated in 1955 and got a teaching assistantship at LSU. I was in Baton Rouge for two years, then came back to Texas here at Sam Houston in Huntsville, teaching in the art department. In 1961 I went to Houston. It was time. A friend of mine said, "Let's go to Houston and get a gallery."

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16137/1.1/>.

Figure 30.1: Charles Pebworth an Nan Dietert at installation at Hyatt Regency, Houston, 1972. Courtesy of Charles Pebworth.

30.2 Getting Started

There were only maybe two or three [galleries] at the time, and I didn't know it. The first one we went to was Meredith Long, and he had just started a gallery on Westheimer where Highland Village is now. So we said, "You want to show our work?" and he says yes. We left our work and for a few months, nothing happened. So I picked up my work and took it home, then went back to Huntsville. I was friends with Stella Sullivan and Ed Mayo and Norma Henderson in particular because they had bought work of mine at that period of time out of the gallery in Conroe that Stella Sullivan was involved with. I remember Dick Wray

came to my show in Conroe, and Norma and Ed Mayo. Ed Mayo in particular and Stella Sullivan said, "Why don't you go see Ben DuBose? He has the Bute Gallery in River Oaks there." My first experience in Houston wasn't that great, but they said, "He likes your work." So I went to see Ben, and he says, yeah, he'd take my work. I don't know if I would have ever gone there—it was the old Bute Gallery, and it was in the old Bute's Paint Store. All the local artists were there at that time.

Grace David had just started David Gallery, and I think there were a couple of other galleries, but I chose to go with Ben and everything started happening for me because he had a show for me and things started selling. Then after a couple of years Ben wanted to develop the gallery and minimize the paint aspect of the thing, and Bute said no. Ben said, "Well, I need for you to put the money that I'm generating into the gallery," and they said no. And he said, "Well, I'm going to go ahead and form my own gallery." So he went over to Kirby Drive. People trusted Ben DuBose because he was a mentor figure for a great number of artists in Houston.

30.3 In the Fifties

People were starting to notice the art scene in Houston. And at that time, I was in the gallery and drove every Tuesday to Houston to take new work to the gallery. Then I started teaching at the Museum school[2] when Lowell Collins was the dean. We had the classes in the basement where the photo galleries and things are now. I was teaching drawing to begin with, and teaching at Sam Houston, too. It was a good experience because I would introduce the same drawing problems here [at Sam Houston] with the 18-year-old students as I would with my students at the Museum school. It was quite different because the people at the Museum school were there because they wanted to be there. They were interested in art. My students at Sam Houston, they didn't know what they wanted. So I really enjoyed the experience.

The 50s were the age of innocence in Houston because the Museum was a very nice place. It was free and you could go in, which I did a lot, and I loved to look at the paintings, the old masters. It was a very personable place. In those days you could touch paintings and feel the texture of them. In fact, one time when I was at the display department at Foley's I was doing some kind of western theme for the men's wear window and the Museum loaned me all the Remington paintings. That's kind of how the art scene was in Houston. You could do things like that at the Museum.

I wasn't part of the Contemporary Arts Association but I knew all of those people who were working at the Contemporary Arts Museum, especially when it was out by the Prudential building. It was strictly a volunteer organization during those times. The art community was very, very small when you think about it.

[2]The Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., School of Art, which opened in 1979, is now the permanent home of the MFAH's art instruction program that was begun in 1927.

Figure 30.2: Opening of the Moody Gallery, 1975. From left to right: Fritz Scholder, Lucas Johnson, Betty Moody, Charles Pebworth, Victoria Andrews, Arthur Turner, Stanley Lea, Lamar Briggs. Courtesy of Charles Pebworth.

30.4 In the Sixties

In the 60s that was when things just started. Galleries were starting to open, new galleries were opening and people were just feeling their way and Mrs. de Menil was still at St. Thomas and Jim Love was doing the displays for her. I can remember very well, Guy Johnson, he was a painter in Houston, and starting to emerge as a good painter. I got a lot of [business] through Ben DuBose—people trusted him. Back in the 60s I'd get my receipts and I could see addresses on Inwood going all the way down the street. Everybody was starting to buy from him. So I felt very fortunate to be in his gallery at that time. Of course, my pieces were selling for $25, but that didn't make any difference. That was good money then; I was very happy to get it.

They started getting big-time directors in the Museum, and it became more professional. I could leave my house here [in Huntsville], drive out the driveway, pull up on Main Street and park at the side entrance of the Museum in one hour. On I-45 I could see maybe only five or six cars that I would pass during that time!

30.5 Early Education

I grew up in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, which is Osage Indian territory—and boys didn't take art classes even if they offered them. I can remember in the sixth grade I did a wood block, linoleum cut, and made a print—and I can still remember the teacher thinking it was good. But I didn't think anything about it because in high school boys didn't [do art]. It was World War II and there weren't guidance tests or anything. I started high school in 1941 and the only thing you could think of at that time was when you were going into the army when you got old enough, and where you were going to be. There was no future beyond the war. No one thought about college, anything. It was just the war. And so my formative years in high school were about getting into the Army as fast as I could, which I tried and tried and tried. At 16 I joined the Navy by forging my parents' signature. (That was the first time I showed artistic talent.) I forged my parents' signature and they called the high school principal and told him I was 16 and couldn't go. It was supposed to be 18—but with your parents' signature you could go in at 17. At 17 I joined the Air Force to become a cadet and I had to wait until I was 18 and by that time the war was winding down. They said they weren't accepting any more cadets then, but I could go into the infantry if I wanted, which I did. I went into the airborne, became a partrooper in 1945, and when I got out of the Army I had the GI bill. So I started going to college.

First [I went to] Colorado A&M, which is Colorado State in Fort Collins. I was on my way to Montana to become a smoke jumper—and I stopped to go to college. Anyway, I enrolled in forestry because I thought that was related. During those days you didn't take tests to go to college. I just showed up at college and said, "I want to go to school." The GI bill would pay for it and they were happy to get the money. A friend of mine there said, "I'm going to Los Angeles to become an art student," and I said, "That really sounds good—I'll go with you." And that's where I became an artist. I went to the Art Center school in Los Angeles and enrolled there, but it was such an advanced school I thought I was in the wrong place. Then I went to Pasadena City College and decided I'd better come back and get the basic training, so I came back to Texas in 1948 and went to Baylor University for two years in art. Jim Love and Roy Fridge were there at the same time, both of them in theater, and I knew who they were, but we weren't friends at that time.

I was a painting major at Baylor and I stayed for two years, then the Korean War came along and I volunteered for the second time to go to Korea because I hadn't gotten it out of my system. I was in that late group of people that had been primed to go to war for four years. I got in the war—in fact we were going to jump on the mainland of Japan—and I was in San Francisco waiting to go when the atomic bomb was dropped. So I went to Korea and got it out of my system. That's when I came back in '51 to go to the University of Oklahoma, and met my wife. She was an art major, too. Then we came to Houston in 1953.

My brother lived in town, and Houston was a big city. An artist has to have a city to survive in. Houston wasn't even a million people at the time and the art community was very small. You knew everyone and it was very nice in Houston at that time. My life was a series of coincidences.

30.6 A Style Unfolds

I had determined in graduate school to find out who I was, and I tried everything that I knew belonged to someone else: a form, a color...all these I rejected. Then I realized, of course, that there are symbols and signs and certain things that have a deep history, and so I accepted certain shapes and forms later. I worked in wood and metal and paint and everything in those days. But I was very fortunate in the galleries that I was in that they used everything no matter how strange it was, you know. And I would work for six months in wood, then I would switch into welding and at the same time Jim Love was going to junkyards, I went to junkyards. We talked about that: where the best junkyards were.

When I first started as a painter, undergraduate, I was unhappy with the surface. I wanted to go below the surface thing, so I was punching a hole in the canvas and trying to build out. So I invented something like a liquid metal which would build up on the surface. And then about that time epoxies were invented that would hold, actually hold sheet metal onto a surface.

I started with board. And I could glue it and it would stay. [I started] with junkyards and with industrial-type things. I could glue metal to [the board] with epoxy. . .putting metal, found pieces of metal, to a wooden surface and that started the whole thing. Then I became allergic after about ten years, and I started getting a rash every time I worked in the studio, so I had to change. Then I got more sophisticated, [buying] new metal—sheet metal—that I cut, grinding and polishing it. I've always like rocks, too—natural rocks. So I picked up rocks for years, then I started being able to cut rocks and polish them, adding colors and various textures and things. So it just evolved over the years.

30.7 New Approaches

To tell you the truth, the art scene has changed so much that I don't understand a lot of the things that are going on now. And so many things are going digital, too. There are actually more good artists right now, today, than there were. Things that were done in the 50s that were shown in the Houston Museum [of Fine Arts] couldn't even get in now because the quality is not there. There are some wonderful artists in every place. I love Julia Speed in Austin, her paintings—and then Roller Wilson's a fantastic artist. It would be hard to say, you know, I have a feeling that so much is going digital now—the emphasis is on digital things and I know so very little about [that]. I started getting some of the programs—three-dimensional things on the computer—and I'm trying to learn this. I'm going back and forth in the studio, saying, "I'm going to do this," or "I'm going to build watercolors which I know I can do." And I'll do those things. I'll use the skills that I have and try to do what I want to do. And of course, I've used that philosophy all through my career, trying to develop something that is me.

Charles Pebworth was interviewed on June 12, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[3]
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[3]http://cnx.org/content/m16137/latest/28 Charles Pebworth.mp3

Chapter 31

Forrest Prince, b. 1935[1]

31.1 Found Things

I had a drug habit. I was in fear of my life. I couldn't get a job. And they were tearing down old houses for that freeway and I started going through them and getting doors. I'd refinish the doors and these were leaded glass doors—I'd taken some to antique dealers and just picking stuff up that nobody else wanted. I started putting mirrors behind the leaded glass and framing it and selling it. Then there was this fan—and through the grace of God I envisioned a piece out of it and put it together and worked on it for the longest time. I was actually walking to The Family Hand carrying it and hoping I could sell it to somebody and the police stopped me—narcotics officers—and asked me what I was doing and where I was going. I told them I was going to The Family Hand and they said they'd give me a ride. I said no thank you. The last thing I [wanted to] do was to turn up in a place like that with the police.

The Family Hand was where they had home-cooked meals and bands—local bands and great blues people would come in and play—but it was the first time I'd been around a bunch of people that wasn't just hardened criminals. Although they were doing drugs, they had a lot of love in their [hearts] and were trying to do the right thing.

So I took my piece over there, but the police picked me up anyway, and told me to get in the car. They asked me what I had. I was in the backseat holding it, and I said, "It's called A Tree Again." [The cop] says, "Well, it looks like a cross to me." He was Mexican. And I said, "It's just your Catholic upbringing that makes you think that." But when I examined it later, sure enough, the Force had had me make something that was a series of crosses, even though I called it A Tree Again it actually was a tree again. . .the cross they hung Jesus on. But the way the Force works I didn't even know what I was doing. I just followed where I was led.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16150/1.1/>.

A Tree Again

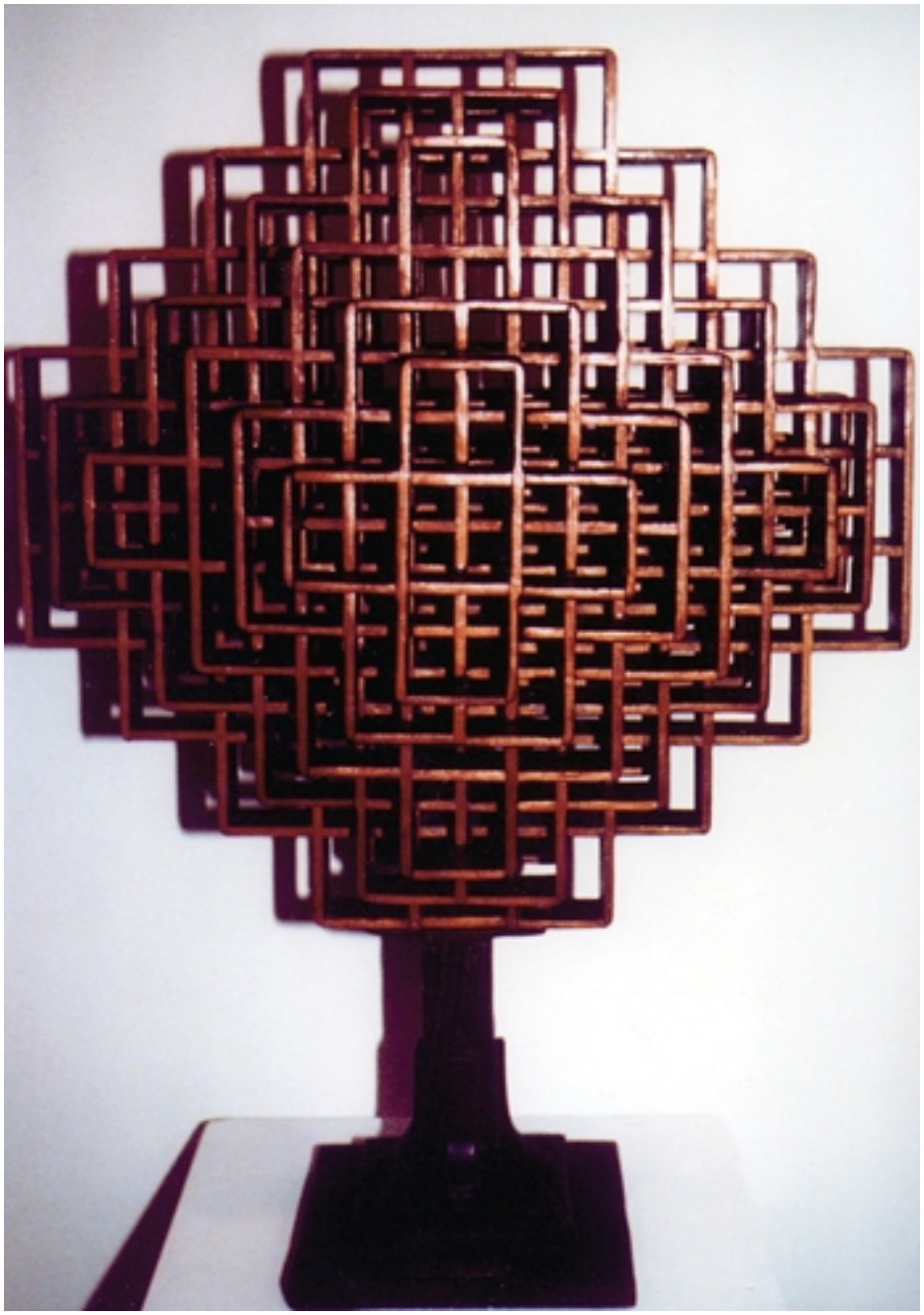

Figure 31.1: By Forrest Prince, 1970. Courtesy of the artist.

