

HETAG Newsletter No. 56, August 2022

It's been a long time since the last issue of the HETAG Newsletter, in April. In part, that's because everything slows down in the summer – especially when it's as hot a summer as this one. Also, however, a lot of HETAG energy has been diverted into preparation for the exhibition which is the primary topic of this issue of the Newsletter. Cue the trumpets – bring up the lights – bring up the curtain. Let the show begin – in a little less than a month!



Gene Charlton *Exterior #1: Arrangement Around Two Houses* ca.1936 (l);
Alexandre Hogue *Squaw Creek* 1927, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (r)

Texas Modernism(s): Houston/Dallas in the 1930s

An Exhibition at the Julia Ideson Building of Houston Public Library

August 27 to November 5, 2022

During the 1930s, even as the depression dug in and the dust bowl blew, art flourished in Texas, and Modernism, that most current of art movements at the time, made its way to the Lone Star State. But Texas is vast and varied, so the Modernism(s) that took root in the major cities and academic centers in the state was varied too.

In Houston and Dallas, Modernism became the central focus for two small groups of local artists, made up mostly of youngsters, along with their forward-looking mentors – in Houston, the Cherry-McNeill Group, and the Dallas Nine up north. Though not even 250 miles apart, the approaches to Modernism of the two groups in the two cities were markedly different, and were in some respects a microcosm of the different paths to Modernism on the national level.

Including over 70 paintings from private collections and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the exhibition explores the looks and philosophical underpinnings of two seminal aspects of the art history of Texas, which strongly influenced later developments in their two cities, as well as the state in general. At the same time, the exhibition demonstrates that Modernism, when it came to America, was not limited exclusively to the art centers of the East and that it was not a single thing, even in a relatively contained region such as Texas. It was, rather a liberating force that could take its disciples along markedly different routes toward the shared ideal of creating a modern art for America, and for Texas.

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520-Our Little Gallery – Houston’s own Modernist gallery in 1938!

One of the fun, and fascinating, segments of *Texas Modernism(s)* will bring together works by Houston’s “radical moderns” of 1938, who showed in the first exhibition at 520-Our Little Gallery – even a few pieces that were actually in the show. Maybe they were a fearless few at the time, but they were making work that has stood up very well through the decades.



Catalog for the opening exhibition of 520-Our Little Gallery May 18, 1938; and the building that housed the gallery.

“In 1938, Ola McNeill Davidson and her students, and their like-minded Houston contemporaries, founded their own gallery with the explicit purpose of providing a venue "for the exchange of ideas and work among painters," and the exhibition of the work of “young [Houston] moderns who fashion their technique after the patterns laid down by the abstractionists and non-objective artists.” They called their gallery, located in a garage at 520 Branard Street, 520-Our Little Gallery, likely in homage to 291, the famous early 20th Century avant-garde New York gallery of Alfred Stieglitz, also named for its street address. Davidson had already articulated the tenets that led to the gallery in a 1937 newspaper profile, not long before she, Charlton and Bailey, left for a several-months European tour to see, and learn from, the most advanced art being made at the time in Paris and beyond – the very art rejected as models by Bywaters and others of the Dallas Nine. In the profile, Davidson said:

Youth is changing the standards of our art, keying it to modern times.

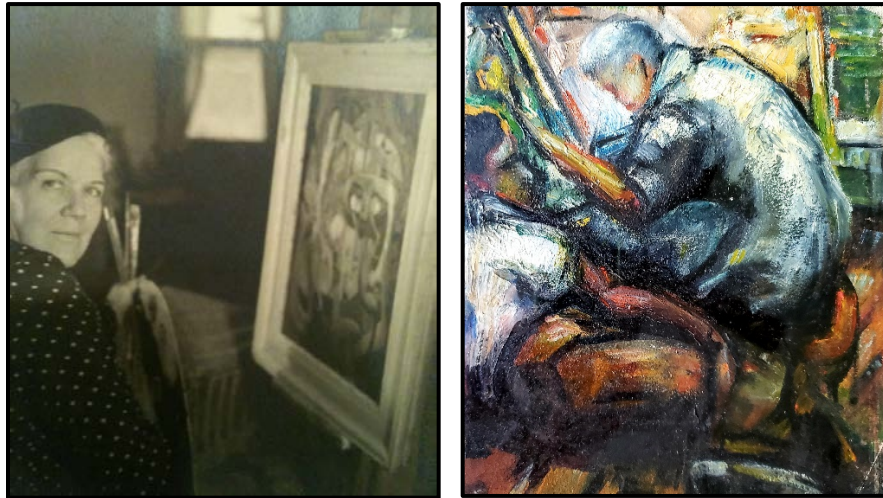
Many people do not like it because they can't understand it. Yet it is simple. It is the scientific approach to painting.

