

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

Newsletter No 6, August 2016



Left to right: Ola McNeill Davidson, Virgie Claxton, Grace Spaulding John, Ruth Pershing Uhler, Florence Fall, Emma Richardson Cherry, Elizabeth Morris, Beatrice Matthei, Margaret Burton(?) and Penelope Lingan.

Portraits and Self-Portraits: Earlier Houston Artists Depict Themselves and Friends

Emma Richardson Cherry, who made her living painting portraits, said: “No one else sees quite as clearly as the artist. But sitters don’t like that clarity in their portraits. They want to be painted as they think they should look. That is not true art.” She concluded that she preferred painting flowers, which didn’t complain about how they looked. But when earlier Houston artists painted portraits of themselves or their artist friends, they could be free to attempt that “clarity” without worrying about the wants of paying customers. In this issue of the HETAG Newsletter we’re looking at self-portraits and portraits of artists by earlier Houston painters.



Ola McNeill Davidson *Watching McNeill* ca.1935, a self-portrait of Davidson, and a portrait of her student, Robert Preusser, watching her paint (l); photo of Davidson painting, from the Preusser archives and possibly taken by Preusser, ca1935 (r)



Robert Preusser [*Self-portrait*] ca.1935 (l); newspaper photo of Preusser, 1940

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HETAG is happy to be working with **The Heritage Society** on this exhibition:

**This WAS Contemporary Art:
Fine and Decorative Arts in Houston 1945–1965**

July 14 – October 15, 2016 The Heritage Society

Tuesday – Sunday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

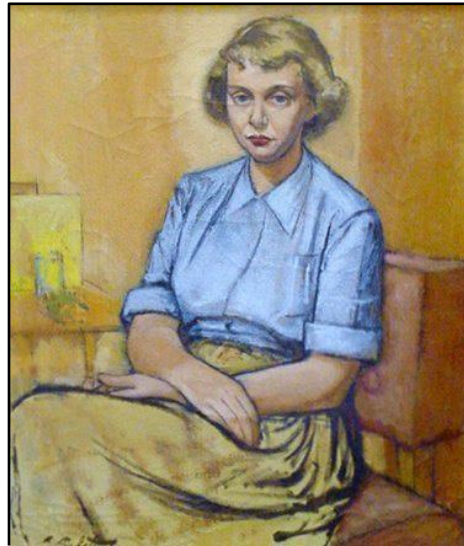
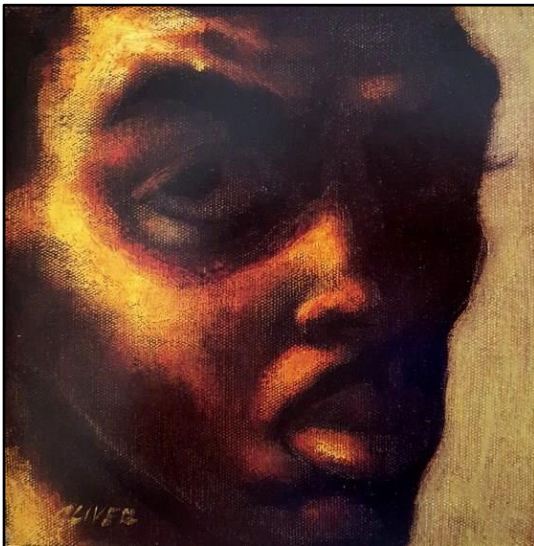
1100 Bagby Street/Houston 77002

<http://www.heritagesociety.org/current-exhibition/>

An illustrated catalog, including essays on Houston art, decorative arts and interior design in the period, has been published in conjunction with the exhibition, and is available for purchase in the gallery.

By my count this is the fourth exhibition of Earlier Houston Art which The Heritage Society has mounted, working with CASETA and HETAG. No other institution in the city has been more supportive of our mission to show Earlier Houston Art to the citizens of Houston and to visitors. No other institution has even come close. There's already talk of another THS/CASETA/HETAG exhibition in 2018. It's time that all of us showed our support of The Heritage Society by becoming members. If you're not already, please become a member of The Heritage Society. Special 2-4-1 offer: Join THS at any level and get an automatic extension on your HETAG membership at no additional cost!

