

HETAG Newsletter No. 39, January 2020



Frank Freed *Cocktail Party* c.1963.

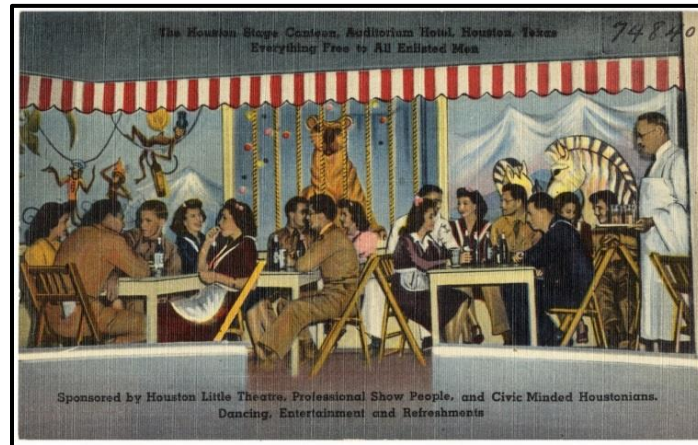
By now the New Year's Eve parties are behind us, and, if you're reading this, hangovers (if any) have probably somewhat subsided, so it's time to launch into another year of exploring, enjoying and enthusing over Earlier Houston Art. In August, HETAG will be turning 17. You might think that by now we would have seen it all and done it all, when it comes to our favorite art. But you'd be wrong. There's lots of excitement ahead.

In April, the 18th Annual CASETA Symposium and Texas Art Fair will be happening here in Houston (see the last page of this newsletter for more). There will be plenty for all of us to do in welcoming our Early Texas Art friends from around the state to Houston at our best time of year. It should come as no surprise that Houston will be well represented on the program.

Then in October, some of us will be embarking on the first ever HETAG Art Tour, following in the footsteps of some of our favorite artists as we sail in France with Road Scholar *In the Footsteps of the Great Masters: Impressionism Along the Seine* – the “Great Masters” include Emma Richardson Cherry, Dawson Dawson-Watson and others whose art we love.

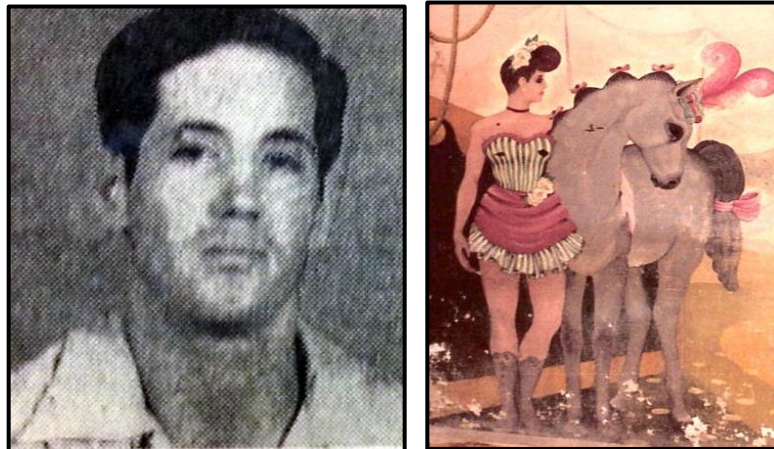
Throughout the year there will be visits to private collections, gallery openings and receptions, and, from the look of their upcoming exhibition schedule, several trips to the San Antonio Museum of Art (more info later in the newsletter). Let's all join in to make this the best HETAG year ever!

Houston Art History Notes: The Stage Canteen, 1942-1945.



Houston's Stage Canteen, 1942-1945.

Houston artist Pfc. Lorin Vallee (1918-1969) is now hardly remembered, but tens of thousands of enlisted personnel in the US military stationed in Houston during World War II knew and loved his art. It was Vallee's murals, on a red, white and blue circus theme, that decorated the walls of the Stage Canteen, located in the basement of the Auditorium Hotel (now the Lancaster). For three years the Stage Canteen, along with New York City's Stage Door Canteen and other similar venues in cities around the country, provided a welcoming, festive, safe place where GI guys and gals, many away from home and in the big city for the first time, could gather, socialize and find entertainment just for them.



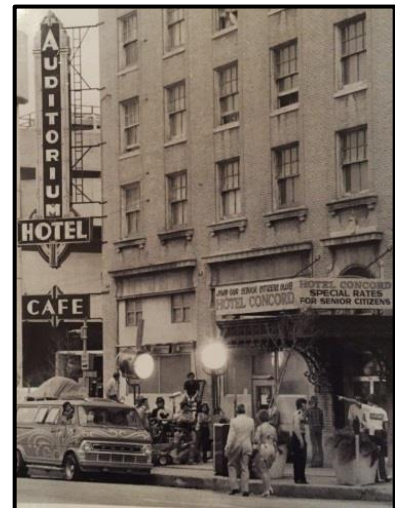
Lorin Vallee in the late 1930s (l); *Circus Lady and Pony* mural 1942.

