



Mrs. Cherry!

160 years ago this month, on February 28, 1859, Emma Richardson Cherry was born, in Aurora, Illinois. It took her a few years to get to Houston, but we can all be grateful that she did. I know I don't need to tell HETAGers how much we owe her for founding the art culture of Houston from which we still benefit today. (Anyone needing a reminder can find one later in the newsletter.) Here is a Mrs. C. photo gallery from throughout her life (one with her daughter Dorothy), plus a beautiful birthday bouquet she painted herself: *88th Birthday Flowers* 1947.

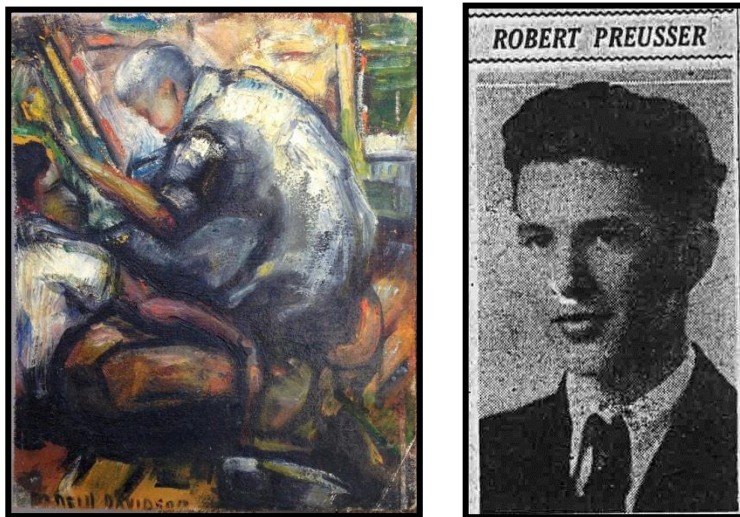


HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

Houston Art History Notes: Robert Preusser goes to the Bauhaus, 1939.

(This piece is based on a “coffee conversation” which took place at Foltz Fine Art, February 9, 2019, in conjunction with the exhibition “[Robert Preusser: Liniar Improvisations](#)” on view until March 9.)

While still only a teenager, Robert Preusser (1919-1992) shined as a prodigy in the small, vibrant modernist art circle in Houston in the 1930s. His teacher, Ola McNeill Davidson, cultivated Robert’s immense, but unconventional artistic talents through the 1930s. But by 1939 she realized that she had probably given him what she could, and that it was time to help him to the next level in his training. That next step took them both to Chicago and the New Bauhaus.



McNeill Davidson *Watching McNeill* cMid-1930s (l) showing the young Preusser watching his teacher paint; and Robert Preusser, January 1940 (r).

Writing to her own teacher and life-long mentor, Emma Richardson Cherry, in September, 1939, Davidson described their Chicago adventure:

Dear One, In spite of a genuine case of the jitters, I must have a little chat with you. I have just gotten back from a motor trip to Chicago with Mrs. Preusser and Robert. We decided to look into the Bauhaus as the next step for Robert.

I am repaid for the physical exhaustion it has brought on for the great satisfaction I now feel in that I have done the proper thing for Robert - a genius without doubt.

I found the new location of Bauhaus ideal for all its purposes – relationship. An old laundry converted into a modern work shop. White throughout with great columns, huge windows with space sense from all directions – glass, wood, textile, molding, color along with light-resistance. Oh yes, photography – the photography and glass excite me tremendously as a new medium of expression – the possibilities of light as an extension is untold. Wish it were so I could desert my duties as mother, wife and caretaker to the dear old aunt and join Robert in his world of excitement.

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Alas! I am but the gang plank for the shore and boat – stretching myself full length that those on shore waiting may walk over my prostrate body and sail out to sea.



The New Bauhaus, Chicago, and its founder, László Moholy-Nagy.

Davidson had taken Preusser to Chicago specifically to study with László Moholy-Nagy, formerly an instructor at the Bauhaus in Germany. In 1937 he moved to Chicago to found a school on the same Bauhaus principles, that art could/should infuse every aspect of design.

In her letter to Cherry, Davidson went on to say:

Moholy Nagi [sic] had us out to his home and studio on the lake front – again white and space – and showed us his various experiments along with light. His instructors were brought to us one by one – gee! Cherry they are a swell bunch. One in particular was gorgeous. Robert writes me he ate his first lunch, with Moholy and this lovely man. Robert’s work, which we took along, was held and brought before the faculty – all were fascinated and filled with wonderment – What, from Texas? I told Moholy, art was from the “by ways and not highways” he caught me, repeated it and said “I like that.”



Robert Preusser *Nucleus* 1937 (l) and *Elsewhere* 1938 (r) – works like those that wowed the New Bauhaus faculty.

