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THE
TRAVEL
MAGAZINE
OF TEXAS

VISUAL

WONDERS

A TOUR OF TRANSFORMATIVE ART ACROSS THE STATE

SEPTEMBER 2022

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BY E. DAN KLEPPER

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Pictured: Steve Turner of Polite Coffee Co. at The Kyle House

EDITOR'S
NOTE



Shot at Fresno Canyon in Big Bend Ranch State Park, *Scouring Rush* is a photo mosaic of a stand of scouring rush—a living fossil that grew in late Paleozoic forests.

Wandering Eyes

This month's cover image marks the seventh taken by photographer and artist E. Dan Klepper, who's been trekking across the state shooting and writing for us since 2010. Titled *Blue Moon*, the art piece is a photo mosaic of the moon during a lunar eclipse as it set over the Santiago Mountains south of Marathon, where he's lived for the past 22 years. While West Texas may be his most influential muse, Klepper counts the Gulf Coast as his second favorite part of the state to photograph. "My earliest memories were salt, sand, and the Gulf wind coming off the water," he says. "Mustang Island is my go-to spot to chill, make pictures, and explore new images and ideas."

One of his more memorable shoots involved three days of camping on Matagorda Island. The trip to the primitive campsite can only be made by boat, and campers must bring all their own supplies. He set up camp using old telephone wire lashed to a heavy tarp around a shade shelter; then a massive storm hit. After withstanding tremendous wind, lightning, and hail, his shelter was the only one left

standing. The 15 other campers on the island crammed into his space after the storm destroyed everything else. "They managed to save their beer, however, so we celebrated once the storm passed," he recalls.

An avid outdoorsman who relishes tackling new adventures, Klepper spent six years as a volunteer firefighter in Marathon, where he's forged tight community bonds. His visual essay (Page 56) featuring photo composites and mosaics is a culmination of more than two decades of capturing the austere beauty of his environs. Though he's recorded nearly every part of Texas with his lens, he says he'd still like to spend more time on the coast. "Access to the more remote places along the Gulf requires you to explore the barrier islands like San José or Padre, so you have to make an effort," he says. "I love those kinds of adventures."

Emily R. Stone

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
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THE CITY  THAT PLAYS

VOLUME 69 NUMBER 9

SEPTEMBER

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City in Color

While Marfa may be seen as West Texas' artistic haven, El Paso offers public art accessible to all.

*By Irene Lara Silva
Photographs by Christ Chávez*

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One Man's Treasure

Artist Jesse Lott turns debris into monumental sculptures at his Houston studio.

*By Michael J. Mooney
Photographs by Nathan Lindström*

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Natural Attraction

Creating art from decades of photographs, a West Texas photographer explores the beauty of nature's constant state of change.

Story and Photographs by E. Dan Klepper



E. DAN KLEPPER

combined photos of a McDonald Observatory telescope and the night sky for this piece. *HJS 107.*

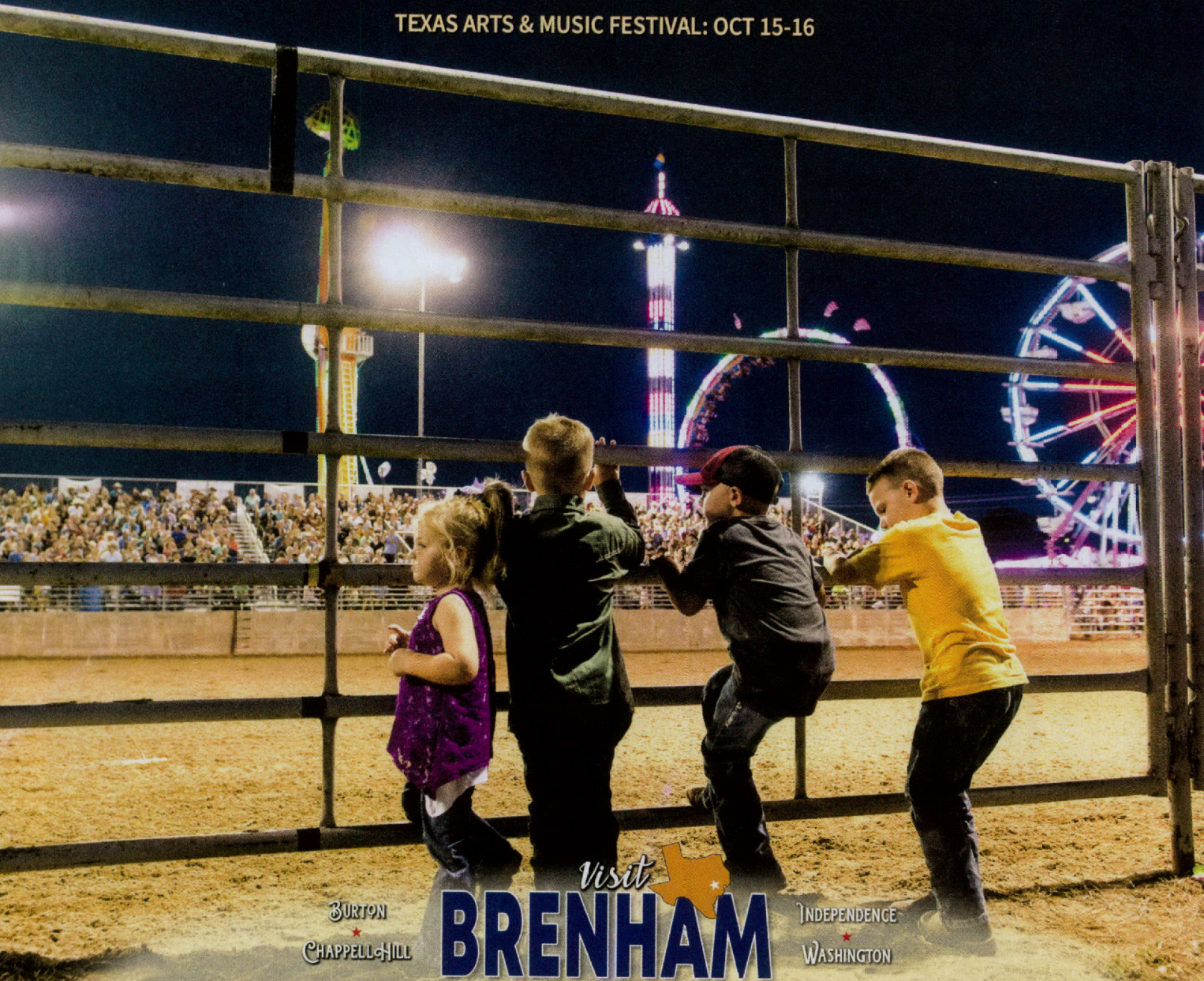
"We didn't realize we were making memories, we just knew we were having fun."