Houston's Stage Canteen, funded by donations and staffed by volunteers, served free soft drinks, coffee and sandwiches (no beer or liquor allowed!) to members of the armed forces (no civilians allowed, except by special pass!) while in the city. The Stage Canteen opened on New Year's Eve, 1942, and closed at the end of a farewell party, on New Year's Eve, 1945.



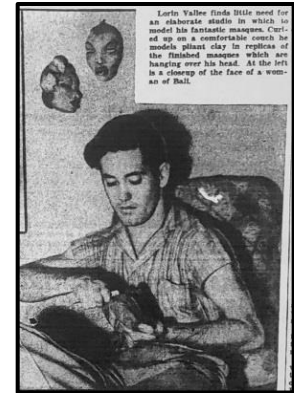
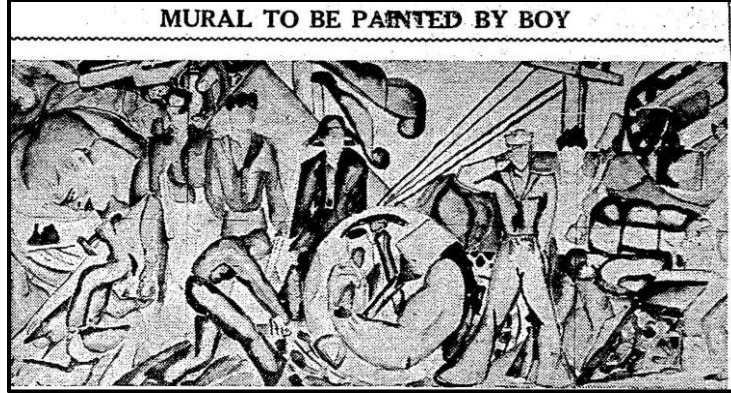
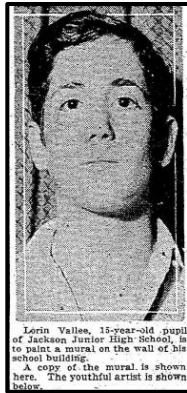
Circus Lady and Seal mural 1942 (l); Houston luminaries at The Stage Canteen 1943 (r).

Vallee's paintings, done directly on the concrete walls, are now long gone, which is too bad. Though Vallee was one of Houston's most inventive and active theater set designers in the 1930s and 1940s, only one art work by him is now known to exist. But at least there are photos of his Stage Canteen extravaganza.



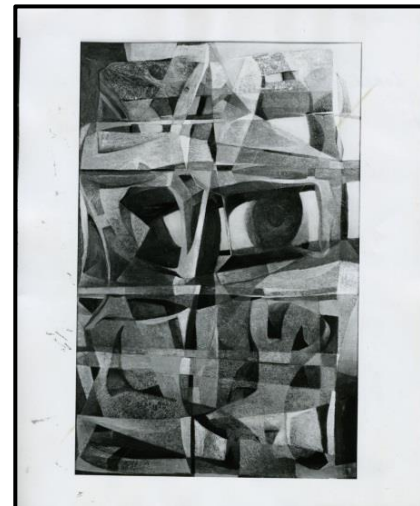
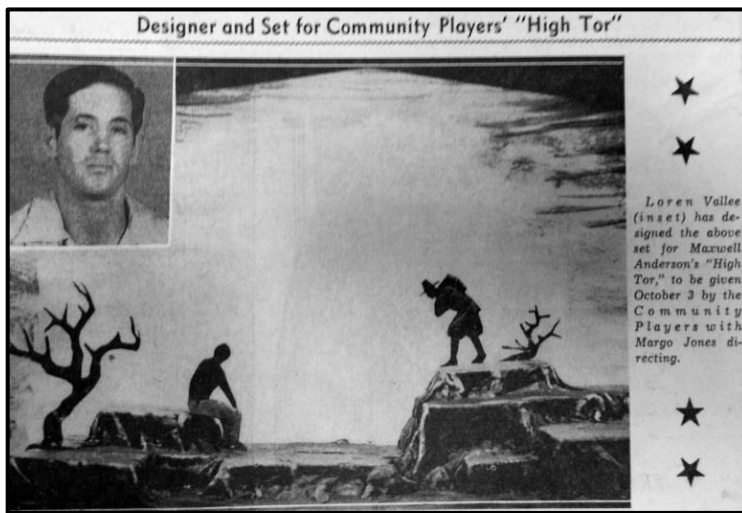
Welcome to the Houston Stage Canteen (l); The Auditorium Hotel (now the Lancaster) (r).