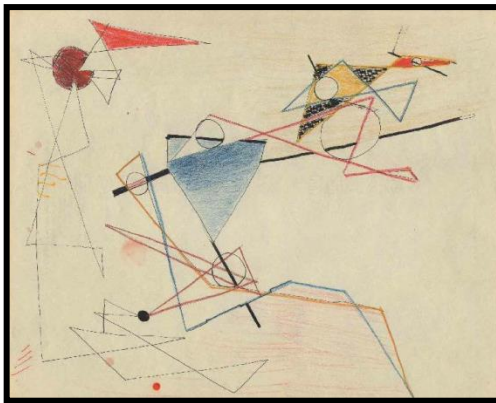
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Early on as she taught Preusser, Davidson realized that he, and some of the other gifted young artists who came to her for instruction, needed special attention to develop their unique artistic talents.

She knew this in part because of her own experience as a student of that dean of Houston artists and art teachers, Emma Richardson Cherry, who had shown her the way to a richer, more productive artistic path a generation earlier.

Taking Robert through the [Art] Institute – his first big show, recalled so vividly you and I, only I was the leader this time and Robert the student. As we stood before certain canvases where you and I stood before – you were with me – and tears came. My one hope that I to him could be what you have been to me. What might my life have been had you not tucked me under your wing when you did. Please! If I seemingly cannot underestimate myself, but seem all too important then blame yourself – your very importance to me has only made me aware of my importance to youth.

Preusser became one of the most innovative artists in the country in the 1940s and 1950s. The Chicago training had an obvious impact on his later work (see images below), and a huge impact in Houston when he returned to the city in the later 1940s, particularly through his co-founding of the Contemporary Arts Museum and his teaching at the Museum of Fine Arts School, but that impact was built on the strong, early foundation of Davidson's teaching.



A Preusser from the Chicago period and a photo of Moholy-Nagy – note the work in the upper left of the photo, as it relates to Preusser's study.

Davidson took pride in Preusser's success and the boost she had been able to give him through her teaching, but she was also fully aware that she *and* he – and indeed all artists in Houston – owed a debt of gratitude to her own teacher, Cherry. She made this clear in a letter she wrote to Cherry years later, when the 90-year old Cherry was feeling a little forgotten by the Houston art world she had done so much to foster over decades.

August, 1950. Dearest One, Everything I have done for my group has come through my appreciation for what you have done for me. Always I ask myself, what would I have done had you not come my way to guide me to the loftier things of life.

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These boys were very unhappy when they came to me – misfits socially and didn't realize why. Starved, yet didn't know where to turn for expression. Of course I understood their needs because of what you had done for me – and so like you I shared untiringly all I had – travel abroad, books, materials, my very soul so that I might be able to “open that door” you opened for me.

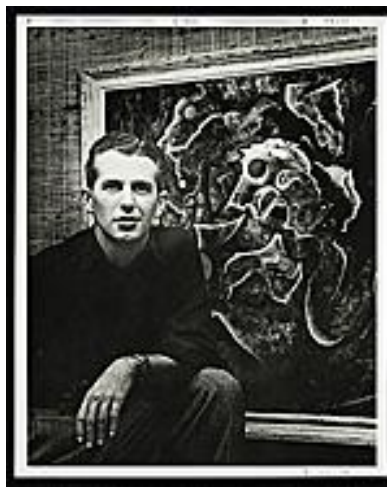
So please do not say “Cherry-McNeill Group! has an interesting past.”

How can that be past? No, Mrs. Cherry that thing we accomplished while active with them flows on and on – it is a chain with you the biggest link – without you and the showing of the way there would be no Robert, Carden [Bailey], Gene [Charlton], Harley [Brubaker] and a number of others on their way to top in their field.

Three generations of innovation in Houston art.



Emma Richardson Cherry c1925 (l) and Ola McNeill Davidson c1935 (r).



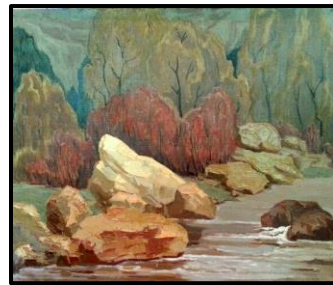
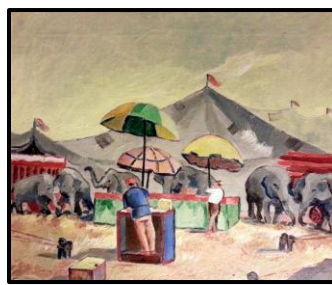
Robert Preusser in 1952.

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Who Made That? Part 2, The 1940s: Last month we're starting a new, occasional feature called **WHO MADE THAT?** to test whether or not we've really been looking at all the fabulous Earlier Houston Art that has been in exhibitions, auctions, books and websites over the last 15 plus years that HETAG has been around. Each month we'll show images of works from a particular decade, and try to link the works with the artist who made them.

This month it gets a little harder as we move to the 1940s. Here is a little gallery of paintings made in the 1940s by the Houston artists listed below, all of whom were working hard and showing often back then. Can you link the artist and painting? Answers on the last page.

Carden Bailey, Elizabeth Coley, Gene Charlton, E R Cherry, Don Edelman, Jack Key Flanagan, Florence B. Grant, Jack Pagan, Robert Preusser, Chester Snowden and A. Hinkle Taylor





**The 2019 CASETA Symposium
and Texas Art Fair
will take place at The TCEA Conference Center in Austin, TX
March 29-31, 2019**

Details on the [CASETA Website](#).