- Winnie the Pooh

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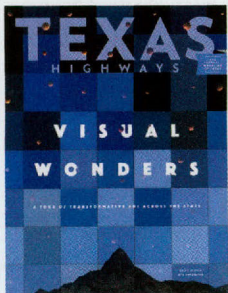
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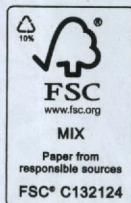
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Behind the Story



The *Texas Highways* Mercantile celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. Since its launch in 1992, the shop has evolved from a modest two-page catalog to a prominent e-commerce site servicing customers throughout Texas and beyond. From handmade pottery and designer bandanas to massive “Don’t Mess with Texas” barrels, the Mercantile features Texas creators expressing what it means to be Texan. “The anniversary is so important because it signifies our longevity in the marketplace by celebrating the place we love and call home,” e-commerce marketing manager Allison Douglas says. “From the store’s inception to this very day, Texas is the core of who we are.” View the product line and store updates at shop.texashighways.com.

Featured Contributors



Rick Bass

In January, the author and environmental activist based in Montana’s Yaak Valley traveled to his native Texas for warmth—and to write “Triangle of Light” (Page 16). “It was bittersweet to see the seasonal migrations of birds that share Texas and Montana altering their journeys in a changing, warming world,” Bass says. “As more unravels, the things that remain solid become ever-more valuable. The cast of light in West Texas in the winter is one of those things that won’t change.” Bass has written numerous books and for *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and *Esquire*. He is currently writing a biography of John Graves.



James Hernández

As a *Texas Highways* summer editorial intern, Hernández photographed and wrote “A Collector’s Fantasyland” (Page 32) about Dave’s: A Pawn Shop in his hometown of El Paso. “It’s one of the places you just have to see for yourself to believe,” Hernández says. “I’m happy to have captured it through both a lens and words.” Hernández is an undergraduate student at Texas A&M University and a reporter and publisher at texags.com. He manages and produces an independent arts publication that has been distributed to 14 countries since 2021.

READERS RESPOND

MERGE



Your article on our small towns with big hearts was great. Some we knew about; others were a nice surprise.

Carol Davanay and Connie Boswell, New Braunfels

Treehuggers

The mesquite is the only green thing up here right now ["The Tree of Life," July]. I have a really old one that's laying almost on the ground, split at the base, roots showing, and it's never slowed or turned brown.

Cheryl Grayson

My grandmother was born in 1913. She said if you want a shade tree anywhere in Texas, just pick a spot and start to water it. Won't be long until a mesquite tree will sprout up.

Sharp Reb

Robert Earl Keen

My wife and I don't always agree on music, but when we do, this guy is top of the list.

@gwcrist

Uvalde Tribute

I just received the newest issue and read "for Uvalde." Thank you, Irene Lara Silva, for writing this heartfelt poem. It speaks on how the entire country feels about that tragic event. Yes, "they are loved"—probably more than they realize.

Maria Kiser, Corpus Christi

Trendy Towns

It's great that so many small towns have revitalized their downtowns and courthouse squares ["Small Town, Big Heart," August]. However, they all seem to have the same obligatory coffee shops, creameries, wine bars, antiques stores, gift shops, and art galleries. I just hope the small towns can maintain their uniqueness like the 15 mom and pop shops also profiled in the issue.

Mack Warren, San Antonio

Beyond the Bustle

When you say "San Antonio River Walk," most people think of the best-known, roughly mile-long section of it that features restaurants, hotels, bars, and tourists. I was so pleased that the article "Down by the River" focused on the lesser-known sections of the River Walk, like the Museum Reach and the Mission Reach. The River Walk as most people know it is fine, but those quiet and beautiful sections are well worth the recognition Wes Ferguson gave them.

Kris Rangel, San Antonio

Fish Into Water

It was very gratifying to read in the July issue about the reintroduction of paddlefish into Caddo Lake ["On the Nose"]. I'm very appreciative of the new generation of biologists carrying on the work

first recommended by those of us in the late 1980s and early '90s during studies of the Big Cypress Bayou/Caddo Lake ecosystem. With their continued efforts, this natural ecosystem will continue to be a great source of pride and enjoyment for generations of Texans to come.