31.2 A Decided Artist

I was trying to sell the piece and a friend took me up to his accountant's office. My friend asked me how much I [wanted] for it, and I said $250. He said, "You'll never get it." Here I am trying to sell a cross to a Jew—shows how ignorant I was. Anyway, I went up to [the accountant's] office, showed him the piece and he jumped right on it. So I decided well, I must be an artist. Later I made a piece out of the ends of old wagon wheels, and it was shaped like a globe. It was up on an old machine base that I had picked up somewhere. And the title of it was Whatever Happened to the Friggin' World. I took it to an antique dealer on Westheimer one day and he sold it to the David Gallery, so I really knew that I must be an artist—so then I just got after it after that.

I made another piece—it took me about six months—of an old, large piece of wood I'd carved. It was called Geronimo—an American who fought for his country—and I took it to David Gallery. Actually I took it to the Art League of Houston and tried to have an invitational show there, but they wouldn't let me in. It ended up at the David Gallery and finally a cousin bought it. And I made a piece for George Fuermann out of old typesetting trays I'd found on a rundown farm somewhere and called it Houston Old and New. He donated it to the University of Houston and after that it was just one piece after another.

31.3 Angels Unaware

The first person to help me was George Fuermann. I was in trouble, and he gave me a place to stay in the country. George was the editorial director for the Houston Post. The way I met him, [I was] going into old houses looking for stuff to make art from and I found some material—old tax rolls—from the city of Houston and since he was a Houston historian it was very interesting [to him]. It had some of the early founders paying their taxes in pigs and cows and things like that. And he jumped right on that. Art-wise Lollie Jackson certainly helped me, and Lollie's daughter Elizabeth, and Laura...let's see, Bill Hill was very supportive—very supportive.

Figure 31.2: Forrest Prince working on "Geronimo, An American Who Fought For His Country," April 1970. Courtesy of the artist.

31.4 Rebirth

I was in so much trouble. I had nowhere to go and I was really in fear [for] my life, so I turned to God. There was no place else to go and since I had had such a horrible childhood (my mother had such a miserable life), the pressure got so much that I finally got on my knees and asked God to please forgive me and please save me. And that's when everything started happening. So after the other artwork got sold I was living in a little garage apartment without any front door—just a blanket over the door—and I was asking God why the world was so screwed up and why everybody was so messed up. Nothing was going right; everybody hated each other. Nobody got along. I started reading books, health books, and it all was making sense. Then somebody came by with [this book] that was the teachings of Jesus from the Dead Sea Scrolls, stating how the body was made to grow on natural food and that anything else would destroy you. So then I really got after it and started doing carrot juice and just eating raw foods...and started making crosses and small crosses. [How I decided to use the mirror] was just given to me. It was like everything was dark that I had done before, and the mirror gave light. It was the only medium that gave light. I'd seen all these great paintings with light in them but it just wasn't the same. So I started using the mirror and it just kept going. It was just very naïve, I guess that's the word, and it just kept getting better and better and my prices kept getting better and now I feel guilty I get so much for it.

Forrest Prince was interviewed on June 13, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2] .

31.5 An excerpt from Forrest's self-styled bio

31.5.1 1935

Born Houston, Texas

31.5.2 1941

Caught stealing. Mother moved to TB Hospital. Shipped out to relatives and then foster homes. Alcoholic father.

31.5.3 1946

Ran away from foster home

31.5.4 1950

Quit school—dishwasher, busboy, 1 juvenile arrest with 2-time ex-convict, released to father

31.5.5 1953-1956

USMC—honorable discharge—2 weeks in brig for leaving post, Sex Addict on speed

31.5.6 1960

Attempted suicide—overdosed on Sleeping Pills

31.5.7 1967

Club business—Sebastian's Club and Rembrandt's Paint Factory—topless joints

[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16150/latest/29 Forrest Prince.mp3

31.5.8 1969

Began seeking God and doing artwork

31.5.9 1973

Slipped—sex, drugs, and rock and roll

31.5.10 1976

One person Show—Contemporary Arts Museum Group Show
Group show—Houston Museum of Modern Art

31.5.11 1983

Founded "Praise God Foundation"

31.5.12 1984

Larry Pfeffer Grant $7,500.00 PRAISE GOD!

31.5.13 1988

Group show—Transco

31.5.14 1992

Museum of Fine Arts Commission for sculpture from Alison Greene (She wanted the large mirrored heart with love embedded in it, The deal fell through when the donor T.C. backed out saying I wanted too much and since the museum was not about to spend their cash on a local artist it was all over. But, Praise God! Bill Hill came by and snapped it right up. What an eye, what a guy.)

31.5.15 1997-2002

House sitter, animal companion, chauffeur, gofer, and artist in residence for Sweet Lollie Jackson

31.5.16 2001

Rejected—Lawndale Big Show

31.5.17 2002

Rejected—Lawndale Big Show

31.5.18 2003

I feel wonderful Praise God!

31.5.19 2004

Group show—Big Lawndale Show

31.5.20 2005

The Menil Collection acquired the Big Heart through a gift from Bill Hill, God bless him and Praise God!70 years old and I have never felt better in my life. Owe it all to a loving and merciful Creator and a raw food diet as taught by Jesus in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Chapter 32

Bert Samples, b. 1955[1]

32.1 Becoming Aware

I was born here in Houston. I don't have any recollection of the 50s. I was a little boy. The 60s are when I became aware of certain things about myself and my surroundings, family and friends and places. The 70s are when my awareness of becoming an artist was taking form.

My mother was a teacher when I was in junior high school, and every summer she would implore me to design her bulletin boards for the fall or the spring. And so that became a regular occurrence. (Of course, there was no charge for that.) She implored me to do her friends' bulletin boards as well. I just had a propensity [for] looking at a lot of art books, even at the grammar-school level, but I was fascinated with animals. As the years went on, I found myself staying in touch with nature as I just began to recall and recollect them in dreams and in drawings. And so I guess it was in an indirect way that I became an artist. But my formal training, I guess, came when I went to Texas Southern University.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16133/1.1/>.

The Saltgrass Trail

Figure 32.1: By Bert Samples. Charcoal. Courtesy of the artist.

32.2 Houston in the Sixties

There was connection and disassociation, you know. My everyday situation was getting up and going to school, but hearing these amazing stories over the news of the Civil Rights marching, assassinations, rioting, protesting. It was very turbulent. I do recall just briefly some local things about Carl Hampton[2] being killed off Dowling Street. And I briefly remember something about the Houston police raid on Texas Southern campus. At that time the campus was open where Wheeler Street ran straight through it and I remember driving with my parents through campus on the main thoroughfare.

One time I remember going to the museum, and it kind of spooked me. I remember seeing these paintings of all these dead people. So it almost felt like a haunted house. I wasn't spooked in the way I think haunted houses are, but it was kind of like a mausoleum because it was very quiet and still. Your energy was pretty reserved, you know, and you're mainly controlled by your teachers and stuff. We used to take these field trips to the museum and to the Houston Symphony. I remember talking to one of my friends going up the escalator when this man at the top slapped me on the backside of my head and screamed, "Pay attention!" That shocked me, and it made me upset. So I didn't like field trips after that one.

[2]People's Party II leader Carl Hampton was 21 years old when he was shot and killed by a Houston police officer on Dowling Street on July 26, 1971.

32.3 College Days

My mother was very determined that I get in [college] right after high school. Me and my cousin took the college entrance exam at the same time—went into the auditorium together and we came out—and my cousin said, "College is not for me. I'm going to start working for the telephone company." But for some reason I just started walking through the hallways of Hannah Hall on campus at Texas Southern University, and that's when I saw the murals that were done by the present (and at that time, former) students. I think I even remember seeing Harvey Johnson working on his mural right at that moment because there were several murals in progress. It was considered a great honor to be able to design a mural then paint it and complete it. So that was an extra incentive to continue something or be a part of something that was more than just receiving a diploma, a degree in art. That was a tradition that was pretty unique in a university setting, or any setting.

When I was coming to school, that was a really dark point in my life. I was kind of separating myself from my childhood friends and school friends. It was almost like walking out of one world into another world—and for the most part, I've never looked back since that time. I just hoped I passed that exam. That was the only thing that was on my mind. And my cousin was really frustrated with it and didn't think that strongly about it. I remember we walked directly over to my grandparents' house—they lived just around the block from TSU—and my cousin, he was quiet and just didn't feel confident. Is this what he wanted to do? Did it fit his needs and skills? I was kind of feeling the same way myself until I saw those murals. And I said, "I could do that."

Figure 32.2: Bert Samples, 1977. Courtesy of the artist.

32.4 Art and Music

I was primarily focused on music early-on, and I've gone back and forth with that since that time. I've been a percussionist mostly. Over time I lost the allure of becoming a musician when I got into college but it was reawakened shortly after that in a way. I started performing rituals to motivate or evoke this imagination to create something. The rituals may have had some connection with my Catholic upbringing—just noticing the rituals one goes through at Christmas and Easter, and observing the pageantry of that. I don't know that I've ever explored the deeper connection to that until I started creating my own kind of rituals when my mother passed away. That was a strong connection to see things on a different level. I felt like another door in my life had closed, or part of my world had closed or changed, and I was looking for that transition. So the mural I created at Texas Southern University chronicles the poignant moments in my life when I felt I was in touch with a deeper connection. It was part of me letting go of things and reaching out to other things. So that's one of the mysteries of life and the mysteries of art: we make connections, [such as] with my fascination with animals and then the explorations of myths and dreams...that's when it really started exploding.

It's taken an interesting turn. The past couple of years I've been listening and collecting and researching a lot of music in many parts of the world and being part of a collective of musicians and musicologists and artists that love music as well. When I was at TSU, Kermit Oliver talked about these precise compositions that he observed [in] many of the renaissance artists, and Dr. Biggers spoke of it as well. It was a way for me to start thinking on a very abstract level. You have a theme, an idea, but you leave that very open...you don't know until you get to the next step what will occur. I was just developing the discipline of creating this construct and seeing what would emerge from that, and music helped me move into that direction. So the connection with music is, once again, that kind of bridge going from an inner reality to an outer reality, but maintaining the connection. It was only after working, sort of studying with Kermit Oliver that I started developing that kind of visualization/meditation, and music became a strong part of that.

Bus Scene

Figure 32.3: By Bert. Samples, 1974. Oil and fabric. Courtesy of the artist.

32.5 Biggers' Influence

I respectfully remember him as Dr. Biggers, but also John Biggers—because I learned to appreciate him on many levels; respected and loved him for many reasons. In many ways he helped me become a man. I was pretty foolish about myself and unaware of what I could be, but just seeing who he was and the great respect that he commanded among his peers, his colleagues and students. . .it was pretty serious respect, but his dynamic presence wouldn't allow you to be too reserved or to step back.

If you were in his class, then you were engaged. You weren't just sitting back—you were into it. He set forth things for you to go for and challenged you all the time, and that's just clearly one of the people that I can say came into my life at the right moment. He was able to make these amazing connections to things that I could relate to—[things] that are universal, spiritual, social, political. He was a master storyteller, and he was a scholar, an etymologist, you know he could break things down to a level that you had an awareness or a connection with. You'd just walk away from class some days going, "Wow. You know that was some

serious deepness there."

A lot of people have that gift to make those connections and transitions, but when you're with a person, and you've studied with them a long period of time, you can see the true genius of it. It's not heresy. It's insight, and it's consistent, and it's just unmistakable. I could talk to him like I was just another country boy sitting on the fence, just talking about simple things. That's his gift: that he enabled me to feel that way about him and not be awed. That's what made him a strong mentor in my life. He made those connections I just had intuitions about—not really trusting them at that point, but allowing me to go full force into it without hesitation. [If I hadn't taken that walk through Hannah Hall that day] who knows what would have happened? I keep thinking of that every once in a while. I'm like, "I could be working for the phone company now."

