

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group
Newsletter No 10, January 2017



Leila McConnell *Ruth's Pots* 1958

The Still Life Issue:

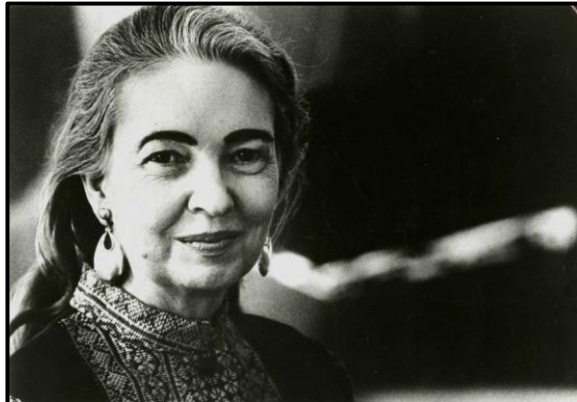
After the tumult of 2016 and the frenzy of New Year's Eve (I'm sure some of you had New Year's Eves like that), I thought that the stillness of still lifes might be a good way to start 2017. It appears that the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, thinks so too, since they're about to open "[Two Centuries of American Still-Life Painting: The Frank and Michelle Hevrdejs Collection](#)". But that show has no Houston examples of the genre, so in this issue of the *HETAG Newsletter*, Houston still lifes get a show of their own.



Ruby Stone Markham [Still Life] 1930s; Gene Charlton [Cherries on a Table] 1940s

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HETAG meeting Sunday, January 22:



Even though the Dorothy Hood retrospective at the Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi has closed, the Hood-fest continues for HETAGers on Sunday, January 22, 2017. First we'll gather at the studio in the Heights where Hood painted in her last years. Then we'll go over to Deborah Colton Gallery for a look at the exhibition [Dorothy Hood: Select Paintings](#), where Colton will talk with us about Hood and her work. As an added bonus, we will also get to see [Looking for the Right Time: Bert Long](#), which is also up at the gallery now. This can be an "and/or" afternoon – join us for both events or for either. Hope to see you January 22 this fun afternoon.

Dorothy Hood studio
819 Highland 77009
Meet at 1:30

[Deborah Colton Gallery](#)
2445 North Blvd. 77098
Meet at approx. 2: 30 to 3:00

Before our visit you might want to view this documentary about Hood, including scenes of her at work in her studio when it was filled with her creative spirit and her art. The studio is now empty except for that lingering creative spirit:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=35JlIqTJEjg>



David Adickes [Still Life] 1953; Herb Mears *Watermelon* 1956

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Houston Art History Notes: Why research Houston's art history?

“When I first arrived in Houston in 1981, to curate exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, I was shocked to find that the museum had never held an exhibition of a local artist.”

Wasn't I shocked to read this first sentence in Barbara Rose's Foreword to *The Color of Being/El Color del Ser: Dorothy Hood, 1918-2000*, the splendid book by Susie Kalil, published in conjunction with the exhibition of the same name recently mounted by the Art Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi? Shocked because it is incorrect.

As a devotee of the Houston artist Emma Richardson Cherry, I knew for a fact that MFAH had mounted exhibitions of her work, and also of many other local artists. Those exhibitions may have been much too long ago for my satisfaction, and perhaps not quite frequent enough, but they had happened, and I would have expected Rose, a prominent art historian and critic who served as senior curator at MFAH from 1981 to 1985, to know better.

A quick count in the exhibitions listing of Alison de Lima Greene's *Texas: 150 Works from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston* (MFAH/Harry N. Abrams, 2000) turned up more than 40 solo or duo exhibitions of local artists at MFAH by 1981, when Rose arrived. And there were also many group shows with a strong representation of local artists, like the juried Houston Annual exhibitions (1925-1960), limited to residents of Harris County, the Texas General exhibitions (1940-1964) and the Southern States Art League circuit shows of the 1920s and 1930s.

I point this out not to reflect badly on Rose, who, along with co-curator, Kalil, mounted one of the most enduringly significant (even if sometimes mostly as a focus of criticism) exhibitions ever mounted of Houston artists, “Fresh Paint: The Houston School,” (MFAH, 1985). I point it out because this discrepancy between belief and fact is a stark example of why it's important to find out more about Houston's art history.