<http://www.heritagesociety.org/levels-of-benefits/>



Kermit Oliver[*Self-portrait*] ca.1965 (l); **George Beckstead** *Portrait of Ruth(Laird)* 1951 (r). Both of these are in the exhibition *This WAS Contemporary Art* discussed above.

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Mark your calendar for the next HETAG meeting:

Saturday, August 13, 10 a.m.
The Heritage Society Museum

1100 Bagby Street

Houston, TX 77002 T 713 655 1912 F 713 655 9249 E info@heritagesociety.org

Join the curators of *This WAS Contemporary Art: Fine and Decorative Arts in Houston 1945-1965* for a gallery tour of the exhibition. Ginger Berni, Tam Kiehnhoff and Randy Tibbits will talk about how the show came to be. Even if you were among the opening night crowd or have already seen the show on your own, please come on down to The Heritage Society for another look and a discussion of the art and objects on view. With any luck we'll even have some of the artists there to give us eye witness insights into this exciting period of Houston's art history.



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CASETA SYMPOSIUM followup:

For the past several years videos have been made of presentations at the annual CASETA symposia. The goal has been to make these talks, which include a wealth of information about Early Texas Art, available for an audience far beyond those who were lucky enough to hear them as they were delivered in the meeting rooms. And now the goal is being met. Presentations from the 12th (2014) and 13th (2015) gatherings have now been posted to Youtube. More will be added as they are edited for posting. Below I've provided links to sessions that were about Houston in a significant way, or were presented by Houston speakers. You can see all those that are currently available by clicking links at the bottom of the list, or by going to the [CASETA website](#)>Gallery>Symposium Videos

J.P. Bryan [“The Story of The Bryan Museum”](#) (Thirteenth Symposium, in Houston, 2015)

Victoria H. Cummins, Ph.D. [“Women Artists and the Public Works of Art Project”](#)
(Twelfth Symposium, Austin, 2014)

Katie Robinson Edwards [“Midcentury Modern Art in Texas”](#) (Twelfth Symposium, Austin, 2014)

Sarah Foltz [“Caught On File: The Dust Bowl In Texas and Beyond”](#) (Twelfth Symposium, Austin, 2014)

Stephen Fox [“Ruth Young McGonigle”](#) (Thirteenth Symposium, in Houston, 2015)

Randy Tibbits [“Guys and Gals ‘Like That’: Some Gay and Lesbian Texas Artists in the 1930s”](#) (Thirteenth Symposium, in Houston, 2015)

Mark White [“Cosmopolitan Southwest: Mid-century Abstraction in Texas “](#) (Thirteenth Symposium, in Houston, 2015)

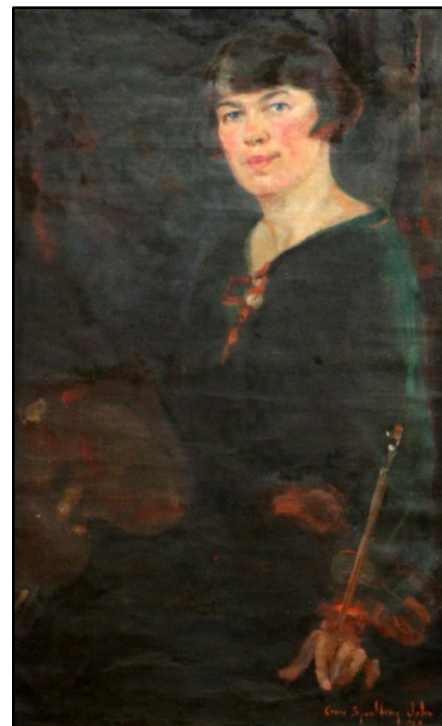
[2014 CASETA Symposium](#)

[2015 CASETA Symposium](#)

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Ruth Pershing Uhler *Growth* 1934, Panhandle Plains Historical Museum Collection, Gift of Henri Gadbois. The central figure is thought to be a self-portrait (l); Grace Spaulding John *Patterns: Portrait of Ruth Pershing Uhler* 1932 Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Gift of Patricia John Keightley and John Spaulding John(r)



Kathleen Blackshear *Self-portrait (in the galleries of the Chicago Art Institute)* ca.1920s (l); Grace Spaulding John *Self-portrait* ca.1920s (r)

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Earlier Houston Art research notes:

When it comes to researching our art history, newspapers are one of the most important sources. The wealth of information they record about individual artists, galleries, museums and community involvement in art is invaluable – and often the only information that survives on the topics. But as one who has spent many mind and eye deadening hours scrolling through microfilm of Houston newspapers, I can tell you that digging out that information can be a near impossible task. Lucky indeed are researchers in cities like Dallas, San Antonio, and even some of the smaller Texas cities, which have long had access to digitized versions of their local papers, often available from their own homes.