32.6 Keeping Community

I hope that young current artists and artists in the future keep an understanding and appreciation of the community. I felt fortunate being around a number of artists as a student, as a contemporary colleague. To me that only happens if one sees something beyond [himself]. It's not just being a single creative force as an artist, but you connect to something that is based in the community—how you can make an effective impact on your community directly. It doesn't have to be done in prosperity and over a period of time to be appreciated later on; you can have an immediate effect. You don't have to be muttering in your studio months and weeks and years: "No one knows the creative genius I am and what I'm doing here, they don't appreciate me. . . ." Forget about that! Get out and do something—because to me that's your role as a creative person. Seize the moment. It's not always about you. It's about us.

Bert Samples was interviewed on October 30, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[3] .

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m16133/latest/30 Bert Samples.mp3

Chapter 33

Mildred Dixon Sherwood, b. 1914[1]

33.1 Learning How

I actually started studying at the Museum when I was a child, and then when I was grown up and I became serious I studied also at the Museum after I studied at Newcomb [Art School].[2] I studied with Frances Skinner and Robert Preusser,[3] and I used to go to Tasco, Mexico, and study at a little art school in the summer with Carlos Merida. And the more I painted, the more serious I became. Ruth Uhler was an inspiration and encouraged me a lot. I had a two-person show with Kelly Fearing[4] and I continued painting. I have a lot of memories of the people painting at that time: Henri Gadbois, Leila [McConnell], Robert Preusser, and oh—I can't remember them all! Lowell Collins...a lot of activity going on. And another fond memory of mine was Jimmy Ernst—Max Ernst's son—gave a course at the Museum and he was a marvelous teacher. I learned a lot from him. I think Miss Uhler got him because he just gave a six-week course.

I continued painting and then my husband and I spent a year in Europe. We spent half the time in Greece and I painted a lot of pictures of Greece...then we spent the next six months in London and I had a show in London of the paintings I did in Greece. I was mainly influenced by not the light so much, but the sun. I was always amused that they'd say so much in England about the light in Greece—and I think it's because it's so cloudy in England. So I was never impressed with the light because the light to me was not a lot different from Houston. The sun was what affected me most. I painted quite a few pictures with the sun in them, but I sold most of them in my [London] show. And then when I came home I had a show at Meredith Long's.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16166/1.1/>.

[2] The Newcomb Art School of Sophje Newcomb College, the women's college affiliated with Tulane University in New Orleans.

[3] Robert O. Preusser was an instructor at the museum school from 1946 to 1950. He was also Associate Curator of Education at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, from 1951 to 1953.

[4] Texas Artists, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Lee Malone, Director. February 6-27, 1955.

House on West Gray

Figure 33.1: By Mildred Dixon Sherwood. Courtesy of the artist.

33.2 Taking It Seriously

We lived in London in the 60s and I did a lot of drawings, but I've never shown [them]. They're sort of fantasy drawings. I always thought in a way, I wish I had been painting later because there's more interest in art now than there was then. There was just Bute Gallery and the Cushmans had a gallery, and it wasn't taken as seriously. Often I think back and feel like I wasn't taken as seriously as an artist because of the times as I would have been later. It was sort of like it was [thought of as] a hobby—it wasn't a hobby to me, but to people I knew, friends, they considered it, "Isn't it nice, you paint."

I had quite a bit of success. I won a lot of prizes and I sold paintings, but still it was just like, "Oh, how nice you can do that." Looking back I rather resent that. Of course, this was before the de Menils came and the Contemporary Arts Museum hadn't been started. I remember when it (CAM) was started and that was nice and helped a lot. They had sort of like a lending library. You'd put your paintings in it and people could rent them by the month or week, or whatever.

Ann Holmes, she was a very good critic—she knew what she was doing. But it just doesn't seem to me looking back that it was taken seriously or that there was that much interest. Meredith started—he may have started in the late 60s—and then the de Menils. I think that they helped. They were very concerned

with controlling the arts scene in Houston, but they probably stirred it up and helped in the long run, but there was a little feeling about it. You know, they wanted to run the Museum of Fine Arts and they wanted to run St. Thomas and all of them, and then they finally found the right thing—the museum that they founded—but they stirred things up, there's no question, and they brought good people here. I don't think Houston was ready for some of them, but they brought them here anyway.

Figure 33.2: Mildred Dixon Sherwood. Courtesy of the artist.

33.3 Subject Matter

Painting to me is seeing, feeling and discovering the life that exists within all things. I paint from memory, usually from an emotional reaction to something I've seen or felt, trying always to combine the visual with the imaginary world of fantasy and dreams. In painting this way it is easier to simplify and eliminate the unimportant and to emphasize the elements that convey the mood and the idea I wish to express. I cannot say what particular thing has influenced me in painting. It's been more of a period of drawing and seeing and seeking in all directions. The more I paint, the more aware I become of the spiritual forces in all of life, and joy and sorrow.

33.4 Institutions

I remember being in one of the early Contemporary Arts Museum exhibits because they did one that the artists painted pictures of other artists. I painted a picture of Henri Gadbois, and Henri painted a picture of me. I was active in the Contemporary Arts Association. I didn't have any official title; I was not in an official capacity, but I was active. As I said, I showed in exhibits they had and I was one of the artists in the program they had where you could borrow or rent pictures—but I never had any official capacity.

Lee Malone was director at the Museum of Fine Arts [when I had my two-person show in February of 1955]. He was a very nice man. He was a man who would liked to have been a painter, he told me, he was sorry he gave it up. I liked him personally. Well of course, Mr. Chillman was the first [director]; Miss Uhler and Mr. Chillman were the two that I was most fond of because I knew them the best.

Up in the Air

Figure 33.3: By Mildred Dixon Sherwood. Courtesy of the artist.

33.5 A Dry Spell

[It was in the 70s] more or less that I had a blank and I hadn't been able to do any painting or drawing or anything. It was very difficult. I don't understand, because Preusser used to say that [he'd] never seen anyone who could paint faster. I couldn't finish one painting that I didn't have another one in my mind. And I don't know what happened. I painted for a while in the 70s and I painted a little in the 80s, too. But I was not satisfied with my paintings, and I looked at some of them recently—they're in storage—and I realize now I was trying to get something I didn't get and I think I became discouraged. And then my husband died and I sold my house and I moved, and I don't have a studio anymore, and that may have something to do with it.

I had a—I guess I still do, in a way—a photographic memory, so it was not difficult for me to paint at all. If I saw something that made an impression on me, I had a picture in my mind that changed as it was worked on. And I spent a lot of time in Guatemala and Mexico; I painted a lot of things. In fact, some of my best things were those pictures. But [later] I didn't like what I was painting. That was very discouraging to me. I think if I had kept on I would have gotten over it. As I said, looking at the pictures I painted in that period that are in storage now, I can see that I was trying to get somewhere and then I got discouraged. And then moving and not having anyplace to paint anymore...and of course, as you get older you don't have the energy you had before. It's a mess to paint!

33.6 A Footnote to Young Artists

Try to see it your own way. I'm not the intellectual type of painter—I'm more of an emotional painter, so obviously, paint what really means something to you. I don't know if anyone should give anybody else advice because everybody's a little different and works in a different way, trying to express a different thing. And it's just as well. Just paint what you want to.

Mildred Dixon Sherwood was interviewed on June 9, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[5] .

[5]http://cnx.org/content/m16166/latest/31 Mildred Dixon Sherwood.mp3

Chapter 34

Carroll Harris Simms, b. 1924[1]

34.1 September, 1950

I came to Houston in September of 1950 looking for a job. And I got a job at Texas [Southern University] teaching sculpture and ceramics. John Biggers was here when I came, but I met John Biggers before coming [to Houston], which was quite a surprise.

I spent my first year of college in Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, and that is where I met John Biggers first. There was a naval base at Hampton, and Biggers was working on his art degree at Hampton, but he got inducted into the Navy. So his teacher, Dr. Viktor Lowenfeld, convinced the naval commander not to ship him out but to induct him at the naval base at Hampton so he could continue to work on his degree in art. So when I would go to paint, Biggers would come over into the art center and paint too. So this is how I met Biggers.

[After graduating from Hampton] one of the benefactors of the Toledo Museum gave me a full scholarship to the Cranbrook Art Academy. And I graduated from Cranbrook in May of 1950. A teacher of mine at Cranbrook [who] had taught sculpture at Rice University and done sculpture in Houston said, "What are you going to do for a job?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well, I've heard of a new school, a small university which is for Negroes." (They weren't saying "black" back then.) He says, "Would you go there if you could get a job?" I said, "Sure, I'd go anywhere."

He helped me write a letter to the art department saying, "I can teach sculpture—do you need a sculpture teacher?" And the letter came back, "Yeah, we need a sculpture teacher, but we need a man who can teach ceramics, too." Cranbrook had at that time a five-week summer term, and [my teacher] said, "Simms, there's this nice lady who's sending you there for nothing so we can write that man in Texas and say, 'Yeah, you can teach ceramics."' So I wrote whoever was the head of the art department and he answered me back that I could teach. And I had ceramics in my transcripts. That's how I got here.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16135/1.1/>.

Local 872 Longshoreman Mural Study

Figure 34.1: Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

34.2 Bayou City in the Fifties

Houston was a village. You could stand on Wheeler Avenue and look up to Sears and Roebuck, but it's all changed now. The names of the streets weren't even on a post so you could see where you were going. When I came here in '50 it was still that way. Like if someone would say, "Come around to my house," they would just [tell you to go] until the end of the street and come around and make a U-turn—this is Rosedale, for example—and that's where I live. And when I'd get up there I'd turn and look and say, "There ain't no Rosedale around here." And they'd say, "Well, you have to look at the gulley." I'd say, "The gulley? Are you crazy? What gulley?" They'd say, "Look down, Simms, where the water runs into the sewer." And sure enough, there'd be the name of the street in little blue and white ceramic tiles! So that's the way it was.

African Queen Mother

Figure 34.2: By Carroll Simms, 1969. At TSU in front of MLK Center, commissioned by Jane Blaffer Owen. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

34.3 Angels and Benefactors

[The art department] was half as big as a table. But Mrs. Susan McAshan along with Mrs. Jane Blaffer Owen—they were benefactors to TSU's art department. Mrs. McAshan, she hosted the Women's International Garden Club one year, and her daddy was the one responsible for our first [university] president Dr. R. O'Hare Lanier getting an ambassadorship to Monrovia, Liberia. So she kept up with our progress. When she discovered there was a man teaching ceramics, she said, "I'm going to bring the Garden Club women out there and let them see his ceramics; see what he's teaching the youngsters." So she called Dr. Lanier, and he called me on the phone and said, "Simms, Mrs. McAshan is coming out and bringing these women to see what you're doing."

Well, I wasn't doing anything but hand-built coil pieces and things. And I had gone to Cranbrook that five weeks and I did three pots on the potter's wheel. The tallest one was about nine inches, down to about four, or something like that. But I saved them and brought them with me. And I had a little collapsible table that looked like a card table. So I set all these little hand-built pots up that the youngsters had done, and I put mine with theirs and all these women came down on us. They just had a to-do over all these lovely little coil things, little pinch vessels—and they wanted to buy the wheel-thrown things and I told them I couldn't sell them. I told them I hoped one day we'd have a proper kiln and a potter's wheel and could do these kinds of things. So everybody left, and about a half hour later a student from across the street—not one of mine—came over and said, "There's a white woman over there in the parking lot told me to come over here and look for Mr. Simms and tell him to come across there and she wants to see him for a few minutes." So I said okay, and walked over there.

She said, "Mr. Simms," then she looked down and opened her pocketbook. She said, "Here's a check, my check for $100. You give this to Dr. Lanier and tell him that this is my promise to get a kiln and that your students will have everything they need to work with." I smiled and said thank you, and she disappeared in her little car. She didn't dress like she was a millionaire. She didn't drive a car like she was a millionaire. But when she got out of sight I just stood there and looked. And I'm going to say this—I don't care how it sounds: I said, "That white woman, she ain't going to do nothing about that. She was just embarrassed about what she saw."

The next morning I went over there to Dr. Lanier's office and I told him the story that Mrs. McAshan made her visit with her group and said for me to give you her check for $100, and she was going to see to it that the people in my class would have a kiln and everything they needed to do their pottery. Sure enough, it wasn't two weeks later before he called me one morning and said, "Simms, Mrs. McAshan called me this morning and told me to tell you to get a kiln and get the same kind of potter's wheel they use at Cranbrook, and get everything you need for your students to make pottery." She was an angel. She was a real angel on that one.

34.4 What Miss Mary Said

A neighbor I remember as a child lived diagonal across the street from us when I must have been seven or eight years old. It was during the great depression and it was hard. Sometimes we didn't really know where the next meal was coming from. And Miss Mary Price—there were maybe six old women over her age, the elders you know—saying, "I can't do this." Miss Mary Price had sort of a nasal sound and they all did snuff in those days. She'd fold her arms and grab back at one leg and then put the other foot forward and say, "Well, I just can't say 'can't' like ya'll—because I got all these mouths to feed," pointing her head toward her children. "I got to feed them, and I can't say 'can't' 'cause 'can't' is dead."

I never forgot that, and when I started teaching, each time I had a new problem about how to throw clay on the potter's wheel and center it and all that, [my students] would say, "I can't do that." Well, throwing clay on a potter's wheel is mysterious if you've never done it. And it really is annoying until you get the hang of it because you really want to experience that magic in your head and your hands that will make you center that clay and then open it and bring that pot up—and then when you get that you want, to say, "Hallelujah!" But when a student would say, "I can't do that," I'd tell them the story. I'd tell them what

Miss Mary said. “You can’t say ‘can’t.”’