Young artists are interested primarily in design. And their designs are composed of things that make our world today, things that are balanced with precision both in color and in form.”



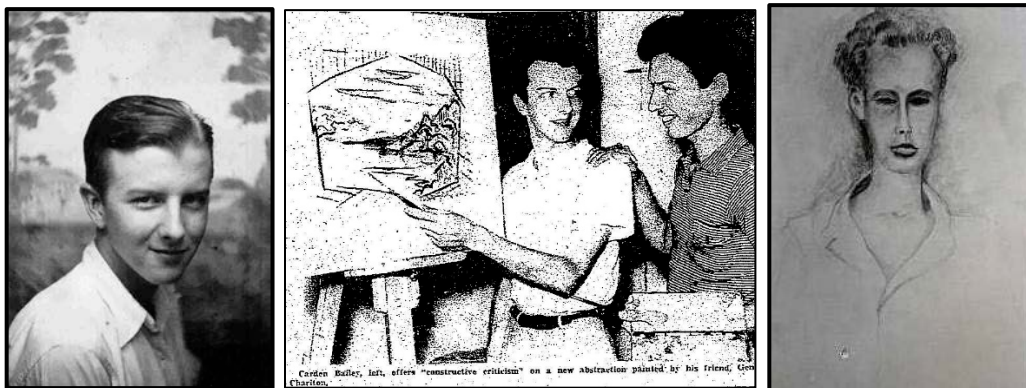
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Ola McNeill Davidson, 1884-1976



McNeill Davidson in the mid-1930s (l); and her *Watching McNeill* ca.1935, depicting her student Robert Preusser watching her paint.

Gene Charlton, 1909-1979, and Carden Bailey, 1911-1997



Carden Bailey (l) and Gene Charlton (r) 1937.



Bailey *Symphony Orchestra* 1941 (l); untitled Charlton abstract ca.1930s (r).

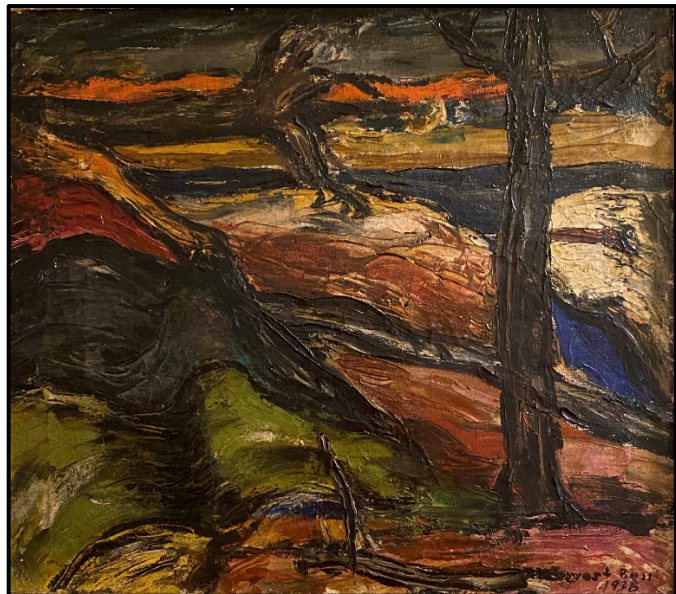
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Nione Carlson, 1910-1999



Carlson in 1939, and her untitled landscape ca. late 1930s.