Vallee was raised in Houston. As a youngster he studied with Emily Langham at the Museum School. Early on he painted and carved in wood. In 1934, when only 15 years old, he painted a mural for his Jackson Junior High School, where he was a student.



Vallee at age 15 (l); his junior high school mural (c); and carving in the late 1930s (r).

He made his most significant contribution during the 1930s as a set designer for the Community Players directed by Margo Jones. Work with the Community Players brought him into contact with members of the modernist Cherry-McNeill Group of younger Houston artists of the time. (See the tribute to Gertrude Barnstone, who began her acting career with Margo Jones, later in the newsletter.)



Lorin Vallee's set for *High Tor* presented by the Community Players of Houston in 1938; *Primordial Totem* collage, Museum League Purchase Prize, Dallas Museum of Art 1960.

After the war, Vallee spent a few years in California – years of personal turmoil in which he came in contact with the legal system. When he returned to Texas, around 1950, he settled in Dallas, where his mother had relocated. He continued making art, though today his only known surviving work is a prize-winning collage in the collection of the Dallas Museum of Art.

Sometime in the 1960s, probably after his mother's death, he moved back to Los Angeles, where he died in 1969.

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

Some sad news came this year along with the joys of the holiday season.

Gertrude Barnstone, legendary Houston artist, actress and political activist, died on December 23 at the age of 94.



Gertrude as a young actress in 1942 (l); Gertrude with one of her commissioned works in 2010 (c); Glamorous Gertrude dressed for a party in the 1950s.

We in HETAG: Houston Earlier Texas Art Group know Gertrude primarily as a sculptor of welded metal and glass works bursting with energy and color almost (but not quite) as exuberant as her own magnetic and powerful personality. Gertrude had been part of the Houston art scene since early in the 20th Century. When, in 1936, at age 11, she had work juried into the Houston Annual Exhibition, presented at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, she was the youngest artist to be brought into that long-running series of annual exhibitions. It is said that the jurors were amazed when they learned her age, after they'd made their decision. Through the 1930s to the 1960s she was among the leading, and by general agreement among the most beautiful, of Houston actresses, working under the direction of equally legendary Houston theater luminaries Margo Jones and Nina Vance.

Shifting her energy from acting to politics and social justice in the 1960s, Gertrude was a driving force in integrating Houston's schools, as a member of the Houston School Board. Her other contributions to the Houston community were legion, throughout a life that encompassed almost half of the entire history of our city. Those of us in HETAG who have been lucky enough to know her art, and to know Gertrude herself, no matter how briefly, have been touched by her - made different and better because of knowing her. We will never forget her, and we'll miss her for as long as we ourselves are still here. Gertrude really was one of a kind.

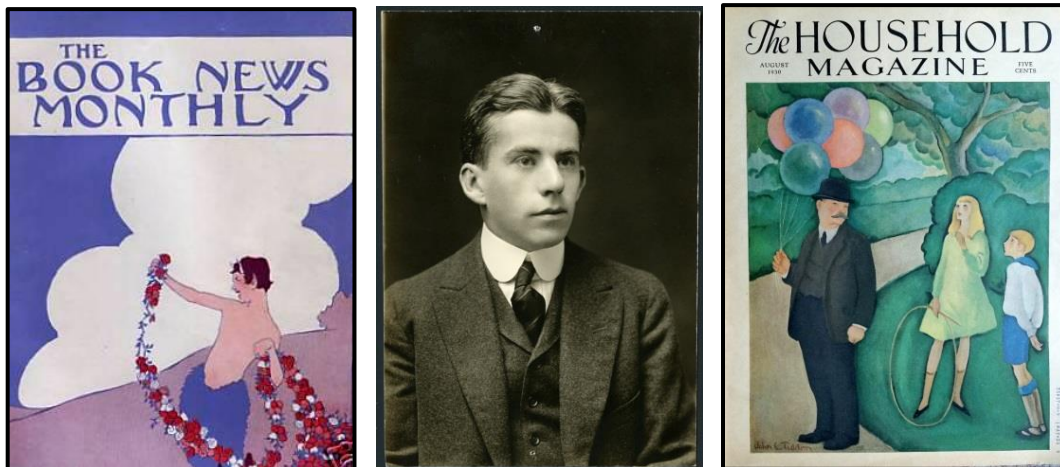
We also learned that **Robert Morris**, briefly director of the CAMH in the 1960s, who had not lived in Houston for many years, died on December 7; and Austin artist **Bob Daddy-O Wade** died on December 23.