I've been having something of a crisis of purpose lately. After all the effort and energy that many of us in the HETAG/CASETA community have expended over the years, now turning into decades, with what sometimes seems like little impact, I've begun to wonder if it's really worth it. The years are getting by; we may not have that many left; is this how we should be spending them? Is it perhaps time for us to wise up and accept that what we've been doing may not be that important? (Oh, my, how unsettling those middle-of-the-night musings can be.) I'm writing this, of course, because I've concluded that it is worth it, and Rose unintentionally helped me get there.

Yes, there have been exhibitions of local artists at MFAH, going right back to the beginning. Not as many as some of us might like, and not nearly as frequent as should be, especially in recent decades, but they happened, and without finding out the facts – which is to say, researching the history – we wouldn't know it.

Without doing the research, we might also accept the myth that there were no galleries in Houston, or none that mattered, before the 1960s. But there were galleries going way back, and they were showing local artists: Yunt Gallery, as early as 1922 and going right through the 1930s; Little Gallery in the late 1920s; La Vielle France in the early 1930s; The Cottage Gallery in 1934/35; The Browse About Shop in the mid-1930s; McNeill Davidson's Our Little Gallery of abstract art in

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1938; and The Houston Artists Gallery, a cooperative run by the artists themselves, spearheaded by Grace Spaulding John in 1930 and active in various iterations until 1938. (Note: An exhibition focusing on the Houston Artists Gallery and a parallel organization of black Houston artists, the Negro Art Guild, will be on show in the Ideson Gallery of Houston Public Library, August to November, 2017.) These galleries, and a number yet to be discovered, did exist long before the 1960s and they made a difference.

Without doing the research we might accept the assertion that modernism, when it finally got to Houston, arrived as the largesse of a few enlightened collectors, that our artists had nothing to do with it. Indeed the collectors may have been enlightened, but it wasn't the collectors who painted with Marsden Hartley in 1920 (as Mrs. Cherry did); it wasn't collectors who brought the first Cubist paintings to Texas in 1926 (Mrs. Cherry again, and they were paintings she painted herself in Paris); it wasn't collectors who filled Maholy-Nagy with "wonderment" when he saw the young Robert Preusser's work in 1939 (according to McNeill Davidson's description of the event). With due respect to Ima Hogg, one of the earliest Klee collectors in America (influenced in Klee's direction by Mrs. Cherry, I'm pretty sure) and the de Menils, who had a momentous impact here, the artists were doing it first – they just didn't have as much capital or as much publicity. Studying the history can uncover that truth.

This is important not just to get the facts right, important as that is, or as a matter of pride. If we believe that our local museums have never supported local art, then why should we expect them to start now, and really why should they? If we believe that our local artists were always behind, why should we bother looking at what they did and judging for ourselves, or expect that contemporary artists are any less so? If we believe that there were no galleries (because there was no art worth showing? because no one cared?) why should anyone bother looking at what our place has made?

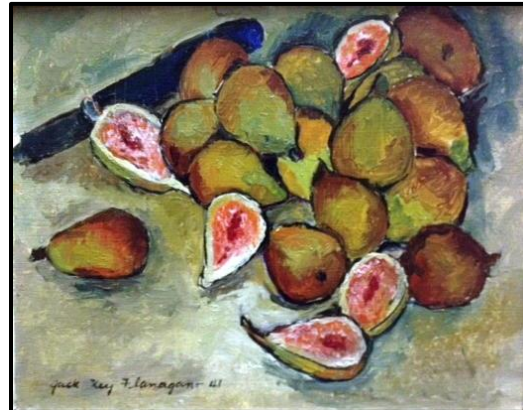
History is only living memory unless someone digs further back, and what we think was true about the past is likely wrong unless we've done the work to find the facts.

When we've done the work, the picture of Houston's art history is different from the one that has prevailed for decades, and it's immensely richer. The flourishing art culture that has developed here didn't begin from nothing in 1950 – basically the beginning of living memory now. Because we're digging out that history we know that there were artists making art here, galleries showing it, and institutions collecting it far back into the early 20th and even the 19th centuries.

