

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

HETAG Newsletter No. 32, April 2019



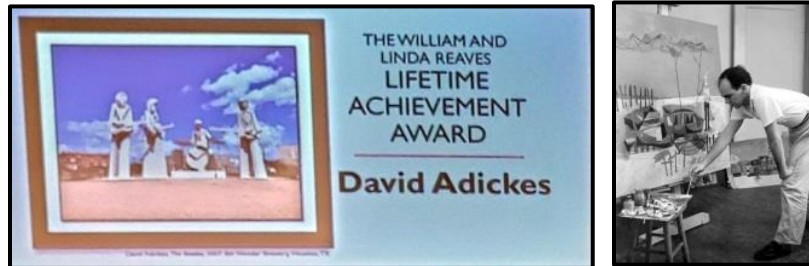
Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art, 17th Annual Symposium Recap.

[The 2019 CASETA Symposium and Texas Art Fair](#) took place in Austin the weekend of March 29-30, 2019. As always it was a festive, informative, non-stop event. If you weren't able to attend, you can watch videos of the presentations (probably by late summer) on the [CASETA website](#).

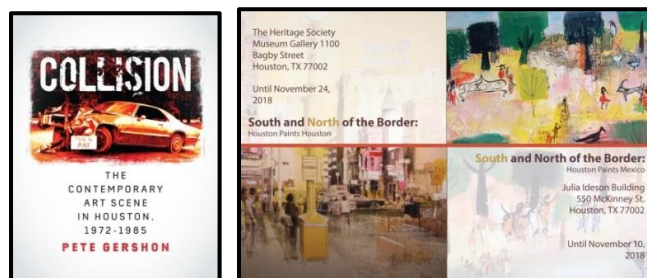
Thanks to all who helped make HETAG a Gold sponsor again this year, and to all Houston individual and organization [symposium sponsors](#), including [THE MENIL COLLECTION](#) and the [MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON](#), and to [FOLTZ FINE ART](#) for showing lots of fine Houston art in the Texas Art Fair.

Again this year CASETA acknowledged the contributions that have been made by Houston artists, scholars and organizations, designating them recipients of these CASETA awards:

DAVID ADICKES, winner of the William and Linda Reaves Lifetime Achievement Award.



PETE GERSHON, Publication Award – Book, for his [Collision: The Contemporary Art Scene In Houston, 1972-1985](#) Texas A&M University Press, 2019.



The Heritage Society (Houston) and Houston Public Library, Publication Award – Exhibition Catalog, for the joint catalog *South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Mexico & Houston*. (Note: This catalog has become scarce, so if you've finished with your copy, HETAG would love to have it back to share with another reader. Let us know at tibbits@rice.edu)

News Flash! CASETA will receive the Texas Association of Museums President's Award for 2019, given for "impactful work [that makes] significant contributions to the museum field."

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Houston Art History Notes: Houston Annual Exhibitions, 1925-1960

Want to know what Houston art from the past looked like? I'm not talking about art that has been bought-and-brought to the city, but art that was made by Houston artists – the real stuff that our city produced.



Evelyne Byers Bessell *Still Life* c.1928. First Houston Annual Exhibition Purchase Prize Award winner, in 1928 (l); Robert Joy *Portrait of L.L.* c.1934, PP winner in 1935 (r).

Since you're a HETAGer, I'm sure your answer is YES. A good place to start is with the Houston Annual Exhibitions, mounted each year from 1925-1960 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The names of both the exhibitions and the museum vary some over the decades, but through the entire 35 year run, the ground rules were the same: this was a juried show; open only to Houston artists (or those who still had Houston ties); and, starting in 1928, prizes were awarded, including a Purchase Prize with the winning work added to the MFAH permanent collection.



Ruth Pershing Uhler *Earth Rhythms No.3* 1935, PP 1936 (l); Genevieve Filson *Wind Trees* c.1939, PP 1939 one of three for which she won (r).

Any Houston artist could submit work, but not everything made the show. From the beginning jurors evaluated the entries and picked those they thought worthy of exhibition. Generally there