Figure 34.3: Carroll Simms, 1967. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

34.5 Changes in the City

I think Houston has outgrown its beautiful humanity of the old city. Nobody has time to be human and as warm as they used to be. That's really my true feeling. In the early period there was a community feeling. This is a period where everybody is struggling to exist. They don't have time to be a community anymore. I feel like that. Houston is a boom city, it's no longer a post-World War II city. When it was a community city it thought it had to go to New York to feel like it was a city, but now New York comes here, because [now] New York is tired and arthritic.

Figure 34.4: Carroll Simms with Sally Reynolds. Photo by Earlie Hudnall. Courtesy of Earlie Hudnall.

34.6 Remembering Artistic Peers

I think Gertrude Barnstone's work is speaking of her also, because looking at her work is like looking at flowers. Each time I look at a piece of her sculpture it's like looking at a flower. When you look at Miss Barnstone's sculpture—the way she handles glass—it's only a medium, but aesthetically it becomes poetically a creative experience that is natural [enough] to be placed among the flowers in the rainforest. It could have been taken from the rainforest and put in the environment in which we live. We wake up in the morning and it's there. We repose and at night it's there, and we wake up and it's still in blossom, just like the flowers in our garden are there. Her sculpture in glass breathes and it has permanence keeping us fresh.

John Biggers is a spokesman, the same as I. We both tell of the experience of arriving in a new world. And he does it in a sense that is more literal than me. But we both tell of being in a new world from Africa by being in the world away from Africa. My work, it's symbolic. In a sense his work is literally symbolic.

Carroll Harris Simms was interviewed on June 20, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2] .

[2]http://cnx.org/content/m16135/latest/32 Carroll Harris Simms.mp3

Chapter 35

Earl Staley, b. 1938[1]

35.1 Preparation

I knew I was artistically inclined because Mother kept pushing me in that direction. I knew I couldn't do sports because of my eyes. So I was into Boy Scouts and Indian lore as a boy in Chicago. Then I got to college in Bloomington, Illinois—Illinois Wesleyan. And I saw some people who looked like they were rather interesting and said, "Who are they?" And somebody said, "Well, they're the art students." I went over there. I said, "I'm not going to be a businessman. I'm sorry, Dad, I can't do this. I cannot take over your business." So I became an artist.

My teachers in school simply said, "There's a painting. There's your canvas. Paint on it." Or, "There's somebody to draw. Draw." I recall no teaching of anything but attitude. We were all abstract expressionists and such. But in terms of teaching rules and how to do it, nobody taught me anything. I had to teach myself a long time later.

For my graduate degree, I applied and ended up going to the University of Arkansas, which had an allegedly progressive art program. But I felt really isolated being in Fayetteville. Most of these people had never been to a museum. Luckily, from there I got a job in St. Louis at Washington University, which was a three-year appointment. It got me started; it got me back into a big city which had a great museum. I had my first show there in a gallery, and this was nice. Then they let me go and I got to Rice.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16143/1.1/>.

Teepee and Winged Skull

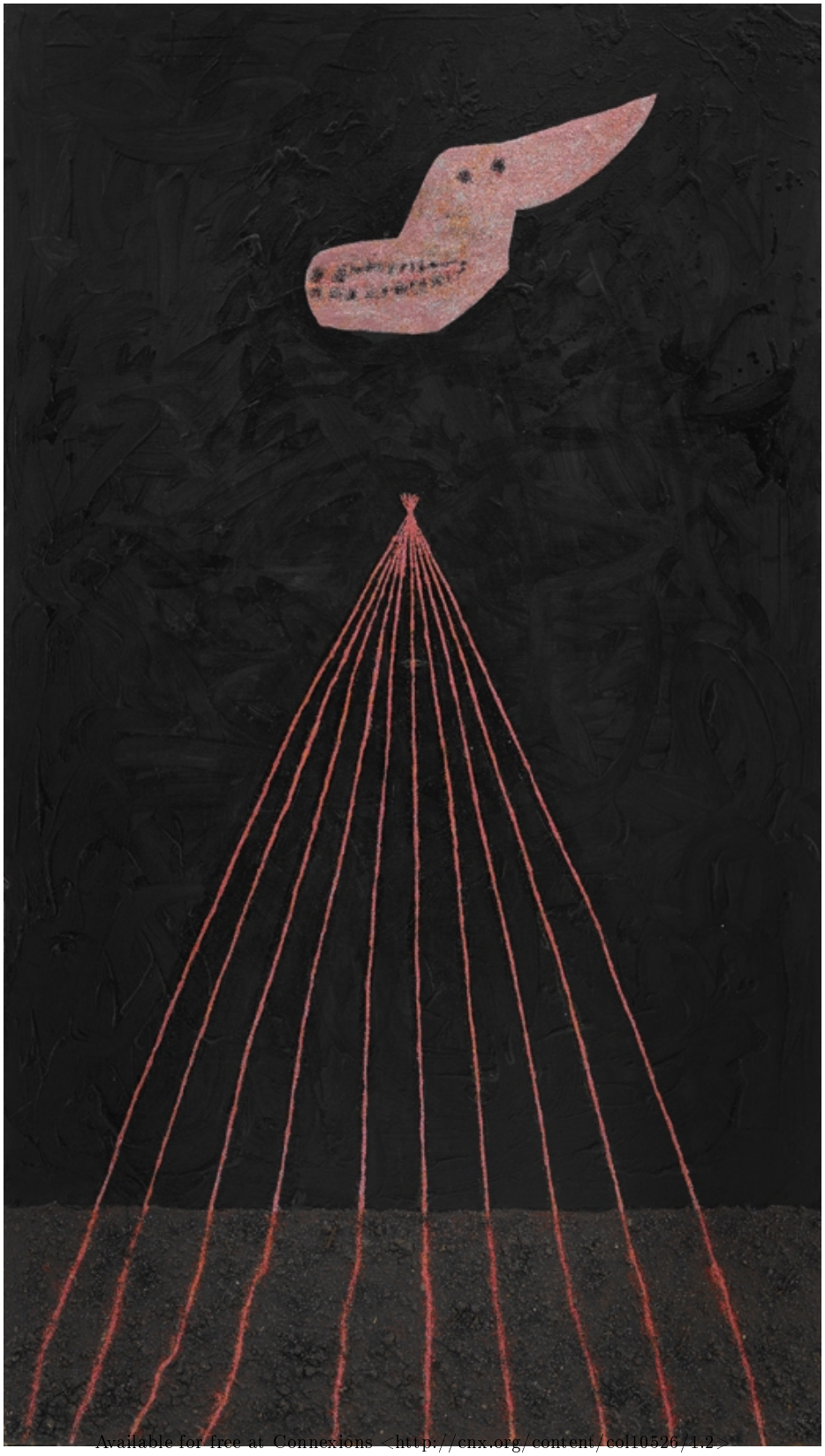

Figure 35.1: 1975. Oil and mixed media on canvas. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of the artist.

35.2 New in Town

I got to Houston in 1966 with a job at Rice University, in the beginning stages of Rice's art program. John O'Neill hired me to teach primarily printmaking and then drawing to architecture students. I was fortunate enough to get here in '66, which seemed like the very beginning of the art world here although it wasn't, really—there wasn't that many of us here, and I was the youngest one. So I was at Rice for three years until the de Menils moved in.

Rice didn't like me because I was too outrageous for them. I was told that if you get out of line at Rice you will not last long, and I offended them. I was a young man. I was arrogant. I really pissed them off. John O'Neill had the great ability to hire people that he immediately didn't like. He didn't like me right away, and he didn't like [Bob] Camblin and after that, Joe Tate. John—he was quite a character. He hired Joe Tate to replace me, and of course, Tate was worse than me.

Camblin was much more gregarious than me and we started hanging out and meeting more people. Man, we had a ball. And after all that, we kept working together, of course. And luckily I didn't have to leave [Houston]. I moved from Rice to [University of] St. Thomas and built a studio program with Jack Boynton and Pat Colville beginning in 1969.

35.3 A Welcoming Place

Houston in the mid-1960s was welcoming. Really wonderful. I mean, the first night I was here I went to an art gallery—Kiko Gallery—and it was all these fancy people walking around. They were happy to see me. I came out of St. Louis which was just a really big city which had a lot of history behind it, and they really didn't have anything to do with the arts. But here people were at least interested in it. They were supportive, although they didn't buy much. It was a lot of fun. There were art galleries all over. David Gallery was in operation. Kiko. Louisiana Gallery was where I had my first show within a year or so. So there was a great interest and not many artists, just a sense of opportunity and interest in what we did.

The Contemporary Arts Association museum was still on South Main. It was going and there was always something happening. And you could get to the people. You know there were collectors then and they were all very interested in us and a few artists that I met slowly. They were always very fun. There weren't a lot of them.

35.4 New Beginning at St. Thomas

[When we arrived] at St. Thomas there wasn't anything there other than a leftover art history program. There was no studio. But the priests embraced the idea of a studio program. We were all part-time, and this was [during] the Vietnam War, so they were overwhelmed with males. Suddenly the studio program was very popular. So within the half-year, they needed a full-time person and Jack didn't want to be full time because he wanted to be an artist. Pat Colville didn't want to do it. So I did. Because I was teaching part-time at St. Thomas and I was also teaching part-time at the community college in Galveston—driving back and forth. So they offered me a full-time job, and they also offered me the chairmanship. In my late 20s, I was suddenly a department chairman at this fast-growing art program which, because Jack and Pat and I worked together, we had no problems with in terms of agreement. At the high point, we had over 110 majors.

Four years later, they built a new library, and the old library was vacant so they gave us the library. Now it's no longer [there], but it was the art department with huge galleries. So we had this big space with an art gallery, and we had this dump called "the annex," which was sculpture and ceramics. So it was a very good time. Some of my best students are still around, working either as artists or in one of the art-related fields.

35.5 The Gallery Scene

I met Joan Crystal at the Louisiana Gallery—had a good friendship with Joan. She showed my early work there. Her gallery was beautiful. They had Pre-Columbian art all over because she was a major source of Pre-Columbian; she had Calder on the wall, Joseph Cornell works on paper, Milton Avery. This was major stuff then. I was with Joan, oh gosh—two or three years. And she had other Houston artists. I enjoyed that, although sales were bad.

I met Kathryn Swenson, and she had New Arts Gallery. I remember visiting her during those early years. There was an active community and there were a lot of galleries. There were many more than were ever in St. Louis. And those were the great years of the Diane David Gallery. Diane's gallery was figurative, and very weirdly figurative. She liked the strange figures. I was a bit too outrageous for her, or funky, or maybe it wasn't accomplished enough, which is a good way of saying it. I've learned that what I thought was cutting edge was sort of dull.

My show was the last show at David Gallery. Then I was without for a couple of years, but Fredericka Hunter was opening up Contract Graphics on Morningside. She was out of Rice and so was I, so we'd see each other, hang around and talk. Then probably around '73 or '74 they opened up the Texas Gallery. I hung around there and finally said, "Would you be interested in giving me a show?" And they said they were thinking of that, too. So I went to Texas Gallery for a number of years. They had a storefront on Bissonnet near Karl Kilian's bookstore and they were showing outrageous stuff. She had beautiful California shows and then she had those New Yorkers in there, which was really nice. I was her token Texan. But I'm sure what really got me going on anything career-wise was Jim [Harithas] at the [Contemporary Arts] Museum.

35.6 A Quiet Catalyst

Jim Harithas came in the early 70s. He came in and said, "No—you guys are good, too. You guys are doing quality work here. There's great work being done and you should step up to the plate and do it." He was a tremendous catalyst. Particularly for myself, and then Surls and John Alexander. He made sure people saw the work and was always there hanging out with us and supportive. He was a great man. Whatever his faults were, God bless him, he did it.

He was such a great influence on all the arts in Houston, and he had his friends coming in. He'd bring in Norman Bluhm and younger artists. I was never a member of his posse; I was standoffish, too aloof for that. But these were great influences that he brought in.

35.7 Transitions

Bob Camblin and I were sharing a studio together off of Montrose near Richmond. We had a studio together, then Joe Tate [my replacement at Rice] showed up and he had a part of the studio. Then we rented a big place down the street from St. Thomas on Sul Ross, and we took it over as a collaborative studio. We were hanging out there and conversing and talking constantly. We taught ourselves. Camblin actually taught me how to paint. He taught me the rules by watching him, and he and Joe and I worked together on projects and ideas and shows at St. Thomas, and whatever happened there.

Of course, our marriages broke up within a few years and I had to leave that group for survival. So I moved out into my own studio—I rented the bottom floor of a building and eventually in the next couple of years while I was getting a divorce I had the whole building. It was there I began to do my myths, my story-making, about my life. I said to myself I wasn't going to do art anymore, I was simply going to tell stories in the most dramatic or outrageous way. Then I started just letting it go on canvas, and I had a lot of anguish to deal with at that time that all came out on these very large canvases.

A woman [from the Whitney Museum] named Heidi Solomon showed up in Houston and somehow she had heard about me either through Fredericka Hunter or Jim Harithas. She came to the studio and saw the works I was doing, then she took the word back to the Whitney. That's when the Whitney chose me to be

in the 1974 Biennial. I remember the day I heard about it...it was very exciting and I had nobody to tell. I had lost my wife and I had left Camblin and Tate, and I couldn't tell them. I was just like, "I'm in the Whitney. Whoa." Now, the Whitney is a career-maker. It wasn't the big deal then that it is now. I know the Whitney showed up at my door about the year I was getting a divorce, the lowest period. Harithas showed up. All of this showed up.