Tom Cloud, Arlington

River Muse

Really enjoyed reading Joe Nick Patoski's article about one of our nation's greatest rivers ["Embracing the Brazos," July]. It was so fascinating to read of him not only traveling on the river but also viewing it from above. It's a river close to our family's heart as my grandfather located and recorded many songs on the levee camps there some 100 years ago. There's a lot more of the Brazos, so maybe Joe Nick will deliver an encore.

John Lomax III, Nashville, Tennessee

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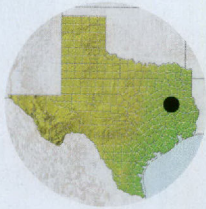






Tree of Life

Árbol de la Vida. Memorias y Voces de la Tierra (Tree of Life: Memories and Voices of the Land) looms over the San Antonio River Walk near Mission San Francisco de la Espada. Created by San Antonio artist Margarita Cabrera, the 40-foot-tall arboreal sculpture is adorned with 700 clay-fired ornaments that locals crafted in celebration of their South Texas heritage. Photographer Tom McCarthy Jr. sought to portray the sculpture's grand size by including people for scale, but triple-digit July temperatures were not in his favor. "Luckily, some bikers passed right under the sculpture on their way down to the River Walk," McCarthy said. "What you can't see from this angle is the additional stenciled details on the trunk of the sculpture or the intricacy of some of the clay sculptures hanging from its branches. One could easily spend an hour or more exploring this piece of art." Learn more about *Árbol de la Vida* among other artwork in "Canvassing the State" (Page 23).



Rusk

Odessa Helm brightens her pocket of the Piney Woods with playful murals

By Heather Brand



ARTIST ODESSA HELM worked for the Texas State Railroad, a major tourism draw for her hometown of Rusk, when she was a high school student.

The Texas State Railroad has long been a cornerstone of Rusk. Prisoners from the now-defunct Rusk Penitentiary completed the 25-mile line in the early 1900s, providing an outlet for timber, cotton, and iron ore, and connecting Rusk to larger regional railroads. Today, visitors board the train's restored vintage cars for scenic Piney Woods trips that run between Palestine and Rusk, which is the Cherokee County seat. Sightseers in Rusk and surrounding towns are also likely to see public murals created by Odessa Helm. A native of Rusk, Helm worked as a sign language interpreter for Tyler Junior College for three years before deciding last year to pursue her passion for art full time. She has painted a variety of imaginative murals in her hometown and in neighboring places like Alto, Bullard, Jacksonville, Palestine, and Tyler.

Working on the Railroad

"When I was a senior in high school, I worked at the Texas State Railroad. I started on the Piney Woods Express, which goes from Rusk to Palestine and back. I did the Polar Express ride in the winter and handed out hot chocolate and cookies in the observation dome car. The stone depot in Rusk looks like something out of a movie. Inside, it has pictures on the walls of the different engines, plus some historical photos. It also has campgrounds and a lake, where people go to fish and hang out."

Fresh Paint

"People ask me to paint all kinds of things. In Tyler, I've painted murals for an elementary school, a park, a car dealership, and a coffee shop. I just finished one for a coffee shop in Jacksonville, and I also painted the 'Welcome to Bullard' sign. My largest mural is in Jacksonville—it's 3,000 square feet and says, 'Love Thy Neighbor.' In Rusk, I repainted the 'Welcome to Rusk' sign and the old caboose beneath it. People are always out there taking pictures."

Family Ties

"In Rusk, everyone knows everyone, and it feels like I'm related to most of them. My whole family lives here, on both my dad's side and my mom's side. I got married last year, and all of my husband's family members live here as well."

A Sense of History

"The town is named after Thomas J. Rusk, a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence. And Jim Hogg State Historic Park was named after the first native-born Texan to become governor. He was born on that land, and the park has a replica

of his house. Rusk has a historic wooden footbridge downtown that is said to be the longest in the United States [546 feet]. That's where everyone takes their prom pictures. The Heritage Center of Cherokee County and the Cherokee Civic Theatre are also downtown."

Get Your Fill

"The Daily Grind is a cute little coffee shop downtown. At All Star Bar-B-Q, I get the chopped beef sandwich, and I love the potato salad. The owner is a big Houston Astros fan, so the inside is full of Astros memorabilia, as well as local sports stuff. If you were on a sports team in high school in Rusk, your picture is probably in there."

Retail Therapy

"My mother-in-law has a store on the square called Jenny's Salon & Mercantile, which has kitchen goods, accessories, and antiques. And my best friend opened Aly Bee's, which is a flower shop that also sells home décor and gifts. All the local businesses come together and set up booths for Fair on the Square, which happens in May. Next year, I plan to have a booth with a 1971 Volkswagen van that I'm getting restored."

No Place Like Home

"People say that in small towns everyone knows your business, but at the same time everyone supports you through your struggles and triumphs. Some say you've got to get out to broaden your perspective, but I think being from here has already broadened my perspective. Rusk may be small, but the people here aren't small-minded. Everybody is friendly, accepting, and kind, and that's one of the reasons I love it here. I will probably never leave." 🐾



TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

5,285



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

1



YEAR FOUNDED:

1846



NEAREST BIG TOWN:

Tyler, 42 miles north



MARQUEE EVENT:

Fair on the Square, the last Saturday in May



MAP IT:

Texas State Railroad Rusk Depot, 535 Park Road 76



Triangle of Light

A Montanan returns to Texas to bask in the brilliance of the Big Bend region

By Rick Bass



W

When I was growing up in Houston in the 1960s, my kin taught me to be leery of snowbirds—folks who lived up north but who descended to our fair climes each winter to take advantage of “our” warmth and so much

sunlight. We pitied them, poor weaking snowbirds—emigres, in exodus from a homeland they could not survive.