At last Houston is about to join the digital newspaper age. Rice University Library has arranged with Newsbank to digitize the entire historical archive of the *Houston Chronicle*, going back to 1901. At present the job is done only for the years 1901-1937 (plus 1963, for some reason), but years are being added fast. Before too many more months all years should be digitized. Unfortunately, Newsbank access is by subscription and for the time being you'll need to go into the Rice University Library to search the archive (unless you happen to be current Rice University faculty, staff or student). We can hope that before too long, however, other libraries will subscribe so that access will be more widely and more conveniently available.

For earlier years (basically those before 1925, for which copyright restriction has lapsed) there are already valuable digital newspapers available. Some are also by subscription, but you can often search them via your public library (check the website). A few, however, are freely available via [The Portal of Texas History](#):

Galveston Daily News 1874-1897

Houston Daily Post 1893-1903

Houston Post 1903-1924

More newspapers from around Texas and the country are available from [Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers](#)



Emma Richardson Cherry *Dawson* [Dawson-Watson] 1888/89 (l); Emma Richardson Cherry *See Yourself As Others See* ca1880s (r). Even though she was a portrait painter, she doesn't seem to have been a *self*-portrait painter. The drawing on the right may be her only known self-portrait.

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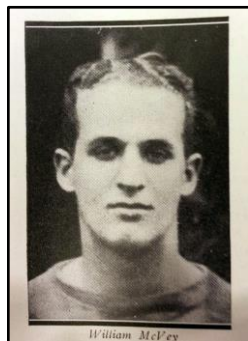
Earlier Houston Art history notes:

Every once in a while, when the weather is nice, I stop by what must be one of the least visited garden and art spaces in Houston: that triangle of grass, azaleas and sculpture that extends out toward Mecom Fountain and Hermann Park from what was originally the entrance of the Museum of Fine Arts.

It's too bad that so few people visit it (at least I almost never run into anyone else when I'm there) since it's beautiful and tranquil, even as traffic swirls around the circle where Main, Montrose and Fannin meet. Also too bad, because it includes an interesting tidbit of Houston art history.

The historical marker briefly tells the history of the Garden Club of Houston, which originally tended the space, and mentions the balustrade at the far end, designed by William Ward Watkin, architect of the original MFAH building. It even mentions the bas reliefs that decorate the balustrade, celebrating the arts of painting, sculpture, music and flower arrangement. But it fails to give the name of the sculptor who made them – sort of strange, since it's an art museum, after all, and since these were among the first works of art ever commissioned by MFAH.

That sculptor was William McVey (1905-1995), who came to Houston in the 1920s to study architecture at Rice University, where, in addition to being an artist, he was a star football player when John Heisman of trophy fame was coach. McVey taught at the Museum School (now the Glassell School of Art) and The University of Texas at Austin, before becoming head of the sculpture department of the Cleveland (Ohio) Institute of Art, one of his alma maters. He's not much remembered here in Houston now, though it's still possible to see his work if you know where to look: on the MFAH balustrade, of course, but also on the Rice campus and even the San Jacinto Monument.



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Out of Town:

JOSE ARPA SPANISH PAINTER IN TEXAS

Apr 9, 2016 - Monday Sep 5, 2016

Panhandle Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, TX

A special related event:

On the weekend of **26-27 August 2016**, PPHM will host a "**Heart of Texas Art**" extravaganza built around the Jose Arpa exhibition and PPHM's permanent Texas collection.

“Beginning Friday we will host a reception for all the lenders and funders of "Jose Arpa: Spanish Painter in Texas," followed by tours of our Texas, Frank Reaugh, and H. D. Bugbee galleries, the Bugbee Studio installation, the murals in our Pioneer Hall painted by Mr. Bugbee and Ben Carlton Mead, and PPHM's vault. On Saturday, 27 August, PPHM will host a brunch after which we will offer to you a guided tour of the Jose Arpa exhibition. We also strongly encourage you to allow time to see Palo Duro Canyon (twelve miles from our front door). Many of you have never visited PPHM and/or Palo Duro, and we offer an opportunity to bask in early Texas art for a couple of days and wish a fond buen viaje (bon voyage) for the Arpa exhibition.” Advance registration required.