Figure 35.2: Rice Art Department, 1955. Left to right: Sandy Haven, David Parsons, Katherine Brown, John O'Neill, Early Staley, and James H. Chillman, Jr. Courtesy of The Menil Collection.

35.8 Advice to the Next Generation

If you have to do [art], if you absolutely have to do it—do it. But my idea is that you shouldn't get involved in it because you will only be discouraged constantly. I've been teaching more or less 40 years. I did have a ten-year span of time when I wasn't teaching full-time, but I've been back at it now for 15 years at a community college. For anybody who is an art major, 99.9% will not go on past school, either

undergraduate or graduate school, because you can't make a living at it. I say artists should be discouraged at all costs because the consequences are that you will end up at 50 [without] anything to fall back on. Of all the students I have had, I only know of four or five or six that are still practicing artists.

I was told to be a success in this you have to be very good, but you also have to be very lucky and very crafty. You have to know how to work the crowd. You have to go out and hustle your work. So if you're not a good hustler, if you're not a people person [who can] sell what you do, it's not going to happen. But if there's a spark in you that demands that you pick up a brush, if that's you, stay in it. Do it. I do this to amuse myself. If it doesn't amuse me, I ain't going to do it. I'll amuse myself so long with this, and then I'll do something else.

I remember when I was in graduate school in Arkansas I was up there in my studio, painting away, and I knew there were four or five other graduate students, but they weren't in there with me painting. So about the second week of school I walked over and there they were, in the faculty lounge having coffee. They were hanging out. What am I doing? I'm painting pictures. Crazy. I'm so tickled to death to be here just to be able to paint a picture...and they were over there having coffee.

So I never did like to schmooze or hang out. I'd rather be in the studio painting because that's who I am. Consequently, here I am.

Earl Staley was interviewed on October 6, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2] .

[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16143/latest/33 Earl Staley.mp3

Chapter 36

Richard Stout, b. 1934[1]

36.1 Getting Started

I was born [in Beaumont, Texas] at the height of the depression. We survived. My older brother was given piano lessons; I was given violin lessons. Then at the age of 12 I was given formal art lessons in classical drawing—it was a small group of us. I learned how to render in charcoal. Right away I became very involved in the new Beaumont Museum. Through the city schools I had very good art teachers; I entered several scholastic art awards contests each year and won lots of awards. Then in my junior year in high school my aunts in Cincinnati had me come up to the Cincinnati Art Academy for summer classes, and the following summer—the summer after I graduated from high school—I also went to the Cincinnati Art Academy. That fall I went to the Art Institute of Chicago on full scholarship, and stayed on scholarship the entire four years I was there.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16168/1.1/>.

Cave

Figure 36.1: By Richard Stout, 1957. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

36.2 Doing Reconnaissance

I didn't know where I was going to go after school so I arranged to get a Greyhound bus ticket that would allow me to go to several cities working my way back to Houston, and on to Beaumont. I didn't want to consider moving to the west coast or the south. The west coast seemed to be too far away for me intellectually, and the south—I felt nothing would happen there for a very long time.

I knew New York from many trips to New York as a student. I spent time in Boston and Washington and

Baltimore and Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Cincinnati. I spent time in Milwaukee, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Kansas City, Dallas, and finally Houston—in each of these places checking out the Chamber of Commerce to find out what the per capita tax was, what cost of living was, what new art things that were happening, and [considering] whether it would be a comfortable place to be and what the people were like. And I decided I'd do this for Houston, too, even though it's awfully close to home. I found that Houston was by far the most interesting of the places I'd been.

I went back to Beaumont, had a garage sale of paintings and the like, and raised $400 and moved to Houston with one name that had been given to me of someone who might introduce me around and that was Preston Frazier. He put me up in his warehouse building.

36.3 Fast Friends

Henri and Leila Gadbois had a party the next night at their house on Bingle Road. It was a house built by Robert Preusser, the painter who had just left Houston for MIT—an important abstract painter in Houston from the 30s and 40s. At that party I met about 30 people who would be very close friends through the next several years, including Herb and Ava Jean Mears and Polly and Lee Marsters—a great list of people who were artists and collectors, and these were to be my closest friends for a long period of time. Many still are. That was in November of 1957.

I quickly found a small apartment on the 1200 block of Bissonnet to rent—a garage apartment. It was so right in the middle of "swell" Houston; I could climb my steps to my apartment and look down and see all the swells of Houston having their martinis on silver [trays] in the backyard—very impressive. You wouldn't see anything like that in Chicago—not in the part of Chicago that I lived in.

I got a job selling books at Foley's, downtown. I had a bicycle so I went everywhere for the first six to eight months on a bicycle. Lowell Collins—thanks to Ruth Uhler at the Houston Museum—hired me that next summer, the summer of '58, to start teaching at the Museum school, which I did with increasing numbers of classes so I was able to retire from selling books by the next year, the spring of '59.

Figure 36.2: Richard Stout. Portrait from The Museum School of Art, Houston, 1959-1960 catalog. Photo by Maurice Miller. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

36.4 Galleries and Shows

I had my first show in Houston at the Cushman Gallery—I believe it was on Whitney Street. I was with it briefly and was in a group show there, then I moved to Kathryn Swenson's New Arts Gallery a little bit

later, and had a show with Kathryn in 1959. The gallery had an address on Brazos...it was the swellest gallery in Texas by far. It was a coach house for a mansion that had been destroyed, with architectural offices below. On the extension of the coach house were the drawing rooms—big rooms above with a sloped ceiling and north-facing windows. Next to that was their—Bailey and Kathryn Swenson's—residential tower: a living room and dine-in kitchen on the first floor; bedroom and bath on the second floor; then a roof garden [accessed] by a circular staircase.

It was a wonderful place to have shows. Guy Johnson showed there, Jack Boynton, Jim Love, Walter Kuhlman, a lot of Jermayne MacAgy's California people showed there; it was a branch for a while of the Andre Emmerich Gallery in New York that showed lots of Pre-Columbian. I guess one of her last exhibitions at that gallery was a Dorothy Hood drawing show, maybe 1960 or '61. I left the gallery in '61.

The relationship between Kathryn Swenson and Jermayne MacAgy was interesting in that Kathryn—who had been involved with the Contemporary Arts Museum before—finally found a visual mentor that separated her from the crowd. There was at this time (the late 50s) some considerable anger between some of my friends—the Mears, the Gadbois, the Marsters—and a number of people who were supporters of Jermayne MacAgy who referred to the older group as being "burlappers." That's because they would cover the walls in the institution amateurishly—this was all put down, of course—so they could hang up pictures and not make holes in the walls. We've always forgot that the Contemporary Arts Museum was a very successful volunteer organization and had extraordinarily good and successful exhibitions in the beginning with catalogs, and then when John and Dominique de Menil hired Jermayne MacAgy—a brilliant woman—a lot of people felt cut out, even though MacAgy would hire various artists and board members to do exhibitions. The older group felt cut out, so they were very antagonistic towards Jermayne MacAgy and everything she did. This made it a little difficult for me in the beginning, only because I didn't know how to sort of like step on these two quaking boats. One of the things that characterizes my entire time in Houston is that I have never been part of a clique.

36.5 On Teaching and Travel

I continued teaching at the Museum school and met Anne Winkler in the spring of 1964. Meredith Long by that time was in his new building on San Felipe, and I was painting. I was making lots of trips to Mexico at this time; a lot of my paintings for this period responded to the mystical, mythical quality of the Mexican landscape as I saw it because landscape has always been a factor in my work to a certain degree.

I had three or four dates with Anne and then I went away to Europe for four months. I borrowed money to go to Europe and I had some contacts there, so I was able to stay with people lots of places. And I took James Chillman's advice to his students that if you go to Europe [you should] spend half your time in Italy. And if you go to Europe for one day, spend your morning in Rome. So I spent two months out of that four months in Italy, three weeks in Florence and three weeks in Rome, and it was great. I came back and Anne in the meantime had moved nearby and we started seeing each other and within the year we were married.

When I realized I was going to get married I went to the University of Houston and asked Dr. Peter Guenther if there might be a position out there and he said, "Well, I could take you part-time now and when you get your masters we will hire you full-time." This was sort of a gentleman's agreement: I like you; we'll do this; it's fine. It doesn't work that way anymore. Anyway, I taught freshman drawing and painting and I had interesting students, right from the very beginning—many of whom I still see. That first year I was still at the Museum school because Lowell Collins had quit so I was running it for a year or two years. Ruth Uhler asked me to do it, and of course I did.

Then I had to start working on my masters to get my job nailed down with University of Houston, and so teaching 18 hours at U of H and taking 18 hours at University of Texas I commuted two and sometimes three times a week to Austin. On a few occasions I would take Guenther with me, because he was working on his doctorate at the same time, and on a few occasions would stop by and visit Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears in Navasota; Kathleen had been my art history teacher at the Art Institute of Chicago—a brilliant painter and then a wonderful teacher who was the principal person in these areas at the Art Institute of Chicago from the late 20s until her retirement in the mid-60s. I was hired full-time by the University in

1968.

I became aware but not absolutely involved with lots of things that were happening in the art world in Houston by virtue of the fact that I was busy and I couldn't get away to the normal watering holes that other people could get to. Louisiana Gallery was continuing—it was moved to Kipling Street, I believe. Out west, Kathryn had re-opened the New Arts in an old house on Audubon and there she showed various people. The David Gallery was brilliant—it was run by someone who was very interested in a new way of thinking about visual arts and who opened her arms to possible wonderful things—and wonderful things did happen at the David Gallery. And a building designed by Charles Tapley on San Felipe just a few blocks east of Meredith Long, it was probably the most important scene in Houston at that time.

36.6 Where in Texas?

I think the thing that catapulted Houston was when we all realized that we didn't have to take five flights to get out of Texas—that we could actually get on a jet at Hobby, even, and get to New York on just one flight instead of having to go to New Orleans on a crop plane or bus or something. Houston was beginning to surface a bit more in the national consciousness in the art world.

I recall in 1960 I had friends come down from Chicago and I had to pick them up at the train in Dallas and then drive on to Houston. We were about 40 miles outside Dallas coming down the highway and they said, "How long is it going to be before we're in Houston?" When I said about five hours, they couldn't believe it. "Well where is Houston?" they wanted to know. I said, "Haven't you ever looked on a map?" They thought it was close to Dallas because they'd heard about Dallas because of Neiman Marcus. So we finally got here and they loved it, and of course it's very different. I would visit with friends in those early years in New York and in Chicago—artist friends—and they would say, "You live in Texas? Where in Texas?"

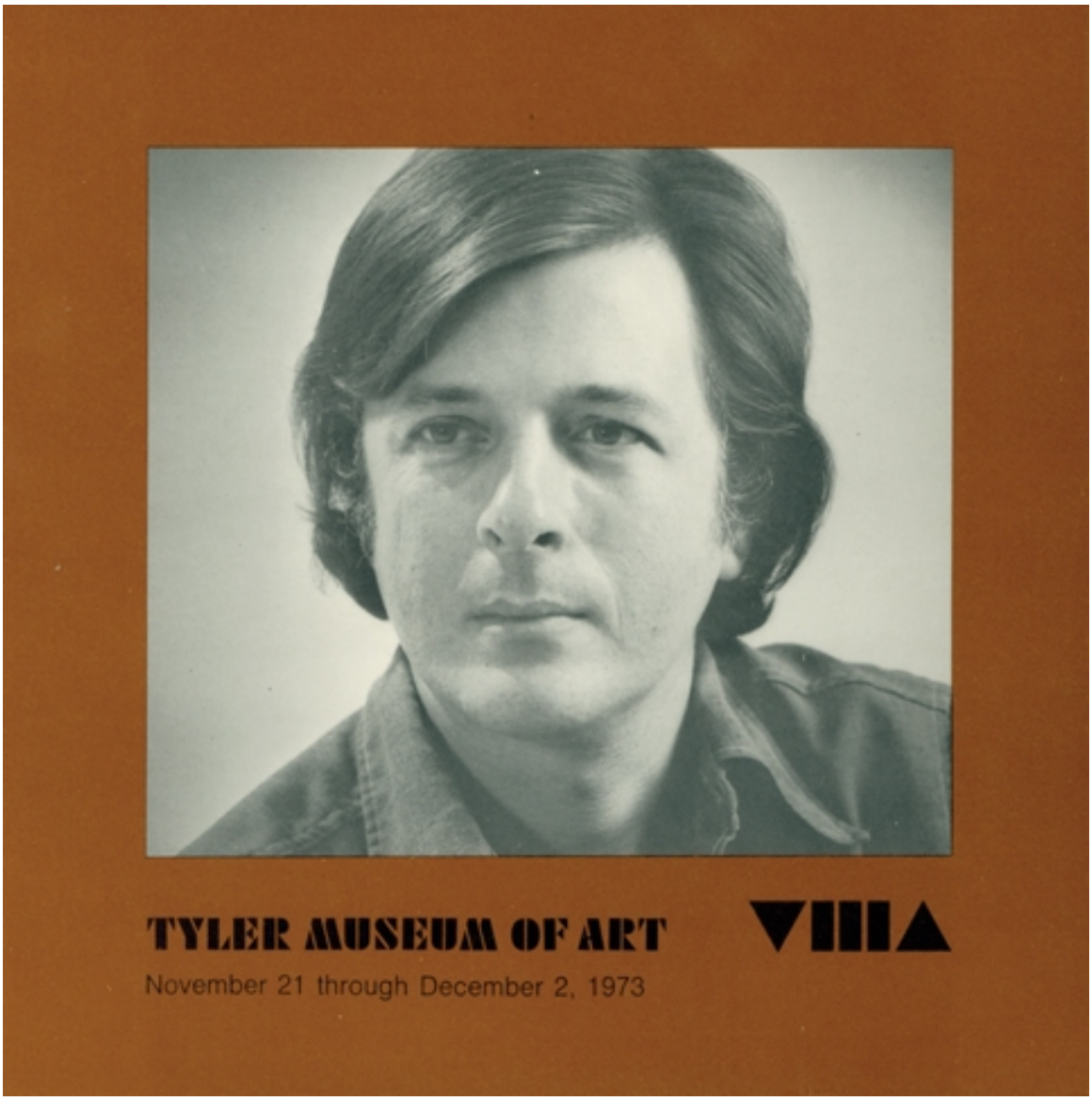

Figure 36.3: Richard Stout, portrait from the Tyler Museum of Art catalog, 1973. Courtesy of the Tyler Museum of Art.