The epithet was a puzzling paradox to me, for I enjoyed journeying just a few miles west of the suburb I lived in as a child. I’d go out to the flooded rice fields of the Katy Prairie, where in winter a rippling wave of white wings pulsed like those of butterflies, with every inch of prairie occupied by wintering snow geese. Then, I cherished the geese more than the light, for I lived in the light while the geese were visitors. Now that I reside in Montana, the light is but a visitor in winter.

Out on the Katy Prairie, the geeses’ gabbling and honking sounded like applause, like joy, like life. And now I have become one. Craving sun and light in January as one might desire food or water, I am headed for an unpeopled land I hold dear—the approximate triangle formed by an imaginary dashed line between Alpine, Marfa, and Fort Davis. My home of the last 35 years lies in a similarly sized triangle on shaded inland rainforest at the opposite end of the country—the Yaak Valley in Montana, where only 150 people live year-round. It’s

97% national forest, and a group I work with—in partnership with Houston’s Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation—has been advocating for the largest and oldest trees to be protected as a climate refuge. The largest 1% of a forest’s trees can hold 50% of the forest’s carbon in secure long-term banking. That’s tons of carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere, accelerating global warming.

Driving south, burning dinosaur bones, I begin to catch up with the migratory hawks. The northern harriers are ferruginous, rough-legged, red-tailed, sharp-shinned. They perch on *Welcome to Wyoming* and *Welcome to Colorado* signs. They fly alongside me, scanning the snow-free prairie below.

I reach Raton, New Mexico, at daylight. I can never pass through without thinking of Townes Van Zandt’s “Snowin’ on Raton.”

A glittering shield of frost greets me well into Texas—a town called Eden. I get a gas station coffee, but it tastes like the saltwater it is. Pumpjacks are the only things moving this morning. A herd of antelope stands improbably on the front porch of an abandoned home, as motionless as decoys.

The cold sun continues to excite the prairie’s icy diamonds, though it is the same sun that later in the day will destroy the frost.

The tiny pumpjacks are slow and listless in the cold, their angled joints and hammerhead counterweights looking like the skulls of mules or the faces of mechanical grasshoppers. I imagine their long tongues lapping at the green-black crude below. The faint brimstone whiff reminds me of how, when my family would pass through sulfurous Luling on the way up to the Hill Country

on vacation, my geologist father would scoff at my dramatic gagging and say, only partly joking, “That’s the smell of money, Richard.”

What do birds think, on their long voyage through the day and the night, navigating the electrical fields we cannot see and have forgotten how to feel?

As I journey closer to the basin of light, I encounter more of the deeply imprinted elements of my childhood: the kettles of migrating hawks far above in a blue sky, as if they are gracefully spinning invisible puppet strings tied to all of us below; the grating call overhead of vast skeins of migrating sandhill cranes. An entire other plane exists above us, ancient highways traveled by otherworldly beings.

There’s a part of me that’s drawn to the Gulf Coast, but the sun and warmth I crave is closer in West Texas. I visited there occasionally when I lived in Texas,



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a long time ago, and occasionally return. Like a pinball, I drop southward on a series of county and farm-to-market roads, drive straight to Alpine, and check into an Airbnb called the Dragonfly Cottage, the only guest. Omicron is flaring like the gas caps being burned off the oil wells I passed up in the Panhandle. Throughout my hejira, I've noticed more train action, and in Alpine, there's more jet and helicopter activity than I remember. Russia's invading Ukraine, and I can't help but think our armed forces are astir, doing their own tune-ups and trainings. I remember noticing this incredible pulse of activity before the start of both Gulf Wars in Iraq. It's amazing, sometimes, what all goes on in broad daylight, yet is unnoted, uncommented upon.

A white dog basks in sunlight. I do believe there are places in the world where light bathes the human brain,

ignites or illuminates it in different ways, and from that we refer sometimes, with lame generalization, to "sense of place."

Marfa's been written about to the moon and back—Austin Spare, or Dallas Lite, or El Paso South—though it is of course none of these things. It is only what it is. The best thing about Marfa, in my opinion, is the eating establishment Food Shark. The sandwiches are nothing fancy but so delicious. Served on a paper plate, a freshly baked baguette bun with an immense amount of smoked turkey and killer aioli, a bright red tomato slice, crisp lettuce, and a side of greasy plain potato chips glistening in the sun. I sit in the gravel courtyard while doves coo. Outlandishly cool cars that probably haven't run in decades are parked out front—I'm particularly fond of a '63 Dodge Dart—and my heart rate slows. When my order is ready,

they call my name from the school-bus-turned-kitchen by announcing it through a little plastic children's faux megaphone. It's fun. Whimsy is good. I've missed it these last couple of years.