<http://panhandleplains.org/calendar.asp?pageid=6&calid=545>

TEXAS FOLK ART

Until September 25, 2016

The Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, TX

“... features the spirited work of some of the state’s most original painters and sculptors, including H. O. Kelly, Reverend Johnnie Swearingen, Velox Ward, and Clara McDonald Williamson, among others.”

[Click here for exhibition information](#)

GEORGIA O’KEEFFE’S FAR WIDE TEXAS

Until October 30, 2016

Goergia O’Keeffe Museum

Santa Fe, NM

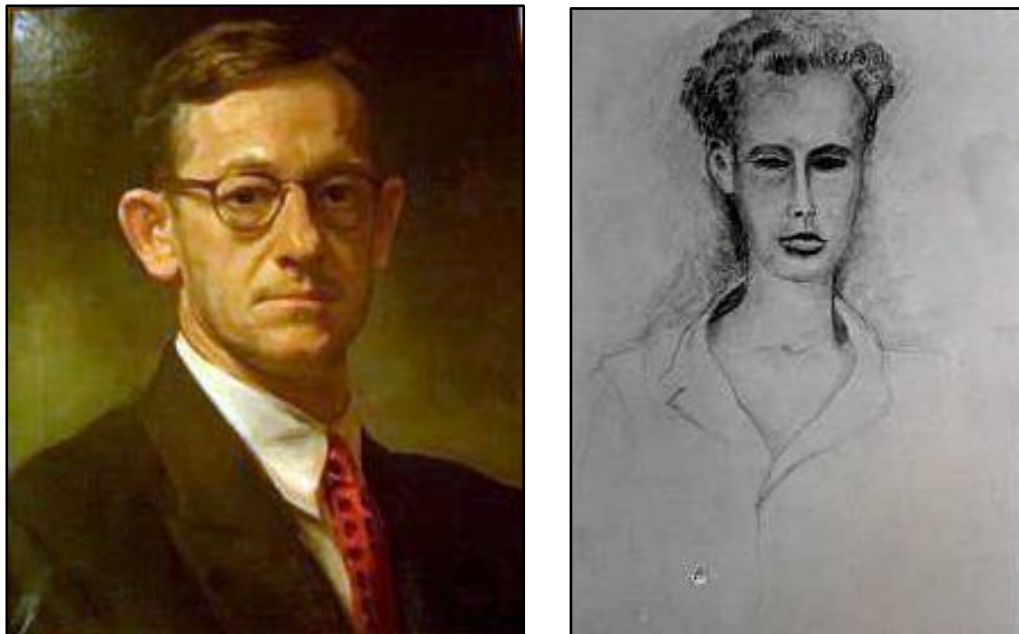
The exhibition features watercolors and drawings that O’Keeffe created during her two years in Canyon, Texas, (1916-1918). The Texas experience was of fundamental importance to O’Keeffe’s development as an artist, and made this iconic American modernist one of our most influential and famous Early Texas Artists.

[Click here for exhibition information](#)

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Don Edelman *Self-portrait* ca.Mid-1950s (l); Watson Neyland *Self-portrait* ca1930s (r)



Robert Joy *Self-portrait* ca.1930s (l); Gene Charlton *Self-portrait* ca1930s (r)

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HETAG and CASETA in the news:

In July there were some nice HETAG and CASETA related items in newspapers around the state. I've linked to two below, but there were probably others that I didn't hear about. If you see any please send me links so that I can share them in future HETAG newsletters.

["Houston's Ambitious Artists Have Embraced a World Of Ideas"](#) by Molly Glentzer. *Houston Chronicle*. (Though this one doesn't actually mention HETAG or CASETA, the spirit of our mission is definitely there.)

["Women Wow in Denver Art Museum's Abstract Expressionist Show"](#) by Rick Brettell, *Dallas Morning News* (CASETA gets a mention toward the end of the review.)

Randy Tibbits, coordinator
HETAG:
Houston Earlier Texas Art Group
tibbits@rice.edu