36.7 Artists and Collectors

By the time I got [to Houston] anyone could come and do anything, but there was a real attention, at least in my circle, for those things that were unique. When we saw Forrest Bess, we knew this was unique. And if I had known you could have bought a Forrest Bess painting then for $15 I would have bought 20. I thought they were like $200 and $300 and I couldn't pull that off—but that's like everything else: You need to ask. I was always the shy one—I wouldn't ask. I could have ordered two plates less of oysters and had a Forrest

Bess hanging on my wall right now, which would be thrilling.

All of that tied together with John and Dominique de Menil, what was happening at St. Thomas, the print club—once again, we could have gotten those beautiful things for nothing—and later the Rice episode and a certain kind of avant garde. It was high times...high art...really good art.

36.8 A Generous Place

I have always loved to live in Houston. I mean, I like the climate, I like the people. I'm happy to continue to live here. It's a great place to work; I have been fortunate in that I can do my work and show it now in my house. I've been most fortunate. The idea of moving has never been interesting to me.

The thing I found right away about Houston is that the people in the art community were very generous and they would bring you in and they would introduce you around. They would introduce you to collector friends and everyone knew each other. It was not uncommon to have the simplest little coffee party or cocktail party after the Museum or something, and you would have both James Sweeney and Jermayne MacAgy in this house at the same time. All the most interesting kinds of people that you would want to see [were] together and talking freely about what [they] were doing and what other people were doing. It was really very exciting.

It reminded me a little bit of what I guess bright young geologists or engineers would [experience when they] come to town, and they would get a connection with someone up at Humble or Shell and they'd say, "Come on out—we're going to the ranch for the weekend and we're going to introduce you to everybody you need to know." So it's up to you to say hello and do your job and do it well, and go for it. And they will support you.

Richard Stout was interviewed on February 23, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[2]
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[2] http://cnx.org/content/m16168/latest/34 Richard Stout.mp3

Chapter 37

Stella Sullivan, b. 1924[1]

37.1 Teachers and Colleagues

I knew from the time I was four that I was going to be an artist, and I considered myself an artist then. I never had very much formal training when I was young, but I did get introduced to people with my mother and she would take me to visit the artists. I ended up taking classes from MacNeill Davidson, which she taught a lot of the important artists in town. [This was] around year ten, somewhere in there. Mother took me over to Grace Spaulding John's studio and I met Miss [Ruth] Uhler and Grace, and we had tea. I saw a fair amount of Grace over the years and another time mother took me by Mrs. [Emma Richardson] Cherry's house where she was having a portrait class out of doors.

My parents used to take me to all the openings at the Museum when I was little and that's where I first remember seeing Gertrude Levy; we didn't know each other then or anything—I was just aware of her. She also was a friend of one of my mother's really good friends.

Then later I went to the Museum school and studied. When I was taking these classes in high school, Jack Flanagan[2] was in the class. And this was about the time he won the purchase prize for the still life painting; he's on the list, you know, at the Museum's Houston Artist Show. One year (probably when I went to Rice) I took architecture to get the art classes. I was interested in architecture—my brother and my father and my uncle are all architects. And I studied with Mr. [James] Chillman: watercolor and drawing, freehand drawing, art history. Loved the art history! I had five years of that. I thought that was great background for what I did later.

In '50 and '51 I went to the Art Students' League [School of Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts] up there, and then to Cranbrook—and I was there until I graduated in 1954. So I was in and out of town on holiday during those years. There were plenty of times between the end of the summer semesters and the starting of the winter sessions, so I was still pretty much in touch with things that were going on [in Houston].

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16171/1.1/>.

[2] Conservator at MFAH from 1948 to 1979. Won the purchase prize at 20th Annual Houston Artists Exhibition in 1945 for oil entitled Flowers.

Maryland Club

Figure 37.1: 1967. Courtesy of the artist.

37.2 Naming Names

I remember in the 50s—even earlier than that maybe—the Contemporary Arts Museum was downtown. And the first time I ever saw a real live Van Gogh was at the one-man show of Van Gogh that they had. The other was a Calder show.

Ava Jean Mears was the secretary of [CAM]—Ava Jean and Herb Mears of course were just wonderful people. And Alvin Romansky was really active in all the things, CAA and the Museum, and he gave his collection of prints to the Museum. He was just a lot of fun; always enjoyable to be with—but he was from an older group.

One of the nice things about the CAA at that time is that it was a volunteer organization, and all the people who wanted to went and volunteered, [doing] something relative to art whether they were artists or not. The artists got so many opportunities through that, and experiences. It was really wonderful: Everybody knew everybody and got to be friends, you know, for life.

Frank Dolejska put together all the shows, physically, at the CAA for some years. I know he worked for them when they were downtown, and he was still working for them out there at Prudential. He was a real fine person. I was godmother to his youngest child; I think Henri Gadbois and I were godparents. It was tragic—he died very young of meningitis, or something like that. Anyway, Frank did these small watercolors as I remember. Very colorful. And he got very discouraged at one point and he went and destroyed all his work. From then on he did mostly drawings and things, you know.

Oh, yes—Preston Frazier and Addison McElroy and Sara Meredith. These were the ones who got together and started this craft store, Handmakers. [It was] a lot of hard work...my goodness, I used to spend hours and hours in the silkscreen studio. It was unique. I don't think there's ever been one like it before with professional artists and stuff. It was supposed to be different, and it was. It was set up to sell our work, but we could bring other people in from time to time. Mostly it was Japanese things—important-type stuff—but we were trying to sell our own work.

[Handmakers] was in the basement of 3813 Main. People loved going down to the basement. This was Houston—there weren't any shops then in basements in Houston. And there were several gift shops across

Alabama, north of us. Rudi's, the restaurant, was upstairs. Rudi's had a good business going and we were right downstairs so we figured we'd get business from Rudi's, which we did. It helped get us going. We were a success in a hurry. [We were told that] people never make a profit during their first year in business [but] we were in the black by the end of the year. But you know we—at least I—never made any money out of it hardly. But oh dear, it was the beginning, you know.

Figure 37.2: Stella Sullivan in her studio, 1955. Photo by Peter Whitney. Courtesy of Stella Sullivan.

37.3 On Teaching

It wasn't until 1961 that I started teaching. The lady at the Brazosport Art League begged me to come and give classes down there. I said, "Oh, I don't teach. I don't want to teach." And Lowell [Collins] was begging me to come start teaching at the Museum school. I think Ruth Laird was probably in on that! She and I were good friends at Cranbrook—we were there at the same time—but she had started teaching I think in '58. And at the Museum they just sort of wore me down. I thought, "Oh, well, I'll give it a try." And my first session at Brazosport was cancelled because hurricane Carla came through. I had to go every other week for six weeks—it was quite a large class. Then I started in the fall with a Friday night class in painting. I couldn't believe that I'd have a class on Friday night, but I did. I just loved [teaching], you know. I thought

somebody should have told me this a long time ago.

Symbols, the Eucharist.

Figure 37.3: Courtesy of the artist.

It started with beginning painting, then I started teaching portrait painting. And then design, and a special class in printmaking. I'd set up the printmaking classes at the University of Houston the next year. They had an opening so I started that in a broken down old Quonset hut with a floor—a concrete floor. Anyway, I was teaching sort of double/triple time. I was teaching Spring Branch Adult Education. Henri [Gadbois] had taught there for years and had an overflowing class, so he recommended me and I taught there for about three or four years. We finally just wore out with these night classes and had to quit. And, I was teaching double time at the Museum and the University. Finally I had to give up one or the other; I stopped teaching at the University and taught at the Museum school. So I had six classes then, which is more than anybody else had.

It was a lot of fun. I loved being in that building [at the Museum]. Cullinan Hall is where this was, and of course, down in the basement. There was a coffee room where everybody in the Museum came, and we could just visit. There were visiting artists, too, and sometimes we could wander down there. I was able to take my students up to these shows when I was teaching design, particularly. I'd take them up, and try to make them aware of the design qualities in these things. [It was a] wonderful teaching tool, and I was always wandering back and forth like that, you know. It was funny—it got to be where anytime I'd walk in the Museum I'd be greeted by one or another of the guards and stuff. And I had a lot of good students there. People used to think it was just a place for untalented rich people that didn't have anything better to do. After I got there we started getting more serious and trying to get certification so they could give a degree in association—I think with the University of St. Thomas. I campaigned for grades. They didn't grade the students. I said, "If you grade you'll cut out the dilettantes and just get serious students." More, anyway. Which we finally did after a few years, and that's the way it was. It's gotten better and better.

The Museum school went on to become the Glassell School, right before I left, I think. I went to teach a year at Sam Houston in Huntsville, and we had a real good thing going then. I can't remember when

we were certified,[3] but we had really gotten a lot of good, serious students and a lot of them were given scholarships.

I opened my own school after I came back from Huntsville out in the Village. I had that for four years [until] I succumbed to the latest oil embargo or whatever that was at the time. I almost always had private classes because there were people who wanted [them]. Frankly, they demanded it. So I was always having some place set up to have a class. I just kept teaching and of course that was the point of the school and gallery I had in the Village. I worked so hard when I was in there. I did everything, you know. I don't know how I would have gotten along without some friends. One of my students from the Museum helped me when I had shows to hang and all that kind of stuff. I'd be up to all hours of the night before [a show] finishing things up. I would have done all the advertising and the layout and mailings...a lot of work. Pete Coleman was one of the ones with a scholarship at the Museum, and he was very talented—a good student and a real nice person. I don't know what prompted him to just come by, but [if] he knew that I was having a show he'd come along on his bicycle and say, "Well, here I am," and start doing all the hard work. Bob Spangler[4] was another one—a wonderful person. I never knew why either one of them did it, but they were so nice to me. I just thought, "I don't deserve all this."

Stella Sullivan was interviewed on June 16, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[5] .

[3]The Museum school offered a certificate for the first time in 1960.
[4]Bob Spangler and his wife, Clare, worked at MFAH in early 1970s.
[5]http://cnx.org/content/m16171/latest/35 Stella Sullivan.mp3

Chapter 38

James Surls, b. 1943[1]

38.1 Prevailing Wind

I think any great concept starts with, in a sense, capturing the moment; it's like riding the prevailing wind. You happen to be wanting to go someplace, and that's the way the prevailing wind will take you. You get to do two things at once. Lawndale [Art Center][2] came about because the [University of Houston] art building burned. The painting building burned. The print building burned and ceramics, sculpture—they shared an old building with architecture. Architecture had one end; art had the other end.

This was in maybe '78, '79, '80. The school, the power structure of the school, came and said, "Oh, my goodness, Mr. Surls. We are so sorry. The building burned. We just don't know what we're going to do. We're going to have to continue classes and put you somewhere, so we're going to put you in this old warehouse over a couple of miles off campus." Which it turns out was Lawndale; Lawndale was the name of the street. They put us over in that building, apologized and left, and I was the happiest man on the planet! The idea of the warehouse, the big, raw, space—I mean, that's a paradise for artists. It's a paradise particularly for sculptors who—keep in mind now—are noise makers, dust producers, junk collectors.

So Lawndale in a sense came about just because God struck the building with lightning and set it on fire. And I happened to be the recipient of the good fortune [and] so did some other people. They also moved graduate painting over to that building. Graduate painting had the upstairs: huge studios, great studios, good studios, high energy. It was almost like playing in the freeway, in a sense. Like putting yourself in traffic. Lawndale was able to be the doorway of an enormous amount of traffic. We just happened to be the right people, in the right place at the right time to take care of a situation.

Lawndale was like being handed a race car, and someone says, "Hey, here's the keys to the car. You can go as fast as you want to go." Whoa! What an invitation! I mean, a race car, not just an old jalopy. They thought, "Poor people, having to work in that hot, old building." I looked at it like a Ferrari, and I assumed the keys. To tell you the truth, I just assumed directorship. No one gave me that. As this "imaginary" director, I didn't have an imaginary staff. I had probably 30, 40, 50 or 60 eager students available. They weren't all my students—some were other people's students, like the graduate painting people. But I became pretty authoritarian in my willingness to say, "Hey, I need ten guys to come down here and move a stage." Now, they could say, "Kiss my ass—I'm not going to do it." But they were incredibly willing to participate. They would move a stage. Paint a wall. Get ready for something. And those guys got to come to the performance. That was their reward. They got to be there when the reality of the action took place.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16159/1.1/>.