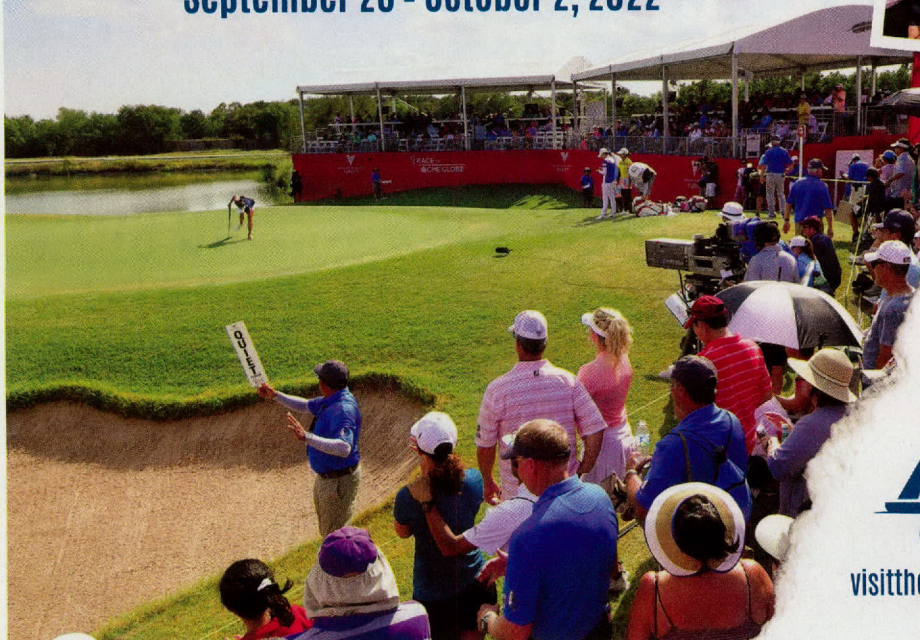
There's no food scene back home in the Yaak. One tavern, where the specialty is a beer called Moose Drool. Heck, there's barely any electricity. It's mostly ravens, forest. I love it. But I love Food Shark, too!

I've been anticipating a lunch here since my last trip two years ago. But heartbreakingly, Food Shark is closed. A sagging little rope separates my dream from the reality, along with a cardboard sign where written in black Magic Marker are the words "Closed Until Not."

You can't write about or visit Marfa without discussing the town's version of the Loch Ness Monster: the Marfa Lights. No less a luminary than poet W.S. Merwin

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explored the phenomenon with the subject of his poem "The Marfa Lights."

Addressing Merwin's work in *The Jesuit Review*, James Rorrens wrote, "He is preoccupied with the darkness that surrounds and engulfs us in the universe, and also with our fugitive but astonishing experiences of light...You cannot compel the light, he believes... All sorts of people claim to see them. But you can never be sure."

It's amusing how some people come looking for lights in the night, when I'm here for light's miraculous quality at high noon.

Entering the triangle of light, one learns to quickly scan the sere sand-colored scrub and the shiny glint of the greasewood for mule deer, antelopes, jackrabbits, whatever—but then to lift one's eyes to the fantastic, phantasmagoric pillows of cumulus and stratocu-

mulus. Who needs light in the nighttime?

It's been said by many that religions often begin in the desert. That the old forests are cathedrals, but that the divine originates where one can see forever.

The "Marfa's Mystery Lights Viewing Area" sign pays homage to, according to legend, a young cowboy who first reported seeing the lights in 1883, in the rolling scrublands between Marfa and Paisano Pass. The lights have received many earnest attempts at explanation. Ghosts, of course. Aliens, duh. Another one: the reflections of occasional car lights from US 67. Lame.

I've been out there at night. *Nothing*. But I enjoy just as much gazing out at the land in the daytime, imagining and wondering. There is more of what we don't know than what we do know. I believe the lights were likely present more in the past. I also believe that too many

pilgrims, and the ceaseless unscrolling of their hunger, can make a shy or delicate or vulnerable thing—a phenomenon—go away. But I also believe such things can come back.

I wander north to Fort Davis and find it as unpeopled as ever. There are a few more "For Sale" signs, but—so unlike Montana—few traces of new home construction and speculative aspirations of affluence. Instead, just raw land, juniper, and greasewood, with some ocotillo. It's shirt-and-jacket weather here in late January, though in the great wash of light it's not hard to imagine how July and August will be much warmer.

Because of the variant, I won't go to the McDonald Observatory, though I have been before and hope to again when all this settles. This is another beautiful thing about the triangle: The



snow globe of clean sunlight landing here not quite like it does anywhere else on earth—due to a specific mix of altitude, topography, latitude, longitude, and aridity—conspires also to yield dark skies and clear, clean, wind-scrubbed stars at night. One is reminded there is always another world, and it's sometimes closer than one realizes. The flip side of the Triangle of Light—a nighttime Triangle of Dark. For nearly all things need their opposite to exist, or are also composed, in some small part, of their opposite. In this case, we need just look above our heads. In these chronically uncertain days, what simple comfort it is to know and witness the steadfast clockwork regularity of the slow march of the constellations above, as if nightly a great calming occurs, a great and sensical order, even if below things skitter and fray. It's good to have some favorite

places that are at least changing at a rate slower than the rest of the world.

Will my little group in Montana be successful in establishing the country's first climate refuge? The times demand it. Growing up in Texas has inculcated in all of us the admonition to go big. I worry that 265,000 acres is, given the urgency of things, too small. But it's a start. And if every northern region around the world protected its oldest forests, what cool, calming breath might emanate?

It's not just the northern border that holds the key. A tree's a tree. Groups like Save Buffalo Bayou in Houston are working to hold on to the forests that help deflect and absorb flood wrath and store carbon in the rising heat of that concrete ecosystem. As Lady Bird Johnson once espoused the value of wildflowers, how wonderful it is to see

fellow Texans espouse the carbon-storing value—the cooling value—of old and mature trees.

I appreciate the extraordinary lucidity of late-winter sun striking the facade of the Palace Theater on the broad east-facing side of Lincoln Street leading to the Presidio County Courthouse in downtown Marfa. Sure, Marfa's curated and funky; sure, Marfa is Oz. But real human beings still love and work there, even as others pass through, hungry for *something*. Hungry for beauty maybe. It is no longer a small thing to know that the light cast from a dying sun 170,000 years ago is going to land on a certain place, at a certain time of year, without a whit of change.