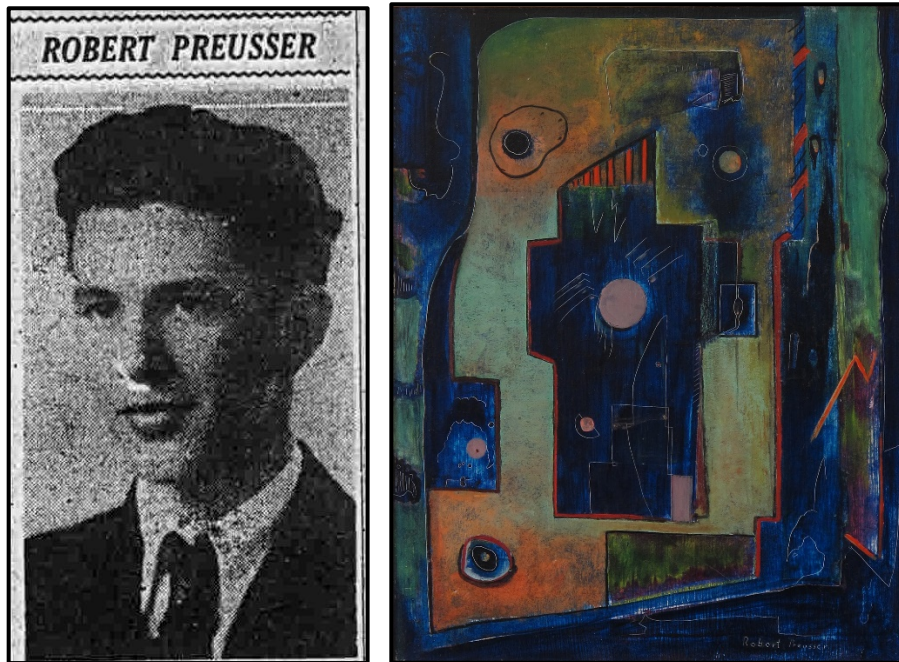
Forrest Bess, 1911-1977



Bess in about the late 1930s, and his untitled landscape, which may be the painting he showed at 520 as *Green Landscape* 1938.

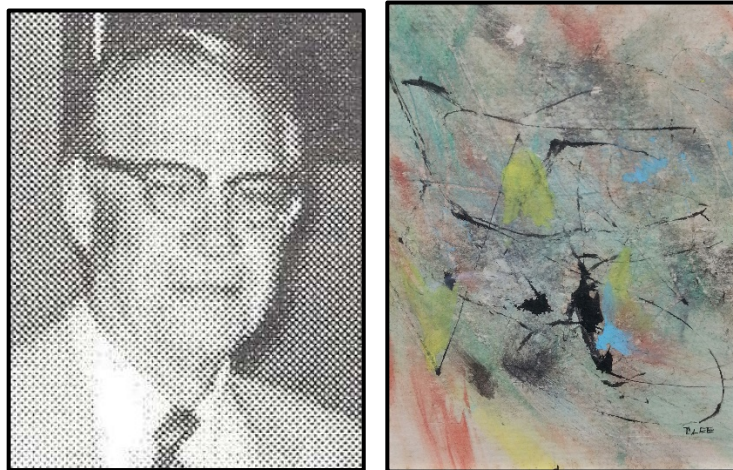
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Robert Preusser, 1919-1992



Preusser in 1940, and his *Crucifixion [sic]* 1938, which was in the first show at 520.