[2] Lawndale Art Center, a non-profit alternative space for the exhibition of contemporary works in all media, was founded in 1979 and has owned its present location on Main Street in Houston's Museum District since 1993.

Two People Dancing

Figure 38.1: By James Surls. 1978-1979. Wood. The Museum of Fine Ats, Houston. Gift of Michael A. Caddell and Cynthia Chapman.

38.2 Expanding the Audience

Lawndale was a working studio, an exhibition space, and a performance space. The performing did not come out of the U of H theatrical department. Oh no, no. Lord, no. It actually just by osmosis came out of the community and then therefore out of the students. There was a guy who died several years ago named Lanny Steele.[3] If you're going to talk about the history of art during this period you've got to know what Lanny Steele meant to the community: who he brought here, when he brought them. He was one of the most important players in Houston. And Lanny had something called SumArts. SumArts was supposed to be the sum of the arts. Lanny taught music over at Texas Southern, where Biggers taught. He was kind of a holdover from the beat generation who said "cool" and "man" and "cat" and "daddy-o." He would say, "Hey, I want to bring Ornette Coleman[4] to town and we need a place for him to play. Can we do it in here?" And he would get the proceeds—I wouldn't. Now any business person would say, "That's stupid! You can't run a business like that." But Lanny didn't have the money to book into Jones Hall or those places. So he would come over and he'd say, "Let's book them into Lawndale."

[3]Lanny Steele, 1934-1994. Creator of the Texas Southern University Jazz Ensemble, pianist for jazz great Arnett Cobb, and president of SumArts.

[4]Ornette Coleman, b. 1930. Texas-born jazz saxophonist, was awarded a MacArthur Foundation genius grant in 1994 and in 2007 received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and the Pulitzer Prize in music for "Sound Grammar."

Well, who were we going to hear that night? We're talking about someone who's in the jazz hall of fame: Ornette Coleman. This guy was blasting double horns. I mean, a saxophone player extraordinaire who is "painting" back in the abstract impressionist times. This guy's whole development was like an abstract expressionist painting. He would come out and play; he would pull both triggers. When he started playing he blew your head off...I mean, from beginning to end. Well, all of a sudden Lawndale is packed with 300 or 400 people listening to this guy! They don't know anything about art, per se. This is extra. This is expanding your audience.

We got to expand our audience out of the University because we did things that involved people from outside the University. Lanny brought a lot of good things to Lawndale. He brought Chicago Art Ensemble. My goodness, the things that happened there were just extraordinary. And they really had to do with my willingness to assume this dictatorial authority, which I didn't have and was never officially given. When people would come and ask me if they could come and do something, I'd tell them yes. Artists can go to virtually anybody and ask for something or ask to do something. In a sense they are asking the person to give them permission to do it. I just said, "I give me permission to do it." George Bunker, our department chairman at that time, really liked activity. George was a very creative person—incredibly well-respected—and he actually tried several times to do something within the school itself and kind of got rebuffed. So I was all of a sudden like this alien who landed in his lap, and you know, I could go to George and tell him I was going to do something and he'd say, "Oh, man! Wait a minute! Whoa! We've got to think about this—we'll have to go to the Dean." Then the Dean would have to go to the Provost or the Chancellor. The first thing you know, it's a rigmarole. So I wrote George about a ten-page letter, and said, "George, I want you to assume [because of] my presence [at Lawndale], that I'm just going to do things. Just assume it's a challenge. I will be a challenge to you. I will do things and not tell you. And they're going to have the University's name on them. And you can say, 'I didn't know he was going to do that."' So in a sense it kind of let him off the hook, you know.

38.3 Creative Risk

Consider the Museum of Fine Arts. The public really [doesn't] want them to goof. They cost too much. They're too big. They spend too much money for failure. It's like having NASA fail: You don't want failures of that magnitude. They don't want to do a show and have the public say it's a dog. They want to do shows the public [says] are great! Well, can you imagine where Dow Chemical would be without their laboratory? I mean—think about it—they have to have that lab. Lawndale was a lab. That's basically what it was. There were some things being tested over there. There was also a very significant failure rate. You know, regardless of how much I appreciated something or liked doing everything we did over there, they didn't all work. Some were bombs. I think you have to be able to do that. You have to have a place where you can take chances and run risks and if the test tube blows up, you simply say, "Shit. We learned."

38.4 Art as Curriculum

I think art should be one third of the curriculum in public schools. That's a major statement, not a lightweight thing. I don't say that offhand. Art, philosophy and science: That's what we should be teaching. Art is the ugly stepchild to universities. We just are. And the reason that music is elevated is that they have their symphony hall. The reason that theater can be successful is they have their [venue]. Is it a good one? Damn right it's a good one. Architecture, hey, they go and get Philip Johnson to build them a grandiose thing. Artists at one time had some kind of place. There was a place for them in the community and in society—and I don't necessarily know where or what that is anymore. When the University did not embrace Lawndale to the point that they kept it and used it and developed it, I thought that was a tragic mistake. On their part, as far as I'm concerned, they goofed. That's a big goof.

The road not taken is as important as the road taken. The reality is that Lawndale ultimately got kind

of shoved to the streets. The students were the lifeblood. The Art Guys[5] came through that venue. Sharon Kopriva[6] came through that venue. The person who's teaching sculpture there now came through that venue. They got to make the leap. It's like being shot out of a rocket, you know. Students don't [typically] get to do that. They graduate, they get their MFA, they go do this or that; the first thing you know this life's a drag and they end up being a banker or something. I don't think universities help them in that professional transition. They're not prepared to do that, and Lawndale did. Lawndale put those students in traffic. An enormous amount of traffic flowed right through their living room. They got to give the parties; they got to host events. They also got to work on them, which presented some problems for some of the other faculty because students would leave a class to come over and work on something. There were a few scrapes, but to tell you the truth, in the scope of things they were so minor. Lawndale was one of the most beautiful moments of my life. I loved being there. I loved being involved. I loved doing what I did.

38.5 Then and Now

[My wife] Charmaine and I came to Houston together in 1976 in a red Ford one-ton truck with two pink suitcases. I'd taught [previously] at SMU for seven years. We stayed at John and Wanda Alexander's[7] place for about a month; I'm sure it seemed like six years to him. We became the thing that wouldn't leave...those kind of permanent houseguests.

James Harithas[8] was my entrée into Houston. Jim Harithas is the one person I've ever met in my whole life who worked for a museum, and particularly a director, on any level. [He] walked into my studio in Dallas, looked and looked and said, "I really like this stuff. You want to do a show? Here's the date." In a sense, that had a whole lot to do with supporting art.

You can live as far out on the edge as you want to go, but it's not really necessarily fair to take your family out on the edge with you. You can't take your kids out there and turn them loose because now all of a sudden two worlds have to survive side-by-side, simultaneously. They have to coexist. I spent a lot of money [at Lawndale]. I didn't go around telling people that, or complaining. I did it because I wanted to do it. I liked doing it. I thought it was important...to me and to the community. I think one of the things that made [Lawndale] successful back then was the fact that artists took responsibility for their own actions. They were willing to do things. They were willing to take responsibility for their own actions, and suffer the consequences. That's what responsibility means.

As best I can tell, [today] there may be a bit more "laying in wait." Kind of saying, "I can't do this because..." or "I can't do that because...." There are too many reasons why they can't do something—and mostly they're self-imposed. You're not really supposed to consider what's out there in terms of what you can and cannot do. You just do it and let the chips fall. If they do, you may get hurt. There's a possibility you might get wounded—that's what entrepreneurialism is, to tell you the truth. And guys who can—I mean, Texas, for goodness sake! Is this the wildcat state or what? Are we risk takers, or what? Are we willing to go out on a limb? There have been more rises and falls and busts in this state than probably anywhere in the world, and some guys do it and come back and do it two, or three or four more times. That's not happening [in the visual arts] now—but it did.

James Surls was interviewed on August 29, 1997. You can listen to the interview here[9] .

[5]The Art Guys, Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing, are a Houston-based collaborative team employing unconventional media and humor to explore serious contemporary issues. The duo has worked together since 1983 after meeting as students at the University of Houston.

[6]Sharon Kopriva, b. 1948. A Houston Heights-born sculptor educated at the University of Houston (BS in Art Education, 1970; MFA in painting, 1981), Kopriva taught in Houston-area high schools for ten years prior to a full-time career in visual arts.

[7]John Alexander, b. 1945. Abstract artist and Beaumont, Texas, native who served as Assistant Professor of Art at University of Houston in the early 1970s.

[8]James Harithas: former Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, director; Corcoran director; Hunter College instructor; Syracuse Museum curator; and co-founder, with wife Ann Harithas, of the Art Car Museum and the Station Museum in Houston.

[9]http://cnx.org/content/m16159/latest/36 James Surls.mp3

Chapter 39

Geoff Winningham, b. 1943[1]

39.1 Stirrings and Influence

I came to Houston in the fall of 1961. I was accepted as an undergraduate student at Rice University, thinking at the time I would be an engineering major. At that time Rice didn't even have an art department, and I certainly didn't have any thought of pursuing art, even as far as one course. I was an engineering major-to-be, but shortly after I got here I became an English major and developed—or I should say re-developed—an interest in photography that I had first developed as a teenager. My junior year is when my kind of first stirrings about visual art began to happen within me.

I was in an English course and I noticed the professor, Walter Isle, making references to photography—relating them to literature. That was a total new thing to me, because basically I was just a kind of a hobbyist. When he would talk about, for example, poetry and T.S. Eliot and make references to photographs of Walker Evans, it didn't have any meaning to me, but I pursued it—I followed it up. And so my first interest in art began on the Rice campus, stirred really by English professors.

My first kind of epiphany in the area of photography came when a fellow named Larry McMurtry[2] came up to me one day in Anderson Hall and said, "You that photography guy?" I said, "Yep." He said, "My name's Larry McMurtry and I work in a bookstore on San Felipe and I just got a book in. You should come by and see it." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Just come by—I'll show it to you."

Well, I went by a few days later. [The book] was a copy of The Decisive Moment, the Cartier-Bresson book, and I remember opening it and being spellbound for several hours, and going away with the feeling that that was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

The other person that was very important in the developing of my interest in photography and in art in general was Charles Schorre. Schorre taught a kind of free-for-all class that was sponsored by the architecture department, called Drawing and Water Color Rendering. In Schorre's inimitable way he took it in all directions and took people like me who had never taken an art course and allowed me to take pictures of the class. It just became a really wonderful special problems class where everybody worked and showed together. Schorre became a mentor, a friend. He loaned me copies of Aperture magazine. He loaned me books. He, more than anyone else, made me aware that there was a tradition and history to photography as an art.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16151/1.1/>.

[2] Larry McMurtry, b. 1936, is a prolific novelist best known for his Pulitzer prize-winning novel Lonesome Dove. He grew up outside of Archer City, Texas, and earned his Bachelor's degree from North Texas State University and his Master's from Rice University.

Self-Portrait

Figure 39.1: 1970. Photo by Geoff Winningham. Courtesy of the artist.

39.2 Media Center

I got out of the Institute of Design at Illinois Institute of Technology with my masters degree in the spring of 1968 and right at that time, another English prof who had befriended me and had been a very close friend of mine, Jerry O'Grady, was hired by John de Menil to start a media center at the University of St. Thomas. O'Grady was kind of a disciple of Marshall McLuhan and in his mind one of the great tasks for higher education was to help everyone be aware of how the media worked. So O'Grady was starting this media center with the enthusiastic patronage of John de Menil. I don't think Dominique was particularly excited about it; she was doing her own thing with her Institute for the Arts. I had an interview with the de Menils in New York in the late spring of 1968 and I was hired.

I started teaching in the fall of 1968—my first and only year at the University of St. Thomas—an astonishing year in many ways. First of all, we were able to buy whatever equipment we wanted; there was no budget to teach; I could do whatever I wanted in the way of setting up courses; and we could take students from the greater community. They didn't even have to be full-time or even part-time students of the University. It was just this great potpourri of people from all over the community of virtually ages from high schoolers up. Then I was told it would be a good idea to have a guest artist program in the second semester, and that the Museum of Modern Art was ready and willing to loan us a show if I could simply identify what we would like to have come to campus. I mean, [I was] one year out of graduate school! The most important and the most interesting range of people you could have come up with at that time came—and they spoke

and/or showed their work. They critiqued my students' work. It was quite a way to start a first year of instruction.

Wrestling

Figure 39.2: 1971. Photo by Geoff Winningham. Courtesy of the artist.

39.3 Back to Rice

In the early spring of 1969, Jerry O'Grady came to me and said, "We're all moving to Rice." I said, "Who are we?" He said James Blue, who had started teaching film, the whole art history faculty there, Bill Camfield, Walter Widrig, Mino Badner, Philip Oliver Smith, the slide librarian, Pat Tooney...and the question was, "Would you like to go, too?" It's not that they could guarantee that I would go, but the first question was, "Would you like to?" And then I don't know whose muster I had to pass, but I did so—and by the end of the '68-'69 academic year we were on the way to Rice. The media center started construction in the fall of 1969, and the Institute of the Arts opened seemingly overnight. In the late spring and summer of 1969 all of the sudden Dominique was having shows, and then we were like six months behind that.

Being next door to that operation was a thousand times more important than being on the Rice campus because the media center from the time of its arrival on the Rice campus was regarded with some misgivings of "What is this all about?" I mean, there was very little art here beforehand. John O'Neill had started the department of Fine Arts and David Parsons was teaching some sculpture and John O'Neill was teaching some painting—but the students were not really coming to Rice expecting to take art courses. But boy, did they line up for the film and photography courses. From Day One we had more students than we could take.