Even the comings and goings of birds—the great, synchronized waves of migratory birds such as ducks and

continued on Page 97

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DRIVE



LA VELADORA
shines on
the Westside
neighborhood of
San Antonio.

EYE WATCHES
passerby on Main
Street in Dallas



A quiet path leads from the old mission church toward the river. I'm alone in the thicket, but I can sense the object of my search getting closer. According to one of my informants, this trail will lead me to what might be the greatest artwork in Texas. Above the canopy, it rises into view: *Árbol de la Vida: Memorias y Voces de la Tierra* (Tree of Life: Memories and Voices of the Land) by Margarita Cabrera.

Cabrera, who grew up in Mexico, Utah, and El Paso, debuted *Árbol de la Vida* in 2018 to mark the 300th anniversary of the founding of San Antonio. It stands at the far south end of the Mission Reach extension of the River Walk, near Mission Espada. Suggesting the shape of a 40-foot-tall tree and the form of an artisanal Mexican handicraft, the massive steel structure is decorated with 700 different hanging ornaments. Each clay-fired ornament was fashioned by a different San Antonian—mostly non-professional artists—and touches on a singular story of local heritage, from an 18th-century cattle queen to a 1950s drive-in movie theater.

Is it the greatest artwork in Texas? Trying to answer that question is the goal of my quest today. I have been writing about art in Texas for nearly a decade, and now I am ready to crown a champion from among all the works of art on permanent display in the state. *Árbol de la Vida* is one of the most ambitious multivoice artworks I've come across; I could stand beneath it for hours piecing together the various tales. But something tells me I can't call off my search here, not yet. There are too many other masterpieces to explore.

Texas' treasury of artistic riches ranges from highbrow to lowbrow, abstract to narrative, jokey to somber. If Cabrera's work isn't your style, might you prefer Michelangelo's first painting, *The Torment of Saint Anthony*, at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth? Or a life-size sculpture made entirely of Cheez Doodles, *The Cocktail Party*, by New York-based Sandy Skoglund at the McNay in San Antonio? How about the giant eyeball, *Eye*, by Chicago-based Tony Tasset, on

Canvasing the State

A veteran arts writer enlists top curators in a search for Texas' greatest artwork

By Michael Agresta

public view in downtown Dallas? Or the *Absolute Equality* mural in Galveston, celebrating the origins of Juneteenth, painted by a team led by Houstonian Reginald C. Adams? Lubbock native son Terry Allen's *Caw Caw Blues* in San Marcos, a sculpture of a crow that incorporates the remains of country musician Guy Clark? Or perhaps the William Henry Huddle painting *The Surrender of Santa Anna* that hangs in the Capitol in Austin, where Huddle lived?

All these suggestions and more come via a viral tweet soliciting input on the question: "What is the single greatest piece of art in Texas, whether in a museum or out in the public?" The most popular reply was a photo of a water tower in San Benito featuring the airbrushed portrait of Tejano rock legend Freddy Fender—an ironic pick that likely owes its online popularity to Fender's blow-dried shoulder-length hair and impeccable moustache. The third-most-popular reply clued me into a fascinating artist I'd never heard of, the late El Pasoan Tom Lea, whose epic murals decorate the R.E. Thomason Federal Building and Courthouse in his hometown, among other locations in Texas.

Two other obvious front-runners emerged in terms of sheer quantity of responses. Both are big, expensive 1970s and '80s projects by brand-name artists: the Rothko Chapel in Houston and the Donald Judd sculptures at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa.

I'd agree these are probably the two artworks most associated with Texas by art connoisseurs around the world. I'm an admirer of each. Sitting in the Rothko Chapel, a stand-alone building in the Montrose neighborhood featuring 14 mournful, introspective black canvases by abstract-expressionist painter Mark Rothko, has moved me to tears on more than one occasion. Chinati, an abandoned Army base Judd converted into a massive stage for his repetitive box sculptures, evokes the spare beauty of West Texas. It has transformed tiny Marfa into an international art center. Like the Rothko Chapel, it's a bona fide pilgrimage site.

But in my search for the greatest artwork in Texas, I two-step past both Rothko

An Unexpected Moment in the Midst of Battle

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#1
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During the 1944 Battle on Saipan, thousands of Japanese were captured. One young Marine is credited with persuading over 1,000 to surrender.

Marine Privates First Class Jim Gilner (*left*) and Guy Gabaldon (*right*) escort a prisoner reportedly "tipsy" on sake on 27 June 1944.

Gabaldon, who grew up in Los Angeles, learned to speak Japanese as a boy while living with a Japanese family. He was often called The Pied Piper of Saipan for convincing the enemy to surrender using his language skills. He was awarded the Silver Star, later upgraded to the Navy Cross for "extreme courage and initiative in single-handedly capturing enemy civilian and military personnel during the Saipan and Tinian operations."