The Houston Connection: Norman Rockwell, John Clark Tidden and American Magazine Illustration.

Whenever a major museum exhibition comes to town, it's always fun to find a Houston connection if we can. Sometimes that's a stretch, but with the exhibition [Norman Rockwell: American Freedom](#), on view at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, through March 22, 2020, it's a snap. Not that Rockwell himself has much connection to Houston, but a major subtheme of the show, titled *Illustration and the American Magazine*, certainly does.



Some of you may remember that our own John Clark Tidden (1889-1957) did his share of magazine work, including some striking covers.



Tidden magazine covers from 1914 (l) and 1930 (r), along with a photo of Tidden from about 1920.

Though Tidden was in Houston for only 10 years, from 1915 to 1925, teaching at Rice, we can claim him as our very own cover artist – and give our visits to the Rockwell exhibition a distinctly local appeal. You can learn more about Tidden in the [HETAG Newsletter No. 21, March/April 2018](#), via the University of Houston Digital Library. Check it out, and check out the fab Norman Rockwell exhibition at MFAH too.

[Norman Rockwell: American Freedom](#) has yet another Texas connection since it includes Tom Lea's arresting painting *That 2000 Yard Stare* from 1945. How this one got away from the exhibition [Tom Lea and World War II](#), on view at the El Paso Art Museum through January 5, 2020, is anybody's guess. But we're lucky that it did, since we can see it here at home for weeks to come.



Tom Lea *That 2000 Yard Stare* 1945.

Exhibitions, Current and Upcoming:

[Arthur Turner: Reflections](#)

December 16–February 23

Levant Foundation Gallery

The Glassell School of Art, MFAH

Celebrating Arthur Turner's art practice and teaching.

Related Events

Reception: January 19, 2 p.m.

Artist's Talk: February 1, 2 p.m.

Learn more about [Arthur Turner here](#)

Leila McConnell in a two-artist “conversation” of artworks.

[Jung Center Houston](#)

Opening Reception January 11 (?), 2020

I do not have details about this exhibition/reception at present, so be sure to verify the date and time before going to the Jung Center.

In 2020 the San Antonio Museum of Art will host three exhibitions exploring the contributions Early Texas Artists. Houston artists will be included in two of the three. What a wealth of Texas art will be on view and how many trips to San Antonio we'll have to make!

[Texas Women: A New History of Abstract Art](#)

Feb 7 – May 3, 2020

The first major survey to focus on Texas women working primarily in the mode of abstraction, the exhibition will include approximately sixty-five works in painting, sculpture, installation, and works on paper by fifteen artists from different generations—among them Dorothy Antoinette “Toni” LaSelle (1901-2002), Dorothy Hood (1919-2000), Susie Rosmarin (born 1950), Terrell James (born 1955), Margo Sawyer (born 1958), Sara Cardona (born 1971, Mexico City), and Liz Trosper (born 1983).



Emma Richardson Cherry *On the Gallery, At the Pines* c1896.

[American Impressionism: Echoes of a Revolution](#)

June 12 – Sept 6, 2020

A travelling exhibition exploring the diffusion of Impression across America in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, and including Houston's own Emma Richardson Cherry in context with other major artists from around the country.

[Everett Spruce: Texas Reimagined](#)

Oct 9, 2020 – Jan 3, 2021

Brings together some fifty of Spruce's masterworks, drawn from across his seven-decade career, to reintroduce and reposition the artist within the canon of American art.

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group



The 2020 CASETA Symposium and Texas Art Fair

The Doubletree by Hilton Greenway Plaza in Houston, TX
Friday, April 24 - Sunday, April 26, 2020

Make your plans now to attend the 2020 CASETA Symposium in Houston in April. You'll be hearing much more about this once-a-year, Early Texas Art extravaganza over the next few months, and you can follow the news at the CASETA: Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art website, but I can tell you now that the program is shaping up to be one of the best ever, with talks on Houston's own Frank Freed (by Carmen Champion, Professor of Art at San Jacinto College); Everett Spruce (by Shirley Reece-Hughes, Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Amon Carter Museum); early women abstractionists in Texas (by Amy Von Lintel, Associate Professor of Art History, Texas A&M University, Canyon); early Galveston art (by Eleanor Barton, Museum Curator at Rosenberg Library); Texas Modernism(s): Houston/Dallas in the 1930s (by yours truly); Texas photographer, Keith Carter of Beaumont; and long-time Houston gallerist, Betty Moody, in conversation with Sarah Beth Wilson McKeel. As usual there will also be special events, including a one-time-only visit to The Menil Drawing Institute for a look at drawings by Texas artists. See you all there!

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
Now including issues 1-31, March 2016 – March 2019
<https://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/hetag>

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