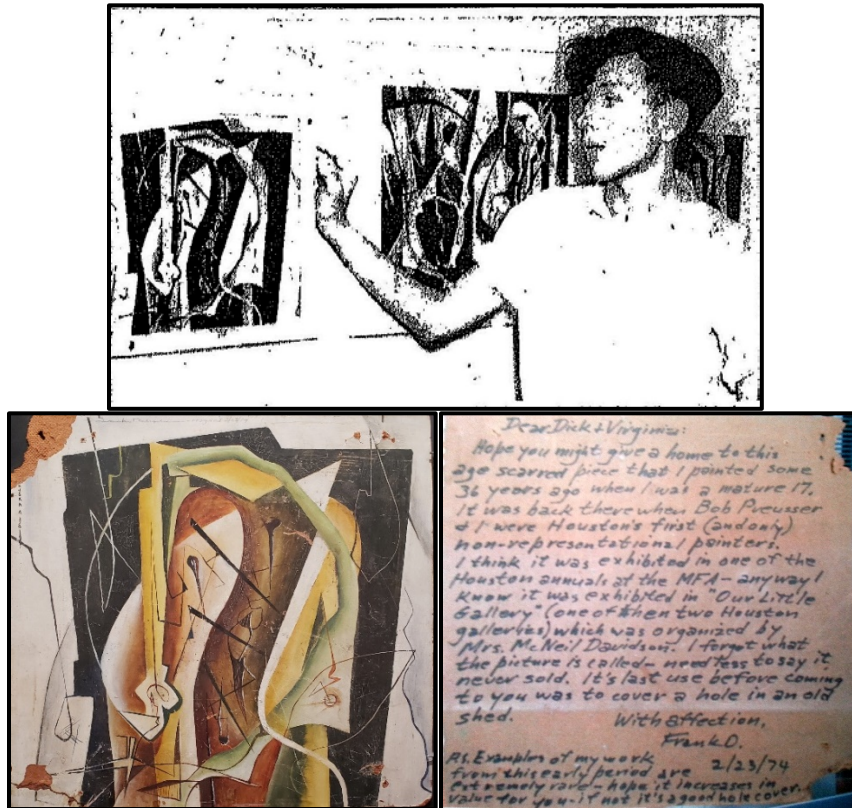
Dean Lee, 1917-1999



Dean Lee in later life (no photos of Lee from the 1930s are known to exist), and his untitled abstract from the later 1930s, from the collection of Emma Richardson Cherry.

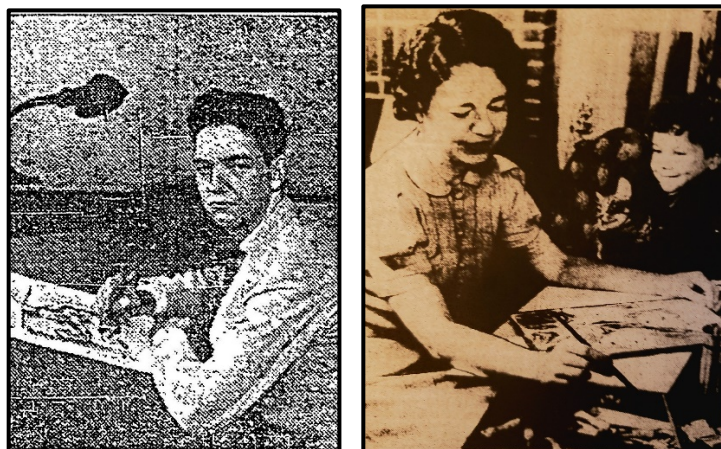
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Frank Dolejska, 1921-1989



Dolejska in 1937, with his *Revealed-Self Portrait* ca.1937, which was in the first show at 520. On the back of the painting Frank tells the hard-life history of this painting, and gallery, ahead of their time.

Harley Brubaker, 1913-1978, and Christine Garland, 1902-1997



Brubaker in 1934 and Garland in 1938. No work by these artists is known to exist.

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Exhibitions around Texas:

Houston

[The Art of Texas State Parks](#)

Foltz Fine Art

Through August 27

Reception: Thursday, August 18th, 5:30-7:30

Exhibition and Benefit Sale benefitting Texas State Parks through a partnership with Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation, the official nonprofit partner of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The Houston exhibition and benefit sale will present a preview of thirty selected works from the upcoming and long-anticipated publication, *The Art of Texas State Parks: A Centennial Celebration, 1923-2023*.

In 2023, the Texas State Parks system will celebrate its 100th anniversary. In anticipation of this occasion, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation has partnered with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, Texas State University, Texas A&M University Press, Bullock Texas State History Museum, Texas Capitol and Foltz Fine Art, Houston, to present *The Art of Texas State Parks*.

