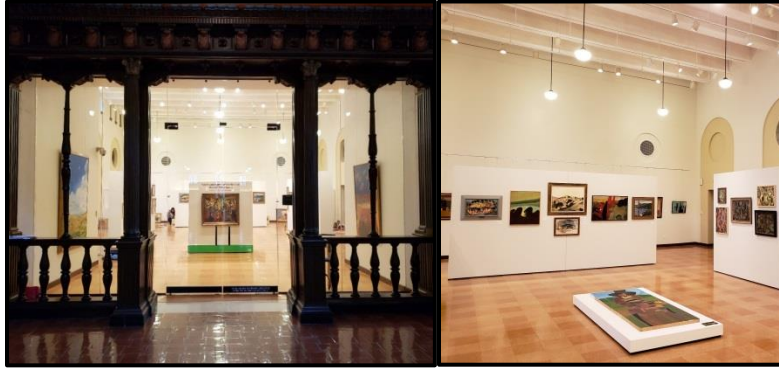


HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group



Houston Paints Mexico at the Ideson Building, Houston Public Library

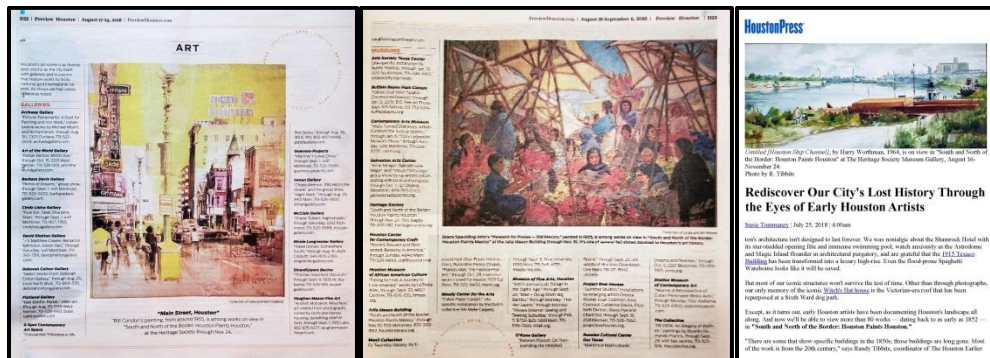
HETAG Newsletter No 25, August/September 2018

The HETAG and Exhibitions Issue

Both halves of the dual exhibition *South and North of the Border* are now open – *Houston Paints Houston* at The Heritage Society and *Houston Paints Mexico* at the Ideson Building of Houston Public Library. By my count these are the 11th and 12th exhibitions of Earlier Houston Art that HETAG or HETAGers have had a big part in mounting. We couldn't have done them without our institutional partners (join [The Heritage Society!](#); Support [Houston Public Library!](#)), but without us they might not have done them either, so this month we'll look back at the exhibitions of Earlier Texas Art we've accomplished together.



Houston Paints Houston at The Heritage Society



The Houston Chronicle and Houston Press (among others) have taken note.

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

Next HETAG Meeting, Sunday, September 16, 2018, 2 pm.



Erik Sprohge *Night Wanderer I* 1982 Oil stick on art board

HETAGers **Helen and Erik Sprohge** have invited HETAG to their home for a social hour and a chance to see the art and studio of Erik, who has been making art in Houston since the 1940s. We will also get to see the art of Erik's father, Paul Sprohge. Both Erik and Paul are included in the exhibition *South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Mexico* on view in the Ideson Building of Houston Public Library until November 10, 2018. I'll be sending details, including directions, soon, but put the event on your calendar now.



Paul Sprohge Untitled [Mexican Market] 1963 Paper lithograph

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

HETAG AND EXHIBITONS – A LOOK BACK:

Over the past 15 years, HETAG has partnered with a number of Houston cultural organizations to present exhibitions of Earlier Houston Art. To be specific, those partners have been The Heritage Society, The Houston Public Library, The O’Kane Gallery at The University of Houston Downtown and the Fondren Library of Rice University. We’ve also participated in other exhibitions that we didn’t explicitly sponsor – one of those in Houston City Hall itself. Catalogs exist for most of these shows, which, taken together, go far toward laying out the history of Houston-made art through the early decades of the 20th Century.