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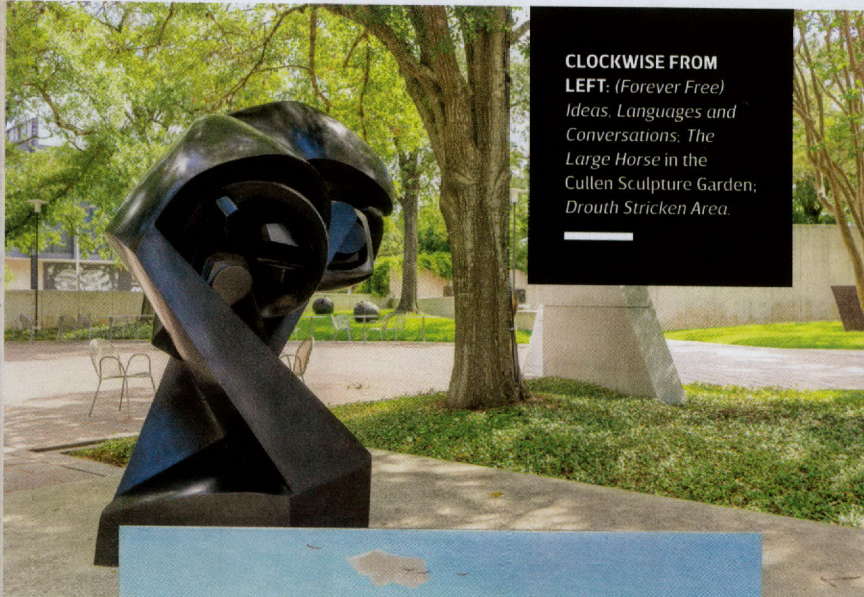


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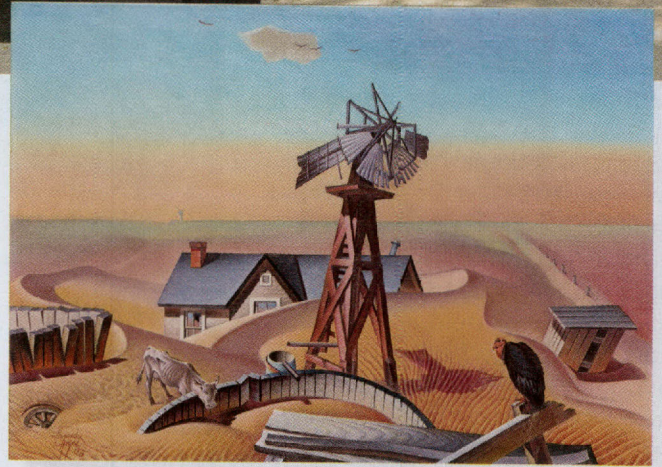
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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *(Forever Free) Ideas, Languages and Conversations; The Large Horse in the Cullen Sculpture Garden; Drouth Stricken Area.*



and Judd. These brilliant New Yorkers (Rothko never even visited Houston) have hogged the attention of Texas road trippers for half a century. Why not crown a new champion a bit closer to home? Texas boasts some of the world's greatest art museums, and our public art offerings are impressive, too. Within the United States, I'd say Texas and California are runners-up to New York in terms of which state hosts the best art collections.

For aid in my search, I enlist local experts—people like Riley Robinson, director of the Artpace San Antonio residency space, who nominated Cabrera's sculpture. Phillip A. Townsend, curator of art at the Art Galleries at Black Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, sends me to the inspiring *(Forever Free) Ideas, Languages and Conversations* by Houston-based Michael Ray Charles at the Gordon White Building on the UT campus. A huge sculpture made of dozens of wooden

crutches cabled together in a shape that suggests many intersecting wheels, it conjures the message that many people working to transcend past injuries can together move forward and heal. Susie Kalil, who is the author of *Alexandre Hogue: An American Visionary*, recommends a trip to the Dallas Museum of Art to see the 1934 painting *Drouth Stricken Area* by the North Texas artist who is the subject of her book. "With ongoing environmental issues, Hogue was way ahead—the painting has even more relevance today," Kalil says.

Some Texas museums are great works of architectural art unto themselves, including Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Renzo Piano's Menil Collection in Houston, and David Adjaye's Ruby City in San Antonio. Alison de Lima Greene, a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, picks the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden at her home institution, designed by Isamu

Noguchi, a notable California-born artist and landscape architect. "He saw it as a 'sculpture for sculpture,'" Greene says.

It's hard sometimes to draw the line between an artwork and a mere feature of the landscape or feat of human genius. Several on Twitter suggested West Texas or Big Bend as the greatest artwork in Texas. One user nominated Dallas Mavericks basketball player Dirk Nowitzki's fadeaway jumper, an elegant shot for a 7-footer. A Whataburger in Corpus Christi shaped like a boat; the Buffalo Bayou Cistern in Houston; brisket; and Willie Nelson's guitar, Trigger, got votes, too. Leslie Moody Castro, a writer and curator for art institutions all over the state, makes a similarly outside-the-box nomination: the giant windmills that dominate the horizon in certain regions of Texas.

Street murals were another popular response—the graffiti *Be Someone* on an overpass in Houston and musician Daniel

Johnston's *Hi, How Are You?* in Austin were popular picks. Rigoberto Luna, co-owner and director of Presa House Gallery in San Antonio, nominates the San Antonio ceramic mural of local artist Jesse Treviño—*La Veladora* (The Candle), a three-story image of a Mexican-style votive decorated with the Virgin of Guadalupe. The Virgin's candle shines over the largely poor and immigrant neighborhood. Luna calls it "a beacon of the Westside."