[Nick Vaughan and Jake Margolin: Wayfinding](#)

Blaffer Art Museum, University of Houston

Through October 9, 2022

The first solo museum exhibition in Texas (and their adopted hometown, Houston) of artistic and life partners Nick Vaughan and Jake Margolin (working collaboratively as “Nick & Jake”), whose poignant interdisciplinary practice marries art, theatre, performance, archival research, and spoken word.

Nick & Jake have spent the majority of their artistic lives mining the habitually marginalized and unheralded histories of LGBTQ communities across the United States, and how the legacies of elements found and forgotten affect the contemporary queer experience. Their primary body of work, *50 States*, is an ongoing, multi-decade series of installations and performances made in response to little-known pre-Stonewall queer histories from each state. This profound vocational endeavor engages critically with perceptions of history and identity as America’s views of sexuality evolve at an astonishing pace, while provoking deeply troubling social and legislative backlashes.

The exhibition marks the ten-year anniversary since the artists launched *50 States*, and is quite notably their first body of work congregating their research in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana, and Wyoming.

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SAN ANTONIO

[James Ferdinand McCan: A Texas Artist Rediscovered](#)

The Witte Museum

Through Oct. 2, 2022

Explore Texas at the beginning of the 20th century—when Texans lived on vast ranches and in small towns, animals roamed and rivers rushed by—in the first solo exhibition devoted to James Ferdinand McCan. His paintings capture Texas’ wild and vivid lands and the people and animals that inhabited them at a pivotal moment in time.



Georgia O'Keeffe *Evening Star No. V* 1917, McNay Art Museum

[Georgia O'Keeffe and American Modernism](#)

The McNay Museum

Through December 11, 2022

Georgia O'Keeffe is known as the “mother of American Modernism,” figuring prominently in the movement from the late 1910s onward. The synthesis of abstraction and representation in her work is a prime example of the movement, as well as the application of these disparate styles to the ordinary or conventional subject matter like still life, landscapes, and architecture. Like contemporaries Dove, Sheeler, and Torr, she blurred natural and man-made, rendering landscapes, flowers, animal skulls, and rocks with the same precision as her images of houses, barns, and skyscrapers—at times reducing subject matter to fundamental shapes and lines, or focusing on individual elements with a wash of vibrant color. And she spent some of those formative 1910s years right here in TEXAS.

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Dallas

[Octavio Medellín: Spirit and Form](#)

Dallas Museum of Art

Through January 15, 2023

Octavio Medellín (1907-1999) was an influential Mexican American artist and teacher whose work helped shape the Texas art scene for six decades. This is the first-ever museum retrospective for the noted sculptor. The exhibition will include approximately 80 works, exploring the evolution of Medellín's sculptural practice, his public art commissions, and his legacy as a beloved and respected teacher. During the more than 40 years he lived and worked in the Dallas area, Medellín influenced generations of students as an instructor at the school of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts and as founder of the Creative Arts Center.



Octavio Medellín (l); exhibition installation view (r).

College Station

[Those Who CAN Do, Teach](#)

J. Wayne Stark Galleries | Memorial Student Center, MSC 1110

Texas A& M University

Through September 11, 2022

The exhibition looks at the inspiring relationships between renowned artists and the students under their tutelage who also became noted in their own right. Examine works side-by-side to see how each artist influenced the other with style, technique, and familiarity. This exhibition features works from the Stark's permanent collection, largely by Texas artists of the early and mid 20th century with deep roots in Houston and other Lone Star cities. Learn about both the teacher and students' educational backgrounds and how they each came to share their gifts with the broader community and world.

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And finally ...

Two paintings by Houston's own Grace Spaulding John, both painted in 1924 and both in the City of Houston Art Collection – a snow scene to prove that it hasn't always been this blasted hot in our city – and a beach scene to remind us where we'd really rather be since it is this blasted hot in 2022! (See you at the Ideson for the Modernisms show – it's Air Conditioned!)



Grace Spaulding John [*Snow in Houston*] 1924 (l); and *Sylvan Beach* 1924 (r), both City of Houston Collection.

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](#)
and
[The Portal to Texas History](#)

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