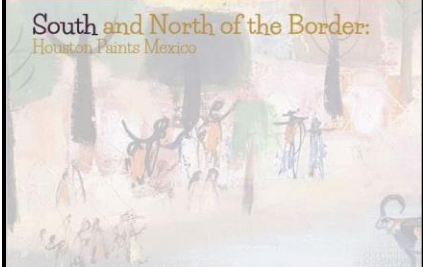
It is perhaps fitting that all but one of these exhibitions were mounted downtown, close to where Houston history began. Without these partnerships and exhibitions, Houstonians would have almost no opportunity to see our own art from earlier times – art made here rather than just bought-and-brought here – since our major art museums at the other end of Main Street are seldom able to show it (though The Museum of Fine Arts Houston has lent works to several of our exhibitions, and there are some related exhibitions on view there now).

By now our record is getting to be pretty impressive, so it’s time for a look back – as a launching pad for our next leap forward. Here, in reverse chronological order, are the exhibitions of Earlier Houston Art in which HETAG or HETAGers have been major participants.

2018: August 25 – November 10

[South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Mexico](#)

Ideson Building, Houston Public Library

 <p>South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Mexico</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">HOUSTON PAINTS MEXICO</p> <p>One of the six flags that have flown over Texas is the flag of Mexico. From 1821, the year of Mexico's independence from Spain, to 1836, when Texas itself declared independence, we were a sparsely populated northern territory of the vast and ancient country that is Mexico. In the almost two centuries since then, Texas and Mexico have been neighbors who were sometimes friendly, sometimes less so, but always intertwined economically, culturally and imaginatively.</p> <p>It is thus no surprise that Houston artists have long been intrigued by our exotic neighbor to the south, a land of sites, scents and sounds flamboyantly unlike those that surround them at home. Particularly through the 20th Century, as Houston grew from a small town into a major, wealthy city, Houston artists have often looked south, across the Mexican border, for inspiration in their art. As early as 1905, the dean of Houston artists, Emma Richardson Cherry, made a trip overland to Mexico City. She wrote home about what she saw, and recorded it in her art. Starting in earnest in the 1920s, after a decade of revolution in Mexico, Houstonians joined the growing numbers of American artists making the journey south. Grace Spaulding John went five times by 1935; Forrest Bess visited in the mid-30s; many others followed in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. Being artists, they depicted what they saw, drawing elements of their Mexico experiences into their work thereafter.</p> <p>Flowing in the other direction, major exhibitions of Mexican art came to Houston, important Mexican artists visited (notably Roberto Montenegro in 1932), and at least one Mexican artist, Crescenciano Garza Rivera, originally from Monterrey, made an indelible mark in the city when he served as art director of <i>The Gargoyle</i>, published in the city from 1928-1932. His covers and drawings for the weekly issues of the magazine exposed Houstonians to the vastly different, revolution-tinged visual world of Mexican art of the time – helping to shape the artistic visions of many of the city's artists, especially the young Dorothy Hood, who would spend 20 years in Mexico before returning with her Mexican-honed artistic sensibility in 1960.</p> <p>It is our hope that by bringing together, from public and private collections, more than 60 works created over more than 60 years by Houston artists visioning Mexico, we might help present-day Houstonians better understand the close ties, both of geographic and culture, which have bound us to Mexico for centuries. This seems especially timely now that our Latino population (many with roots in Mexico) approaches 50 percent.</p> <p>This exhibition is half of a joint project with the umbrella title "South and North of the Border," to be mounted in conjunction with The Heritage Society, where "Houston Paints Houston" will explore how our artists helped create our understanding of our own city. The two shows together are cornerstones of the "Festival of Earlier Houston Art" taking place in institutions and galleries all over Houston during the Fall of 2018.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This exhibition is generously supported by Houston Public Library, City of Houston, and Houston Public Library Foundation</p>	
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HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