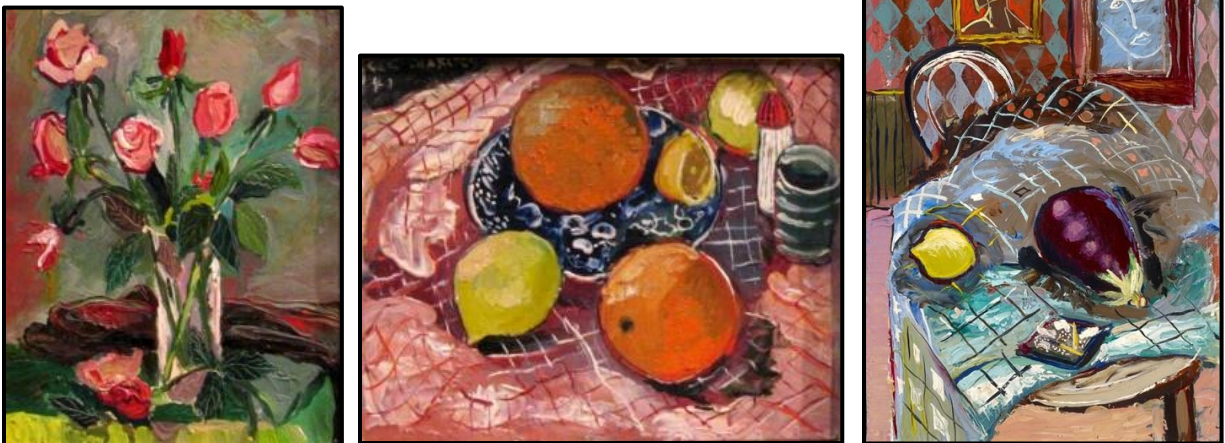
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were three jurors each year, sometimes from Houston, sometimes from elsewhere in Texas, sometimes from around the country, with a strong representation of artists.



Robert Preusser *Composition 1, 2, and 3* 1940, PP 1940 as a group. These were the first non-objective works to win the purchase prize.

Though the juries were selective, some years there were still hundreds of pieces in the exhibitions, and over the years the number of prizes grew. But there was only one Purchase Prize award each year – the best of the best – though, since Houston art is never dull, not everyone always agreed that the winner was really the best.



Gene Charlton *Roses, Oranges, Eggplant* c.1942, PP 1942 as a group.

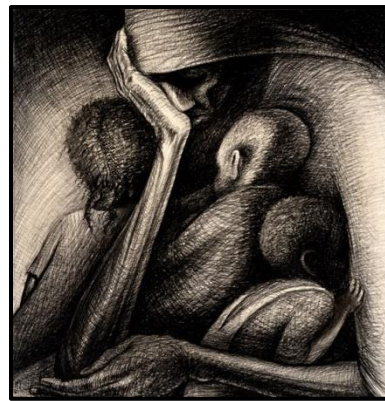
The entries in all the annual exhibitions are listed in the [Exhibition Database](#) maintained by the Archives Department of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. To find them, search using variations of the phrase Houston Annual Exhibition. The listings make for interesting reading; you're bound to find artists and works listed that are completely unfamiliar to you, no matter how much you know about Houston art.

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Frances Skinner *Exercise for a Rainy Afternoon* c.1942, PP 1943 (l); Ruby Lee Schiwetz *The Steer Rider* c.1944, PP 1944 (r).

Being HETAGers, you'd probably even like to see the paintings, watercolors, drawings, sculptures, ceramics, fabrics, soap carvings etc. that made the cut each year. That's another challenge, since, aside from the Purchase Prize Winners, they all went back to their makers or lending owners, and have been disbursed or lost over the decades. Some have made their ways into private collections, but even those in museum collections are only ever on view in occasional temporary exhibitions, like those remembered in our "look back" in the HETAG Newsletter for August/September 2018.



Chester Snowden *Sunday Quietude* c.1946, PP 1946 (l); John Biggers *Cradle* 1950, PP 1950 (r).

But thanks to the wonders of the internet, it is now possible to get a look at those best-of-the-best Purchase Prize winners, all of which remain in the permanent collection of MFAH, and most of which are represented with images in the [MFAH Collections Database](#). Searching them out can sometimes be a challenge – try by artist name if you know it, or once again try Houston Annual Exhibition, Purchase Prize or other likely phrases that occur to you. I'm showing a few here, but there are many more.

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Jack Boynton *Thunderstorm* 1955, PP 1955 (l); Robert Morris *Summer* 1958, PP 1958 (r).

When James Johnson Sweeney arrived in Houston in 1961 as Director of MFAH, he put an end to the annual exhibitions. They were too local, which seemed to mean provincial, for Director Sweeney. Even though that's going on 60 years ago now, there are still artists among us who showed in the later annuals, even one who showed as far back as 1936, though she was *very* young then. Some of those artists have been heard to lament the passing of the annuals. The exhibitions were, they felt, a way of finding out what other Houston artists were up to, of creating community, of feeling valued by our own museum. Ah, for the good old days!



Herb Mears *Construction* 1960, PP 1960 the last purchase prize (l); Frank Freed *OUT!* c.1966.

It is perhaps worth noting that the Houston Annual Exhibition sometimes had a social impact as well as an artistic one. When John Biggers won the purchase prize in 1950 for *Cradle*, pictured above, he was not allowed to accept his award in person. Biggers was black and at the time black Houstonians were allowed in the museum only during a few hours on Thursday evenings. The award ceremony took place at another time. Working with John Biggers, MFAH Director, James Chillman, Jr., convinced the museum board that the situation was unjust, even absurd. The racially segregated hours were abolished and MFAH became one of the first integrated public institutions in Houston.

