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Essentials: 385 words

## BIG ART in a small town Denison's Red-Hot Art Scene

Story and photographs by Randy Mallory

Paint a picture of a quaint north Texas town of, say, 23,000 people. Draw a quintessential Main Street lined with historic structures. Brush in 14 art galleries and artists' studios, some with artsy loft apartments. Oh just for fun, sketch a winery, several eateries, antiques shops, specialty stores, and an old train depot and railroad museum.

That's the spittin' image of Denison's flowering arts district.

Denison has long been a jumping-off spot for outdoors enthusiasts enjoying nearby Lake Texoma. Increasingly, art buyers (especially from the Dallas/Fort Worth area) come for art and attractions compressed into seven stroll-friendly blocks.

Paintings, sculpture, glasswork, photography, ceramics, and mixed-media represent traditional and contemporary styles. Galleries show works from 100 or so local, regional, and national artists. Hometown and visiting artists also lead workshops that teach painting techniques to budding artists who come from around the region.

Downtown struts its artistic stuff March 29-30, 2008 with the annual Spring Fine Art Tour of studios and galleries, held along with the Denison Arts & Wine Renaissance on March 29. Galleries also periodically host new art shows and meet-the-artist receptions to keep the local scene fresh and unpredictable.

On a recent downtown stroll, I discovered that, when it comes to art, this small town has big ideas.

Main Street is lined with two-story, turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-Century brick buildings. Bright booster banners flap from antique-style lampposts, bearing reproductions of local art. Galleries and studios commingle with antiques emporiums, a coffeehouse, and down-home eateries. Add several specialty shops—women’s apparel, garden décor, sports outfitter, books, and a batik boutique. Complete the picture with Homestead Winery and the historic Rialto Theater, which stages live music shows.

My art stroll down Main Street began in the 400 block, where the bronze face of Apace leader Geronimo called to me from a window at the Pat Wayman Gallery. The sculpture was the work of North Texas artist George Cadell. Studying the wizened gaze, I noticed a metal tear running down Geronimo’s face—presumably a symbol of collective sorrow. The realism of Western and landscape art runs rampant in Wayman’s gallery. A Dalhart Windberg painting depicts Longhorns in a mountain scene, and a Xiang Zhang painting shows mounted cowboys in corrals. A William B. Churchill, Jr. sculpture depicts a saddle that looks like leather but is carved from a single piece of mahogany wood. Around the corner, Wayman operates an art school, where she and visiting artists offer workshops year-round.

Across the street, I wandered into the Old Katy Glassworks. Artist-owner Mike Williams creates Japanese and Art Deco style windows, doors, lamps and other decorative pieces made of colored and reflective glass. I particularly liked his landscapes that showed mountains and rivers framed in the foreground by trees and flowers, all glistening in richly colored glass. Mike (NEEDS CHANGING TO WILLIAMS) was one of the first to set up shop downtown more than a decade ago. “I caught the spirit of making art in such a leisurely setting,” he said.

Williams' gallery showcases eclectic works of several artists. A striking piece by local artist Keith Hartline shows the stylized figure of a woman in turquoise and black with her head tilted to the right. At first, the work, titled *Attitude; Blue Woman VII*, looked like a vivid acrylic painting, but turned out to be a mosaic of glazed ceramics.

The invitingly odd metal sculptures of Chance Dunlap tickled my fancy. Biology meets sci-fi in his *Cabinet of Curiosities* series, where Dunlap fabricates found metal into invented plants or animals, giving them scientific Latin names. (NONE THAT I SAW WERE PARTICULARLY AMUSING) Then he audaciously "preserves" them in glass jars—in mineral oil—as if they were rare species. His *Specimen Box* series displays metal made-up creatures of flight whose fantastical moth-like wings are pinned inside shadow boxes—as if an insect collection. "I take scrap metal that had a past life and rescue it from meltdown by giving it a new consciousness," Dunlap explained.

Next I zigged across Main to 416 West Gallery, where artist-owner Barbara Elam showed her *Slipping and Sliding* series of original prints. Each print features a woman's slip flared as if dancing. "I named each piece after famous female dancers of the 1940s," said the former professor of printmaking at DePaul University in Indiana and Rockford College in Illinois.