2018: August 16 – November 24

[South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Houston](#)

The Heritage Society



Houston Paints Houston


"What the artists in this exhibition chose to see in Houston was its mercurial quality. They looked with presumptive nostalgia to Houston's old, left-behind neighborhoods and to its ardent natural environment for alternatives to modern flatness and the destruction of emotional layering associated with rapid development. Artists sought to infuse the landscapes they saw with pathos in order to extract from the incessantly modernizing city a Houston in which they could feel at home."

Stephen Fox

In the first half of the twentieth century, the population of Houston increased dramatically and the city transformed from a small southern town into a modern "Space City." This exhibit allows visitors the unique opportunity to experience those changes in visual form and by local artists who have their own feelings about the changes they too are witnessing. The artists are watching, recording and interpreting how Houstonians have shaped their environment.

Houston experienced an astonishing trajectory towards modernity that required a revolution in visioning the city. Showing that re-visioning through the eyes and works of Houston's own artists is the goal of the exhibition "Houston Paints Houston." It is our hope that by bringing together, from public and private collections, more than 70 works created over more than 130 years, we can help present-day Houstonians better understand how the vision of the city evolved, and helped create the modern city in which we live.

This exhibition is half of a joint project with the umbrella title "South and North of the Border." It is mounted in conjunction with the Ideson Gallery of Houston Public Library where "Houston Paints Mexico" explores how our artists helped create our understanding of our closest, and in many ways, most important neighbor.





2017: August 12 – November 9

[Planned, Organized and Established: Houston Artist Cooperatives in the 1930s](#)

Ideson Building, Houston Public Library

PLANNED, ORGANIZED AND ESTABLISHED
HOUSTON ARTIST COOPERATIVES
IN THE 1930s



Houston Artist Cooperatives in the 1930s

In racially segregated Houston during the 1930s, two separate-but-parallel groups of artists—one Black, the other White—organized artist cooperatives, hoping to expand opportunities for exhibiting and selling their work. Both the Negro Art Guild and the Houston Artists Gallery are little known today. The artist-members of each are seldom acknowledged as the serious-minded workers in art that they were. But through their cooperative efforts they laid down the foundation on which the vibrant modern art culture of Houston stands.

In December 1930, the White artists, led by Grace Spaulding John, opened their cooperative gallery in two basement rooms in the Beaconsfield Apartment Building (still standing on Main Street in Downtown Houston). According to John, the Houston Artists Gallery had been "planned, organized and established within the period of a week." Though many of the members were women of secure social standing, they were dedicated to their art, hard-working and willing to take on the challenge of starting a business during the Depression. Most of the leading White Houston artists of the day were members at some point during its existence from 1930 to 1939.

Due to segregation, no Black artists could be members of Houston Artists Gallery, but there were Houston Black artists at the time who wanted to show their work. Until now little has been known about these early artists, who were working years before Dr. John Biggers arrived at Texas Southern University in 1948, when the previously known history of Black art in Houston began. These earlier Black Houstonians presented exhibitions of their own at the Colored Carnegie Library through the 1930s; and, following their fifth annual exhibition in June 1937, they organized the Negro Art Guild.

This exhibition and the accompanying catalogue present the histories of these two artist organizations in order to explore the development of art made by Houston artists in an earlier era, and to illuminate the impact of segregation on the cultural life of the city. The present exhibition brings the two groups together and lets modern-day Houstonians see and come to appreciate their work. Separation turned into unity makes for a stronger, fairer Houston in all areas, including art.