All artworks pictured are in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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Coming soon in Houston and beyond:

NEXT: Three Generations of Houston Abstract Expressionists

Featuring the work of Richard Stout, Ibsen Espada and Jonathan Paul Jackson
and

Immediacy: Watercolors by Dick Wray

[Foltz Fine Art](#)

2143 Westheimer

Until April 27, 2019

Closing Reception and talk with the artists: Saturday, April 27



Richard Stout *Bright Morning* 2018 (l); Ibsen Espada *Cromosapiens* 2015/18 (c);
Jonathan Paul Jackson *Untitled* 2017 (r).

[Luis Jiménez: Selected Works 1972-1997](#)

Moody Gallery

Until April 27, 2019



Howl 1987 (l), *Out of the West* 1996 (c), *Self Portrait* 1995 (r).

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Women in the Arts Panel

Wednesday, May 1, 2019, 6 pm

Midtown Arts & Theater Center Houston (MATCH) 3400 Main St.

Sarah Beth Wilson McKeel, HETAGer and Director of Exhibitions and Curatorial Projects at Art League Houston, will moderate a panel discussion about women in the arts in Houston. Panelists will be Houston artists Pat Colville, Terrell James and Rabea Ballin. The program is organized by Visual Arts Alliance and will take place at MATCH. Details, including ticketing information, will follow, but mark your calendar now.



[The Witte Museum, San Antonio](#)

Opens May 4, 2019 San Antonio

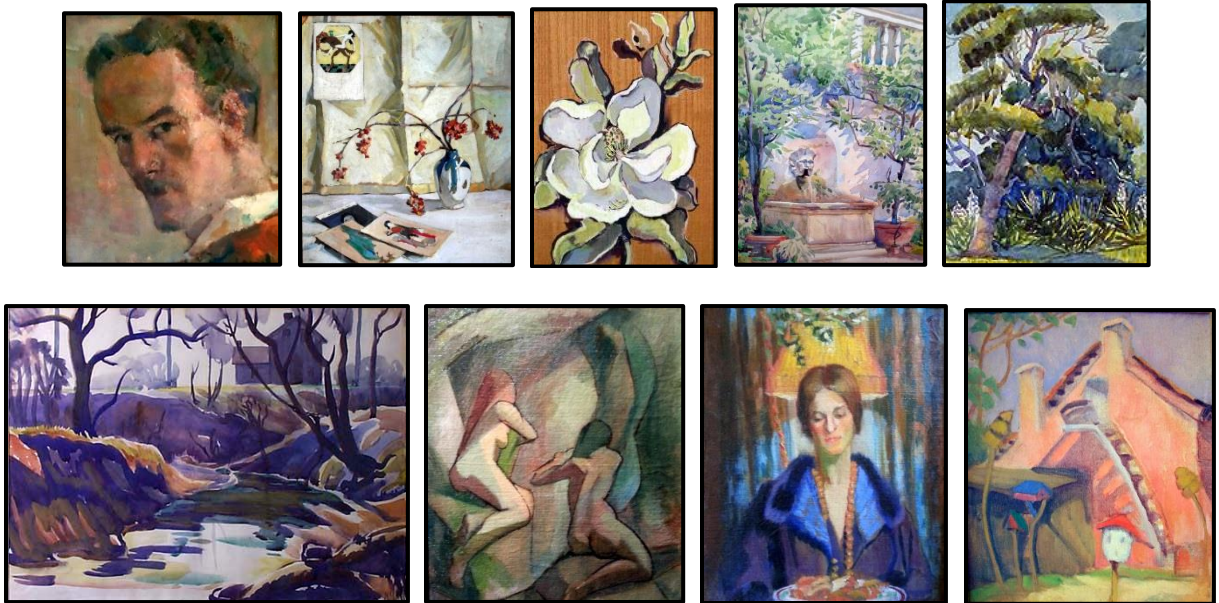
This May a major and massive exhibition will open at the Witte Museum – *The Art of Texas: 250 Years*. Artists range from 19th century Theodore Gentilz to 20th century Georgia O’Keeffe. The more than one hundred art pieces will include a mural by John Biggers, a sculpture by Jesus Morales, and a painting by Julian Onderdonk, “Chili Queens at the Alamo,” that once graced the Oval Office during President George W. Bush’s time in the White House. Art will travel to The Witte from museums and collectors from throughout the United States and in Texas, from El Paso to Houston and from Dallas to Corpus Christi.

In conjunction with the exhibition opening, there will be a **CONFERENCE ON TEXAS ART**, May 3-4, 2019. Check the Museum website for details.

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Who made that – 1920s – The next in a series testing our Houston art eyes to see if we can spot which of these artists made these works, all from the 1920s. Answers below.

The artists: William McVey, James Chillman, Ruth Uhler, Emma Richardson Cherry (twice), Bertha Louise Hellman, John Tidden, Watson Neyland and Emily Langham.



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? – 1920s

Top row: Watson Neyland, John Tidden, Bertha Louise Hellman,
James Chillman, Emily Langham

Second row: Wm. McVey, ER Cherry, ER Cherry, Ruth Uhler