(VARIOUS DANCERS)

From Barbara's, I zagged back across the street to an 1880s former dry goods store. That's where Shelley Tate Garner was completing a triptych in her Artplace Gallery and studio (where she also frames artwork and offers classes). Garner cuts clear acrylic sheets into three shapes, adds bright acrylic colors on the back, then folds and wrinkles each piece by applying heat. Her "acrylic on acrylic" technique illuminates a concept from abstractionist Mark Rothko,

which Garner painted on her studio wall: "Art is an adventure into an unknown world which can only be explored by those willing to take the risk."

At Mary Karam Gallery I perused what artist-owner Mary Karam calls her "organic works," action photographs of bears and other wildlife. I also admired large photos by California-native Robyn Raggio. One photo zooms in close on the curved, chromed bumper and rusted hood of a 1950s Plymouth sedan, turning its front into a whimsical face. Another shot catches the crest of an ocean wave infused with light from a golden sunset. The lustrous water glows as if glass.

Karam's gallery also spotlights the unusual work of Dallas artist M.D. Davis, who paints limestone slabs with images she saw in lower Pecos River pictographs. Her work recreates ancient Texas cave paintings into wall art, tables, and room screens.

At the eastern end of Main Street lies the historic Katy Depot, which houses the Red River Railroad Museum and the studio of long-time local artist Alfred Robinson. Robinson was out, but around the corner, on Houston Street, I strolled into Denison's largest and newest art spot, Mystic Studio & Gallery.

Owner-artist Joni Beamish opened her ceramics studio last year in a 20,000-square-foot warehouse built in the 1880s as a rail-side coffee roaster. Her cavernous space echoed with soft Japanese flute music and the scent of burning incense. A third sense—vision—lit up when I eyed Beamish's mystical platters, bowls, sinks, lamps, and sculptural pieces. Visceral glazes of teal green, barn red, and cobalt blue danced across works made from slabs of clay impressed with patterns, then curled at the edges.

Back on Main, at Studio 406, I finagled a tour of the artful digs of artist Donna Finch Adams, which are open by appointment. Adams and her husband, R.E., turned an 1882 business college and doctor's office into a loft apartment, studio, and gallery.

I was fascinated by her mixed-media *Stories in a Box*. She pastes collages of photos and articles—provocative bits and pieces that form social commentaries—inside cigar boxes, then uses a heating iron to work in hot colored bee's wax. "Each box tells a moralistic and humorous story," she said. One of her wall-sized acrylic paintings showed smooth stones, hands, and female faces intertwined in the roots of a massive tree—all tinted blood red. "This came from a German myth about planting a tree over a grave," Adams explained. "When the roots grow into the body, the person becomes free.

"My work is very intense, but it stimulates me to change and grow. I like exploring the mythology of the female found throughout history."

After years as a college art professor at several universities in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, Adams retired and moved to Denison to make art. But she was lured out of retirement and now teaches at Denison's Grayson County College, the last stop on my art tour.

On campus, I looked up Steve O. Black, art professor and chair of Fine Arts and Humanities, who also manages the college's 2nd Floor Gallery, which exhibits student art and juried shows. Steve (NEEDS CHANGING TO BLACK) came to town 13 years ago and joined a growing cadre of artists intent on stirring things up.

"We did art installations like filling an entire room at the Katy Depot with bois d'arc apples," Steve said with a smile. "We wanted something different than you'd expect in a small town. We're still not afraid to take chances with art."

In Denison, Steve isn't alone. In two short days, I'd met many artists whose work expresses their love of art and the creative process—even (or maybe especially) in a small town.

Writer-photographer **Randy Mallory** of Tyler hopes more Texas towns will nurture the cultural (and economic) advantages of art in their communities.

## ESSENTIALS

### Denison Art Scene

Denison is 65 miles north of Dallas on US 75. Most of Denison's galleries and studios are on the 100 East through 600 West blocks of Main St. in downtown. The annual **Spring Fine Art Tour** of studios and galleries is March 29-30, 2008, held in conjunction with the Denison Arts & Wine Renaissance (March 29, 2008). Denison also hosts an annual Fall Fine Art Tour, complete with art talks and demonstrations. On May 3, 2008 take a tour of loft apartments of artists and others living downtown. For events and other details, contact the Denison Arts Council, 313 W. Woodard St.; 903/465-1551; [www.smalltownbigart.com](http://www.smalltownbigart.com).