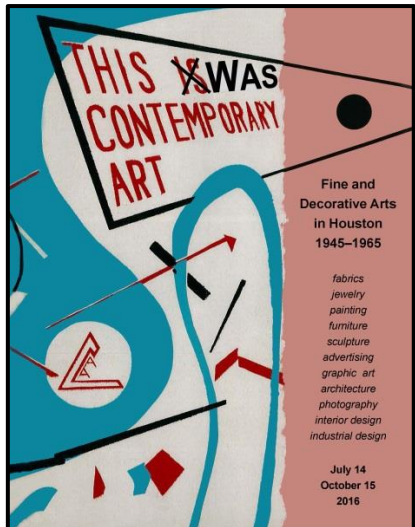
This exhibition is generously supported by Houston Public Library, City of Houston, and Houston Public Library Foundation

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

2016: July 14 – October 15

[This WAS Contemporary Art: Fine and Decorative Arts in Houston, 1945-1965](#)

The Heritage Society



This WAS Contemporary Art: Why and What

The first exhibition organized by the brand new Contemporary Arts Association (later renamed Contemporary Arts Museum) in 1948 was titled *This Is Contemporary Art*. It was a real eye opener for Houstonians, inspired by the Bauhaus concept that design – which is to say, art – is a part of everything people make, and that good design can have a positive impact on the lives they live. The show forcefully made the point that art wasn't something limited to paintings-on-the-wall – a concept that Robert Preusser, one of the co-founders of the Contemporary Arts Association, had absorbed during his time as a student of László Moholy-Nagy and others at the New Bauhaus in Chicago. Many of the faculty that he encountered there, including Maholy-Nagy and György Kepes, had themselves taught at the original Bauhaus, fleeing Germany as World War II approached, and bringing the revolutionary Bauhaus approach with them.

The concept was somewhat radical for Houston in 1948. The fine and decorative arts in that first CAA show (painting, sculpture, furniture, fabric, jewelry and much more) were not made in Houston, however, only shown here. In our 2016 exhibition, we want to suggest the impact that the 1948 show had on Houston artists – to demonstrate how they took the concepts about design exemplified in *This Is Contemporary Art* and built a Houston-made body of work along the same lines.

On a purely coincidental level, it seems fitting to link the current exhibition to that first CAA show for another reason as well. When the CAA museum was built in 1949 it was located adjacent to Sam Houston Park, now the home of The Heritage Society. In 1948 there was not yet a CAA building so *This Is Contemporary Art* was actually mounted in a gallery of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. That original CAA building has long been gone, but in the early days there was a physical proximity between THS and CAA which is celebrated in a small way by *This WAS Contemporary Art*.

We leave it to those who visit the exhibition to decide whether or not the work still seems "contemporary". The current interest in mid-century design suggests that many will say yes. Most of the works included in the exhibition come from individual collectors, rather than institutions, and certainly those collectors have incorporated the objects into their contemporary lives. The argument can be made that good art and design are always contemporary since they touch those who experience them, in whatever period, in ways that move them to feeling and thought.

The special aspect of this exhibition is that the works included were made in Houston. Though some do not much acknowledge it, PLACE has an impact on art and design – often an elusive impact, but an impact none the less. Of course, every artist and designer is unique, even though all draw from the zeitgeist of their time, so the things they make have something about them that is unique as well. That we can name the makers of the objects in this show as Houston artists/designers, working in Houston (rather than things simply bought-&-brought from elsewhere), is an exciting affirmation of the ability of our city to make for itself.

Included in *This WAS Contemporary Art* are paintings and sculptures by many artists who are still with us, as well as others now almost forgotten. Among those represented are Robert Preusser, Gene Charlton, Frank Doljiska (who designed and installed the 1948 show), Niuse Carlson, Frank Freud, Richard Stout, Henri Gadoux, Lella McConnell, Erik Sprohge, David Adickes, and the list goes on and on. But it is, perhaps, the surprises discovered in preparation for the exhibition that engender a particular affection, since they were completely unexpected at the start: the brooches and furniture, the fabrics by Sheila Sullivan, the jewelry by Sullivan, Gadoux and Robert Felworth, the exquisite hard-stone and bone carvings by Lowell Collins, which are all illustrated in the catalog for the show, along with the many art works and designs by the many others whose work is here.