We were on the early wave of the arrival of photography in the universities across the country as a viable and important visual art form. Students were ready for it. It was beginning to happen. The Museum of Fine Arts was beginning to have photo shows. St. Thomas and now Rice were beginning to teach photography. But we really were one of the first waves.

We actually taught Rice courses in the fall of '69 at the University of St. Thomas. We had a little building on Mt. Vernon Street, and that building which we had converted to darkrooms and studio and classroom was still operational. I taught Rice-sponsored courses, part of the department of Fine Arts at Rice University chaired by John O'Neill, in that same location in the fall of '69. In the spring of 1970, we moved into this building which was then and is still today as far as I'm concerned the best working/teaching facility in film and photography I've seen anywhere...just a dream of a space. Eugene Aubry designed it with James Blue and me working with him on the specs. So wow—what a first two years! Really interesting, you know. All of a sudden I was out of graduate school and now not working towards a thesis or any course requirement. I was a working artist.

Destruction Derby

Figure 39.3: 1974. Photo by Geoff Winningham. Courtesy of the artist.

39.4 Blind Luck, Big Breaks, and Books

I made this extraordinary range of contacts and the work that I began to do in '68 and '69 was kind of an extension of what I had done in grad school. Very experimental, kind of Bauhaus-type work—and it never really was my forte. I always was and still am basically what some would call a documentary photographer

[or] a descriptive photographer. I'm interested in describing the world, not creating one on paper. Within a couple of years after being back here in Houston, my work began to move back into its more natural vein. I began to explore and to photograph what was around me rather than try to create the original stuff in photography. The guest artist series continued at Rice, and I met and invited Garry Winograd and Lee Friedlander, and they were enormously influential in terms of my work.

So in the spring of 1971, I kind of hatched this plan. I had come to be a great admirer of photographs of Arthur "Weegee" Fellig—the New York News photographer, and his "naked city" photographs of New York. I remember specifically saying to myself: "I love this city and nobody can see it like I can, so I'm going to be Houston's 'Weegee."' So that's what I began to photograph. If Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis were in town, I'd be there. If a politician was speaking, I'd be there. If there was a ribbon-cutting, I'd be there. Then one afternoon reading the newspaper I saw where Johnny Valentine and Wahoo McDaniel were going to fight in the Houston Coliseum on Friday night. I don't think it's too much of an exaggeration to say that my photographic life kind of changed that night. There was the subject I'd looked for. There was what I wanted. Lights, action, powerful emotion, great drama.

So you know, I photographed wrestling. I convinced myself shortly after beginning my weekly visits to the Coliseum that if Shakespeare were alive and well, he'd be writing scripts for the wrestling matches. As soon as I finished with that I did a book about it. Now this is a pure Houston story: I got nine months into this photography of wrestling and I had some good pictures. I knew I did. And it was coming towards a book. I showed it in New York in the summer of '71—I took it to Peter Bennell at the Museum of Modern Art and he and John Szarkowski both kind of flipped over it. So I came back determined to finish the book that fall and I thought, "Where am I going to find a publisher?" I was totally wet behind the ears—totally green. I'd never done a book. Never thought about doing a book.

As a Rice student I had edited the yearbook, and the publisher's representative for the yearbook was a man named Jess Allison. He was our rep, and he sold class rings and yearbook printing, and we became big buddies. Jess told me as the yearbook was finished in 1964, "You know, one of these days you're going to come up with a set of photographs and you're going to want to publish them. I want you to find me when you do." So Jess Allison kind of popped back in my mind in 1971, and one afternoon I took a box of photographs over to his office on Allen Parkway.

I said, "Jess, I have a book now." He said, "What's it about?" And I said, "Well, it's about show wrestling." And I was ready to open the box and show him the prints. He said in so many words, "I don't need to see the pictures. If you tell me they're good, I know they are." Then he said, "How many should we print?" I said, "What about 10,000?" He said, "What do you think it will cost us per book?" I said, "We need to find out." So we went over to Jack Wetmore and Wetmore Printing and they priced the book. Came down to almost exactly a dollar a book—ten thousand dollars. Well that's a huge amount of money in 1971. But Jess thought about five or ten seconds and said, "Well, let's do it."

Friday Night in the Coliseum came out, and then Going Texan in a year. When I visited New York, Magnum called me—that's the big picture agency, Cartier-Bresson's agency—and they wanted to visit with me and to know how I was getting these books done. I remember telling the then-director of Magnum the story about Jess Allison, and I thought she would fall off of her chair.

That was—that is—Houston. That's why I'm here. It's a very, very important thing in my mind. I was there because I could operate. There was that wonderful attitude of "go for it—we'll make it happen." Jess never looked at the pictures. He just felt that kind of faith in me as a person. It's pure Houston, I think. I did feel and still feel literally blessed to have begun my career and be continuing my career in Houston. I think it's a place where things have happened for me that literally wouldn't have happened anywhere else.

Geoff Winningham was interviewed on January 16, 2007. You can listen to the interview here[3] .

[3]http://cnx.org/content/m16151/latest/37 Geoff Winningham.mp3

Chapter 40

Dick Wray, b. 1933[1]

40.1 Trying to Decide

I was born in 1933 in the Heights Hospital, and I was educated for the most part here [in Houston]. High school, the University of Houston School of Architecture...in the army a couple of years. Then in 1958 I went to Europe and spent two years in Europe trying to decide whether I wanted to be an architect or an artist. By the time I came back in 1959, I knew I was going to be an artist. I didn't feel like I wanted to sit in an architect's office and do that kind of work, so I started painting.

In 1959 I entered some silly show at the Beaumont Art Museum and won second prize or something. In those days they had those kinds of shows with first prize, second prize, that bullshit stuff. And then I have shown every single year since 1959, no exception, to the present date. I have not missed one year. My bio's every damn year.

[1] This content is available online at <http://cnx.org/content/m16140/1.1/>.

Klee Gone Mad, Almost Berserk

Figure 40.1: By Dick Wray. 1963. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of the Contemporary Arts Museum.

40.2 On Sweeney and the Museum of Fine Arts

The Museum had a show—James Sweeney came into town and he got rid of that local show—he put together the Ford Foundation-backed show called the Southwestern Painting and Sculpture Show.[2] It consisted of Southern California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Louisiana. The judges were Jim Sweeney, James Brooks—who was a painter from Dallas, lived in New York, who by the way doesn't get anywhere near his due respect—and [Alexander] Calder.

Now Houston—the powers that be—didn't particularly care for Mr. Sweeney because he didn't kiss anybody's ass and he didn't go to meetings, and I mean he didn't go to people's houses to try to fundraise and stuff like that. He wasn't too social and he went back to New York every other weekend. At the time he was probably the very top museum person in the United States, and he bought a painting of mine after the show was over with. It was up to those of us that were chosen to select what museum we were going to be showing at, and I chose the Albright Knox Museum in Buffalo, New York, because of their strong collection of Clyfford Still's work, and also I liked Gordon Bunshaft, who was one of the designers for Skidmore and Merrill that had recently built an addition onto the [Albright Knox] museum. And Sweeney sort of suggested, well, you give that to Albright Knox and we will buy one for our collection. So Sweeney actually purchased a painting from my studio.

He would call me up and come over to my studio that didn't have air conditioning in those days. And he wore a three-piece suit, always, always. Never saw him without a three-piece suit on. Never saw him without his coat on. He didn't take his coat off when he came to my studio. And he would come over there in like August, and the poor guy would just sweat. He would rather come over and hang around with artists in their studio...and I was real flattered because he chose someone like me to hang around with.

I said something about wanting to go to Tamarind, which was Ford Foundation-sponsored—and [Sweeney] was also on the board. The Tamarind Lithography Workshop [was] trying to introduce lithography back to the artists in this country and get it away from the artisans. They wanted to reintroduce the artist in collaboration with the printer and so it was set up for the artist to be invited to Los Angeles...and so I was. Then about two years later in the mid- or early 60s, the Museum of Modern Art had a show of the Tamarind people...and I was in that. So I went to the Modern and Sweeney introduced me to Merrill, Rosenberg and all those dudes. He was real supportive.

40.3 Local Reflections

Houston had a lot of galleries. I didn't participate. Nobody really liked my work. I did work when I was in Europe and I was very much influenced by the Europeans. I was one of those fortunate people that happened to be living in Paris at the time when Europe had [Antoni] Tàpies and [Jean] Dubuffet and the Cobra Group with Karel Appel and [Pierre] Alechinsky. From Spain you had Tàpies; Alberto Burri was coming from Italy and Germany had Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze, commonly known as WOLS. There is a painting in the Menil Museum of WOLS. Very influential. That was very influential to a young artist from Houston. After I came back from Europe in '59, there was a community of artists [that] would go to openings, and the New Arts Gallery was a kind of heavyweight gallery in town exclusively because of Jermayne MacAgy. MacAgy had a terribly strong influence equal to Jim Sweeney in the formation of what was the Houston art scene. She never really cared for my work except the piece that the Albright Knox Museum has of that Southwestern Painting show, and she became a fan of mine at that point. But prior to that, she had her favorites.

There were a lot of galleries just opening. Meredith Long had one of his first galleries—maybe his first gallery—up on Westheimer in the Highland Village. I did have some good mentors in Howard Barnstone and Burdette Keeland and people out at the University. I think studying architecture was probably better than studying art. It certainly was in terms of the teaching quality because the art department at the University of Houston was just atrocious. "Atrocious" is the word. I wandered over to the art department and was so

[2] The Southwest Painting and Sculpture Show, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 12/7/62-1/20/63.

unimpressed I couldn't believe it. Then I went to Europe and at that point I realized how backwards we were.

Then I came back and there was an active group of people. For example, Richard Stout and Jack Boynton and myself and a couple of other people. We went to other galleries, but mainly because they had free drinks and we were broke. I mean it was social—it was the thing to do because there wasn't anything else to do. And before I got married it was a way to show our plumage, as it were.

Drugs changed the whole art world and everything else. It had a strong effect on the culture of particularly the art district. Very, very strong. It's now got back on its feet. But for a long time, well, it was a lot of marijuana-induced stuff. But the art world needed that at some point. The San Francisco Art Museum didn't really have instructors—just "We're all free and you can do whatever you want." What we called "let it all hang out."

Figure 40.2: Dick Wray from "School of Art: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Biennial Catalog, 1973-1974, 1974-1975." Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Archives.

40.4 After a California Sojourn

I lived out in L.A. for about eight years, but I'd come back every couple of years. When I came back in '69 most of the art that was being sold here was all decorative—as it still is. There's two things that sell very comfortably in a conservative environment that we have now and one of them would be decorative work and the other would be blue chip conservative. People like to buy a name because it's like buying stock and putting it up on their walls. Then they call themselves collectors. Louise Ferrari sold a lot of artwork—top dollar, good looking, beautiful stuff—to people in Houston that had money. They would buy things like Hans Hoffman because they were very expensive. It shows a certain amount of taste. But they wouldn't have bought Hans Hoffman when Hans Hoffman was alive. It's too controversial.

The galleries in '69 were Kiko...there was Cushman Gallery. Meredith Long of course had his. I will say this about Meredith, that I've been pretty harsh about the type he shows and stuff like that. I'm very outspoken about things. But the one thing I do admire about Meredith is when he was at the University of Texas at Austin he would go to the art department and buy works from the students...and he would sell pieces, make a little profit...but he was interested in art—and that's to his credit. That's a quality a lot of people don't know about Meredith. So Meredith always had the heart for it, but he also wanted the good money—and now he has the good life, or presumably the good life.

I think each of us has our own interpretation of what's "the good life." I think I'm probably the most successful person I know of, because I get to do exactly what I want—but I'm 72 years old and didn't get that way till it was just about time for that Social Security check.

40.5 On the Importance of Making Something

I was speaking to some young people [recently] that were at my studio for the first time. And I said, "Do you know anyone that makes anything, physically makes anything?" They said they knew people who wrote stories and so on. But that's intellectual property. I used to have an uncle that would make furniture. He would come in at night and he would talk about his work that was made by his hands. And he felt good about himself because he did it.

I have to come up with something new every single day. Every day, every day I'm challenged. It's essential...like breathing. The reason I do it is because I don't want to see something I've already done before. So I have to kind of stretch it: every day stretch a little bit more, a little bit more every day.

When you start living with art...art is something that is totally unique. My books I make are unique. My paintings are constantly changing. And to be around original art, to have this exposed to you and your family and your friends and your children...this is something that's totally unique. I told my son one day, "Do you have anything in your house other than your dad's artwork that is totally unique?" And he said, "Yeah, my car, my Volkswagen. I've fixed it up." And I said, "No—it's still a Volkswagen. You're just trimming it out, but that's not original. You've got to have another original." And it dawned on me, hell, my kids don't even know the concept of original art.

I feel strongly that my obligation is to create something that has not been created before. Good or bad—we're not talking about that. I feel like that was my destiny and I've done it, and I've gotten through the bad times and now I have my integrity.

Dick Wray was interviewed on May 15, 2006. You can listen to the interview here[3] .

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m16140/latest/38 Dick Wray.mp3

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Houston Reflections: Art in the City, 1950s, 60s and 70s
A collection of interviews, conducted by Sarah C. Reynolds, with Houston artists and other arts figures, all of whom proved influential in the growth of the contemporary Houston Arts scene.

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