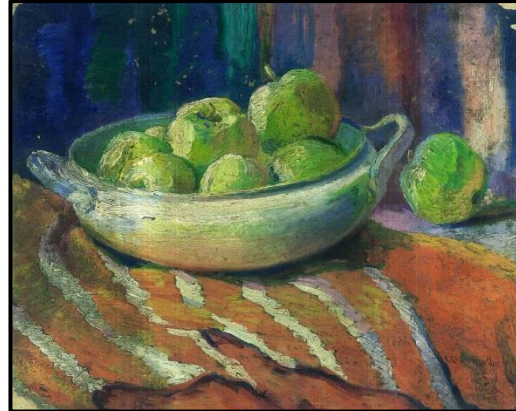
Houston isn't New York, Paris or L.A., but it doesn't need to be: those slots are filled. And Houston art isn't theirs either. All art is local at some point, and artists, like writers, have impact when they create from what they know. The past is part of that. Until we know our art history, whether we're artists, collectors, museum professionals or just interested viewers, and realize that we can learn from it and take pride in it, even if we chose to break with it, we don't stand much chance of discovering the local uniqueness that might have a broader impact.

Rose may not have known – may not now know – the history of art in Houston. If she had, the groundbreaking exhibition she mounted with Kalil would probably have been even more significant. If she did, she certainly would have started her Hood Foreword with a different first sentence, I hope. Perhaps something like this: When I arrived in Houston in 1981, I was shocked to find that the art of the city was exciting and varied, and that it had been for a very long time – and I was eager to build on that history. (How comforting some middle-of-the-night musings can be.)

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Chester Snowden [untitled] 1940s?; Jack Key Flanagan [Figs] 1941



Stella Sullivan *Still Life With Cauliflower* 1950; Emma Richardson *Cherry Green Apples* ca1929

Exhibitions in Houston:

Museum of Fine Arts Houston

[Overhead and Under Foot: Contemporary Topographies on Paper](#)

Through January 29, 2017

Contemporary artists, including Texans Dick Wray, Terrell James, Vernon Fisher and former Core Fellow Hilary Wilder, interpret physical geographies and the varied impressions of their surfaces; break through the ground, interrogating that which is under foot; draw directly upon the methodologies and ephemera of geographical research; or take up the practices of the archaeologist and navigator to explore material culture. (Description copies, with a small alteration, from the MFAH website.)

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[Arts Brookfield, at Two Allen Center](#)

[On My Journey Now: The Legacy of John Biggers](#)

January 11 – April 3, 2017

The legacy of artist John Biggers can be found not only on the walls of Texas Southern University, but in the works of many of his students who are now veterans of Houston's art scene. *On My Journey Now – The Legacy of John Biggers* will highlight early works of Dr. Biggers accompanied by works of his accomplished and respected students, who were taught by him during his 34 years as a professor in the art department he founded at Texas Southern University. Curated by Sally Reynolds.

OPENING RECEPTION

January 18 | 5 – 6:30 PM



John Clark Tidden *Bittersweet* 1923 (l); Agnes Muench [untitled interior] c.1920s (c);
William McVey *Compositional Study* 1927 (r)

Exhibitions around the state:

The Grace Museum

Abilene

[Spanish Texas: Legend & Legacy](#)

Through March 11, 2017

<https://www.thegracemuseum.org/on-view/>

Old Jail Art Center

Albany

[TEXAS MODERNS: Sallie Gillespie, Wade Jolly, Blanche McVeigh, and Evaline Sellors](#)

Through February 11, 2017

<http://theojac.org/#about>

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**Panhandle Plains Historical Museum
Canyon**

[When Georgia Was Here](#)

Through February 24, 2018

<http://panhandleplains.org/gallery.asp?pageid=7&galid=490>

**Amon Carter Museum of American Art
Fort Worth**

[Abstract Texas: Midcentury Modern Painting](#)

Through October 8, 2017

<http://www.cartermuseum.org/>



Pat Colville *Summer Table* 1960 (l); Henri Gadbois [Persimmons] 1950s (c);
Gene Charlton [Table top] c.1946

In the Galleries:

[William Reaves Sarah Foltz Fine Arts](#)

2143 Westheimer

Transient Views: Places of Our Lives

Work by Jim Culberson, Ken Matzu and Richard Stout

Through Jan 28, 2017

[Deborah Colton Gallery](#)

2445 North Blvd.

Dorothy Hood: Select Paintings

Through January 28, 2017

Bert Long, Jr.: Looking for the Right Time

Through January 28, 2017

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Beulah Schiller Ayars [untitled] 1930s; Forrest Bess [Tablescape] 1940s?



Gene Charlton *Oranges* 1942; Frances Skinner *Exercise for a Rainy Afternoon* 1942



Ruth Uhler *At the Window* 1920s?

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