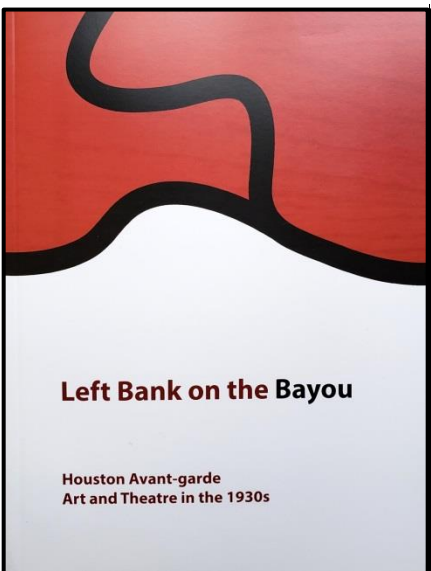
The Heritage Society, and those organizations and individuals who have curated, lent to and sponsored *This WAS Contemporary Art* hope that all who see the show will enjoy it, learn from it, maybe even be inspired by it – especially so, knowing that these beautiful and amazing things were made right here in Houston.



2014: September 4 – October 16

[Left Bank on the Bayou: Houston Avant-garde Art and Theatre in the 1930s](#)

O'Kane Gallery, University of Houston-Downtown



The importance of a production here in Houston may seem negligible to the history of the theatre. I do not believe that is so. I believe theatre here is as theatre everywhere-- a breathing testimony of creation.

—Margo Jones, Letter to the Drama Editor, *New York Times*, (December 24, 1939)

Born in Livingston, Texas, Margo Jones knew early on the theater was her calling. A university education and travel around the world observing dramatic performances invigorated Jones to bring great theater to Texas. Jones' initial work in Houston was a short lived theatrical venture as part of the Federal Theatre Project, an off-shoot of the Works Progress Administration in the late 1930s. She then convinced the Houston Recreation Department to allow her to use a building on Buffalo Drive (now Allen Parkway) just west of downtown Houston. Used two days a week for square dancing, the building contained a perfect stage. With the Houston Recreation Department on board, the Houston Community Players were born and opened in December of 1936 with a production of "The Importance of Being Earnest."

The company grew under Jones' leadership and expanded into the Lamar Hotel to enable summer productions and an opportunity for theater-in-the-round. Instead of the typical steady stream of light-hearted comedies or musicals, Jones felt local theater needed to speak more deeply to the heart, mind, and soul, and, if well done, could provide a lasting richness to the communities where it played. Jones believed it was essential to support and produce plays written by contemporary playwrights. The Houston Community Players produced plays by local writers but also, as Jones gained experience and resources, national ones, including Edwin Justus Mayer's play, "Sunrise in My Pocket," which had its world premiere in Houston. She would later teach at the University of Texas, direct on Broadway, and open a professional theater in Dallas.

In Paris, the now infamous "left bank" of the Seine was serving as the meeting place of erstwhile writers, artists, thinkers, a café society made up of the likes of Pablo Picasso, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, all intent on pursuing a more modern understanding of the world in which they lived. In their own way, Jones along with artists included in this exhibition, Maudie Carron, Casden Bailey, Forrest Bea, Robert Preusser, Frank Doljiska, Niuse Carlson, and Gene Charlton, helped to create a more modern if no less noble Houston "left bank," fully embracing a tolerant and progressive atmosphere for artistic expression.



HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

2014: June 1 – October 1

[Houston Founders at City Hall](#)

Houston City Hall

(Not a HETAG show, but organized by William Reaves Fine Art with the participation of HETAGers, so I include it.)