Exhibitions:

Robert Preusser: Linear Improvisations

[Foltz Fine Art](#)

Through March 9, 2019

Drawings from the 1930s and 1940s.

[Jim Love: Sculpture](#)

Moody Gallery

February 14 – March 16, 2019

Future exhibitions:

[James Surls: With Out, With In](#)

March 5 – August 18, 2019

Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum

Austin, Texas

James Surls will be on the program at the [2019 CASETA Symposium](#) (see above).

The Art of Texas: 250 Years

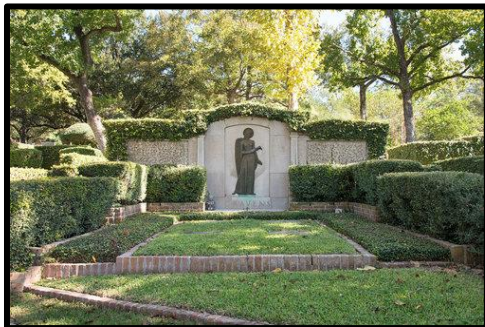
The Witte Museum

San Antonio

Opening May 3, 2019

Ron Tyler, curator of the exhibition and editor of the accompanying catalog, will be on the program at the [2019 CASETA Symposium](#) (see above).

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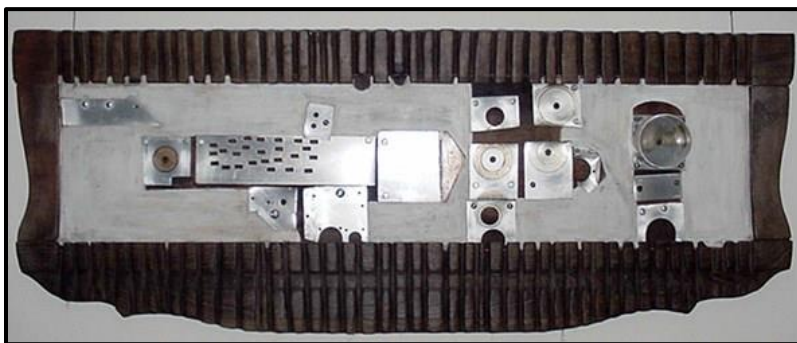
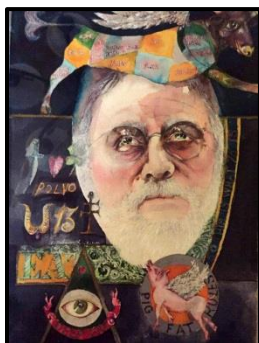
Cravens family memorial by Houston sculptor, William McVey.

Next HETAG Meeting:

Sunday, March 10, 2019 (rain day, Sunday March 17, 2019) 2 pm

HETAGer Bob Pando will take us on a tour of Houston's historic [Glenwood Cemetery](#), showing us final resting places of some who have been influential in the art history of our city, and pointing out some of the memorial art that graces their graves.

I am sad to report the passing of two who will be greatly missed in Earlier Houston Art circles.



Charles Pebworth, 1926-2019, *Self Portrait (1)* and mixed metal and wood wall construction.

I never met Charles Pebworth, which I consider my great misfortune, since getting to know other Houston artists of his generation has been a joy. But I did get to know him through his art, and that in itself is a joy. What exuberant, distinctive art it is. You know a Pebworth piece from across the room - or across the vast lobby, in some cases, since many of his mixed media wall works - in metals, woods, stones - literally filled lobby walls in buildings around Houston and beyond. But every Pebworth work, even the pill-box sized pieces humble collectors in small spaces have room for, is unmistakably his.

His drawings and paintings are not quite so well known, but they are equally fabulous - and often wickedly witty. (I'm thinking in that regard of the regal naked lady seated on her throne, strategically positioned in our powder room.) Though I didn't know him as a teacher, his contribution in helping younger artists find their own voices - for many years at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville - will also live on as a continuing legacy.

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Bill Lassiter 1932-2019

I did have the great pleasure of knowing Bill. Though he was not an artist himself, it's impossible to talk about a Houston art scene over the last 60 years without including mention of Bill. The heartfelt memories of those who knew and loved him well are a tribute to his life well lived. You can read more about Bill in [The Houston Chronicle](#) and [Glasfire](#).

The mission of HETAG is to illuminate Houston's art history by providing viewing opportunities for art, by supporting and doing research on the artists and art communities working in Houston through the years, and by spreading the word.

**Back issues of the HETAG Newsletter are available via the
University of Houston Libraries
Digital Library**

<https://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/hetag>

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Answers to WHO MADE THAT? – 1940s

Top row: Don Edelman, Emma Richardson Cherry, Carden Bailey
Second row: A. Hinkle Taylor, Chester Snowden, Florence B. Grant
Third row: Robert Preusser, Gene Charlton, Jack Key Flanagan,
Elizabeth Coley
Bottom row: Jack Pagan