*NOTE: AT FACT-CHECK ASK MIKE WILLIAMS (SHOWN IN RESOURCES) ABOUT MORE EVENTS AND DATES OR CHECK [WWW.SMALLTOWNBIGART.COM](http://WWW.SMALLTOWNBIGART.COM)*

## GALLERIES

**Old Katy Glassworks**, 427 W. Main St.; 903/465-6460; [www.oldkatyglassworks.com](http://www.oldkatyglassworks.com).

**Pat Waymon Gallery**, 430 W. Main St.; 903/465-2008; [www.patwaymonsgallery.com](http://www.patwaymonsgallery.com).

**Artplace Gallery and Framing**, 413 W. Main St.; 903/327-8180; [www.artplacegallery.com](http://www.artplacegallery.com).

**Mary Karam Gallery**, 404 W. Main St.; 903/465-3703; [www.marykaramgallery.com](http://www.marykaramgallery.com).

**416 West**, 416 W. Main St.; 903/463-0416; [www.416westgallery.com](http://www.416westgallery.com).

**Images**, 408 W. Main St.; 903/463-0408.

**Mystic Studio and Gallery**, 110 S. Houston St.; 903/327-8246; [www.mystic-studio.com](http://www.mystic-studio.com).

**2nd Floor Gallery**, Grayson County College; 6101 Grayson Dr.; 903/463-8662;

[www.grayson.edu](http://www.grayson.edu).

## STUDIOS

(some studios are open by appointment only)

**Donna Finch Adams**, 406 W. Main St.; 903/464-9644.

**David MacSmith**, 116 S. Rusk St.; 903/818-3180; [www.dmacsmithart.com](http://www.dmacsmithart.com).

**Alfred Robinson**, 101 E. Main St.: Ste.105; 903/819-5502.

**Doug Simpson**, 413 W. Main St.; 903/327-8180; [www.artplace.com](http://www.artplace.com).

**Ghost Town Arts Collective**, 7319 Hwy 691; Suite 101; 214/649-6514.

**Keith Hartline**, 427 W. Main St.; 903/465-6460 or 903 327-8845.

**Wild Lotus Beads**, 613 W. Main St.; 903/465-2000; [www.wildlotusbeads.com](http://www.wildlotusbeads.com).

## ATTRACTIONS

**Rialto Theater** (Main Street Showcase), 424 W. Main St.; 903/463-1690.

**Red River Railroad Museum**, 101 E. Main St., Ste. 120; 903/465-7170.

**Homestead Winery**, 220 W. Main St.; 903/464-0030 (also houses Devolli's Italian Restaurant; 903/463-3800).

**Antiques on Main**, 311 W. Main St.; 903/465-2605.

**Gilley's Antiques**, 425 W. Main St.; 903/337-0672.

**Angela's Café**, 409 W. Main St.; 903/337-0424.

**T-Bones Bar & Grill**, 101 E. Main St.; 903/464-0888.

**Watson's Drive In**, 631 W. Main St.; 903/465-4669.

**Ringler's**, 313 W. Main St.; 903/465-2660.

**Vintage Gardens**, 419 W. Main St.; 903/465-0024.

**Adrenalin**, 414 W. Main St.; 903/465-4300; [www.adrenalinelifestyle.net](http://www.adrenalinelifestyle.net).

**Epiphanies**, 325 W. Main St.; 903/327-8188; [www.abebooks.com/home.epiphany](http://www.abebooks.com/home.epiphany).

**Country Java**, 514 W. Main St.; 903/327-8984; [www.countryjava.net](http://www.countryjava.net).

**Fit 2 Be Tied**, 431 W. Main St.; 903/327-8490; [www.fit2betied.com](http://www.fit2betied.com).

**Ex Libris Books and Curiosities**, 501 W. Main St.; 903/337-0012;

[www.booksfromexlibris.com](http://www.booksfromexlibris.com) (includes art by Fish Out of Water; [www.trophyfishprints.com](http://www.trophyfishprints.com)).

#### SOURCES:

--For general questions, contact Mike Williams, Old Katy Glassworks (see gallery listing above) or Shelley Tate Garner at Artplace (see listing).

--Individual artists/attractions, see above listing.

--Chance Dunlap—903.816.4200

--For wine event and loft tours, Amy Lay, Main St Director, 903 464-4452