2013: February 1 – May 4

[Emma Richardson Cherry \(1859-1954\): Houston's First Modern Artist](#)

Ideson Building, Houston Public Library



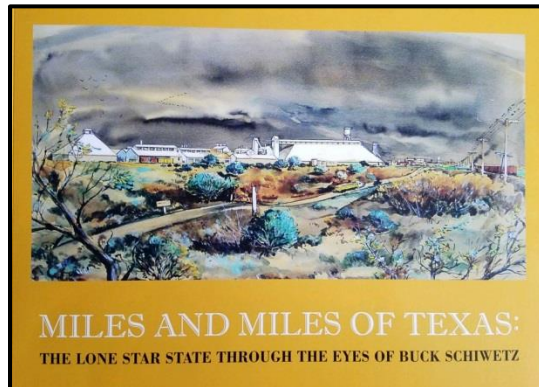
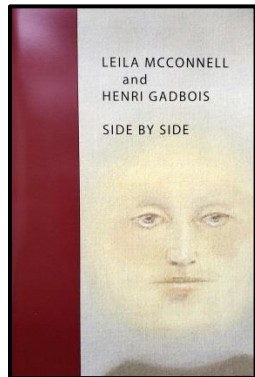
HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

2009: October 1 – November 5

Leila McConnell and Henri Gadbois: Side By Side

O’Kane Gallery, University of Houston-Downtown

(Not a HETAG show, but Leila and Henri are HETAGers, so I include it.)



2009: July 21 – September 27

Miles and Miles of Texas: The Lone Star State Through the Eyes of Buck Schiwetz

The Heritage Society

(Not a HETAG show, but curated by a HETAGer, so I include it.)

2006: May 2 – June 25

Houston Art in Houston Collections: Works from 1900 to 1965

The Heritage Society



2004: July 1 – September 26

Actively Working, Silently Waiting: The Paintings of Emma Richardson Cherry

The Heritage Society

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

We're about to launch into a very busy Earlier Texas Art Fall, with exhibitions and events all over town. It's an unprecedented opportunity to see and learn about Houston-made art from the 1850s through the 20th Century. Here's info on some of what's happening.

Current exhibitions:

[SOUTH AND NORTH OF THE BORDER: HOUSTON PAINTS HOUSTON](#)

The Heritage Society
1100 Bagby Street
Houston, Texas 77002
Until November 24, 2018

[SOUTH AND NORTH OF THE BORDER: HOUSTON PAINTS MEXICO](#)

The Julia Ideson Building, Houston Public Library
550 McKinney Street
Houston, Texas 77002
Until November 10, 2018

The two exhibitions are presented by The Heritage Society, Houston Public Library, CASETA: Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art, and HETAG: Houston Earlier Texas Art Group. A joint catalog has been published and is free when you visit either exhibition.



Dick Rembrandt Untitled [Houston Skyline] 1960s

The following are presented in conjunction with the publication of [Collision: The Contemporary Art Scene in Houston, 1972-1985](#), by Pete Gershon (Texas A&M University Press, Sept. 2018)

[Contemporary Artists in Houston from the Collections of William J. Hill and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston](#)

Leslie and Brad Bucher Gallery, the Glassell School of Art
Until November 11, 2018 (Reception Friday, September 7.)

[Forty Years of Discovery: Gifts of Clint Willour](#)

The Museum of Fine Arts Houston
Until October 14, 2018

[Creating Collision: The Contemporary Art Scene in Houston, 1972 - 1985](#)

Hirsch Library, Museum of Fine Arts Houston
Until December 15, 2018

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

Future exhibitions and events:

Saturday, September 15, 2018, 6 pm

Tam Kiehnhoff, HETAGer and co-curator of "South and North of the Border," will be giving a talk on Handmakers in conjunction with

Stella Sullivan: A Retrospective

Reaves-Foltz Fine Art

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 15th, 6-8pm

<http://www.reavesart.com/index.cfm>

Saturday, September 15, 2018

Houston Foundations III: Identifiably Houston

Deborah Colton Gallery

The next in a series of exhibitions focusing on Houston art – other segments will extend into 2019. See the website for more information.

http://www.deborahcoltongallery.com/International/content/future_exhibitions

Saturday, September 22, 2018, 3 pm

Conversation and book signing with Richard Stout, *Sense of Home: The Art of Richard Stout* moderated by Alison de Lima Greene, Isabel Brown Wilson Curator, Department of Modern and Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts Houston

<https://www.mfah.org/calendar/discussion-book-signing-sense-of-home-richard-stout-jim-edwards/201809220300PM>

View clips of a recent interview with Richard on Glasstire

<http://glasstire.com/2018/08/26/video-richard-stouts-history-of-houston/>

Thursday, September 27, 2018, 6-8 pm

Houston architecture historian, Stephen Fox, will give a talk in conjunction with the exhibition *South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Houston*, for which he wrote a catalog essay.

The Heritage Society

Sponsored by CASETA: Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art

(Details to follow closer to the date.)

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

Early October

Sense of Home: The Art of Richard Stout

O’Kane Gallery, University of Houston Downtown

Sharon Kopriva: Early Works

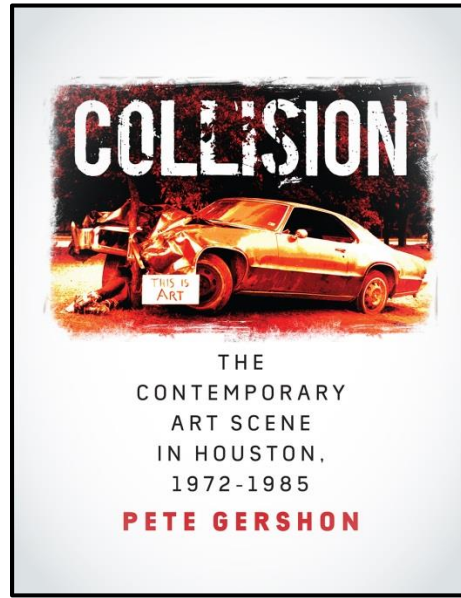
[The Jung Center, Houston, TX](#)

October 2 – 30, 2018

Saturday, October 6, 5 - 7pm: Opening reception

Tuesday, October 9, 7pm: Discussion with artist Sharon Kopriva about the work in the show.

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group



Many events will occur in conjunction with the publication of [*Collision: The Contemporary Art Scene in Houston, 1972-1985*](#), by Pete Gershon (Texas A&M University Press, Sept. 2018)

Sunday, September 23, 1pm: *Collision* book launch event, Favrot Auditorium, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Houston

1:00 pm – 1:45 pm: *Collision* presentation by Pete Gershon

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm: Panel discussion: Pete Gershon, Alison de Lima Greene, John Alexander, Bert Samples, Arthur Turner.

3:15 pm – 3:20pm: Group photo of '70s/'80s HTX artists on atrium steps by George Hixson.

3:30 pm – 4:30 pm: Book signing with writer and participating artists

Sunday, September 30, 1pm: Contemporary Houston Artists film festival, Favrot Auditorium

1:00 pm – 1:30 pm: *Dorothy Hood: The Color of Life* (1985, 30 min.)

1:30 pm – 2:00 pm: *Jesse Lott: Art and Community* (2017, 30 min, Cressandra Thibodeux, dir.)

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm: vintage Super8 home movies with live narration by artist Earl Staley

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm: *Jackelope* (1975, 60 min., Ken Harrison, director)

Thursday, October 4, 7pm, Hirsch Library

Conversation with Pete Gershon, Terrell James, and Clint Willour focusing on the research Behind 'Collision' and James's experience working for the Texas Project of the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art from 1979 to 1984.

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group



Don Edelman Untitled [Downtown Houston] 1969

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>

**Randy Tibbits, coordinator
HETAG: The Houston Earlier
Texas Art Group
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Bill Condon *Guanajuato, Mexico* 1957