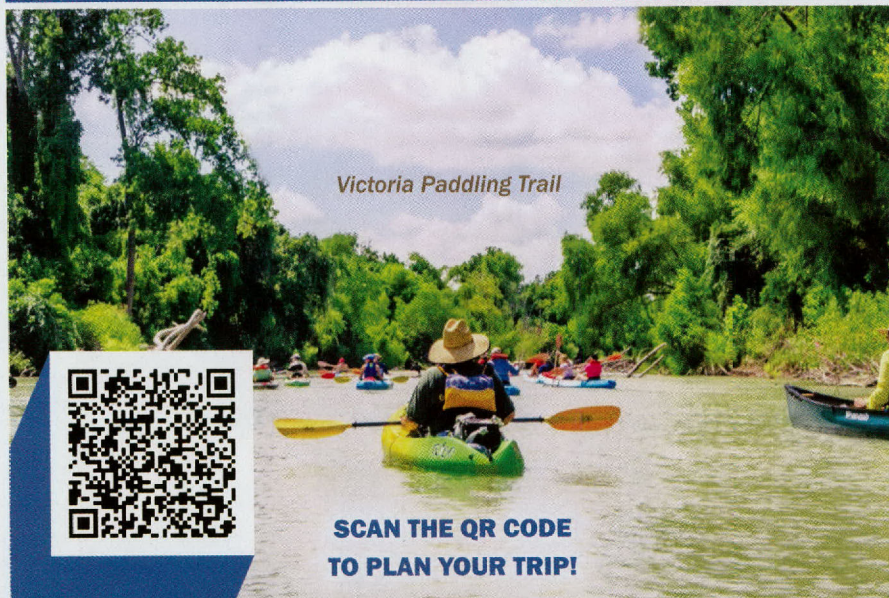
According to Ballroom Marfa director Daisy Nam, the greatest murals in Texas—and the oldest—are in the remote borderland canyons where the Rio Grande and Pecos rivers converge, near present-day Amistad Reservoir. This is where, thousands of years before Europeans arrived in Texas, a hunter-gatherer people recorded aspects of their lives and mythology on rock walls at sites like White Shaman Preserve, using distinctive abstract human forms with stick-figure arms and long bodies. These pictographs are objects of fascination to anthropologists and of worry to conservationists, who fear moisture from the reservoir will soon degrade the paintings.

I visit Seminole Canyon State Park, the most accessible Lower Pecos Canyonlands rock art site, on a cool morning after driving across the reservoir. It's a quick hike down to the archeological site, where a tour guide explains aspects of the ancient artists' lifestyles and visual vocabulary.

"The materials that went into making the pictures were also used for survival," Nam notes, pointing to inorganic materials from minerals found in the area used as pigments and animal fat as a binder. "It was so important to them to make these pictures, no matter how much they needed these materials to survive."

If the story of Texas art starts with these mysterious rock paintings—I'm convinced there's no greater artwork in the state—it begins from a place of deep cultural importance. Looking around the state at the other candidates for best artwork in Texas, all seem to reflect this vision of art as a central part of being alive, as necessary as food and medicine. Here's to the next 10,000 years—if our great works can make it that long. 🐾

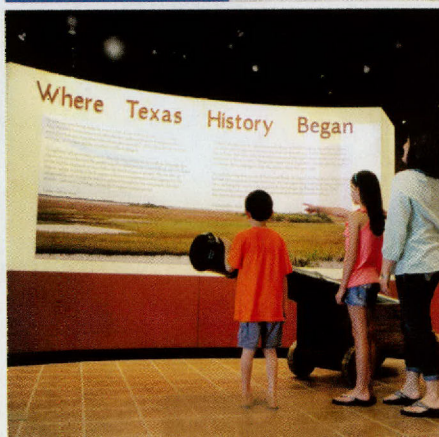
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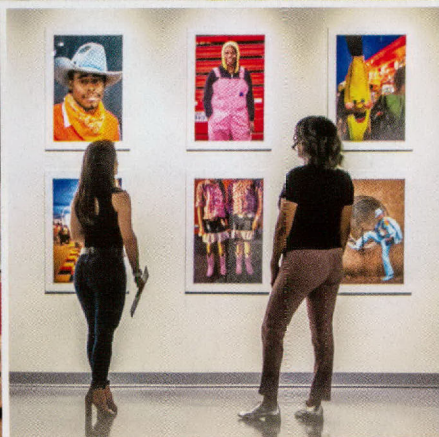
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GORDON MASSIE opened the Texas Vintage Motorcycle Museum in Johnson City this past spring

Vroom Room

The road goes on forever at the Texas Vintage Motorcycle Museum

By Clayton Maxwell

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 11 a.m.-6 p.m.



In the backroom of the new Texas Vintage Motorcycle Museum stands a 1967 Bultaco Metralla, a sleek minimalist machine of silver and black curves. Once the fastest two-stroke production street bike in the world, this Spanish beauty has an almost mythic reputation among biking cognoscenti—only 5,000 of them were thought to have been made. Riders say that when they're perched behind the Bultaco's handlebars, they're one with the road—light, fast, and free.

"This Bultaco has the right kind of curves, the right kind of lines," museum owner and bike collector Gordon Massie said. "I love the way this pipe swoops down. You see the curve of the taillight matches the curve of the tank matches the curve of the front fender matches the curve of the bikini fairing matches the curve of the tailpipe. That's art."

In 2021, when visiting his daughter who lives in the Hill Country, Massie decided to buy a historic building in the heart of Johnson City that had been a showroom for Model A Fords in the 1930s. After moving from the Woodlands, Massie opened the Texas Vintage Motorcycle Museum in the spring of 2022 to pay tribute to the art of the vehicle. Now his 81-piece collection of beauties is on display for people to admire and fantasize about the freedom of life on two wheels.

For Massie, his love for motorcycles helped him survive what may be the hardest loss of all: the death of a child. After his son, Hunter, died in 2021—just three years after the death of his wife, Barbara—Massie grappled with depression. “Have you ever heard of a long dark night of the soul?” he asked. “That’s where I was.” But a lifelong passion for riding, collecting, restoring, and customizing vintage motorcycles—a perfect metaphor for boldly moving forward—helped him get off the couch, sell his suburban Houston home, and move to Johnson City.

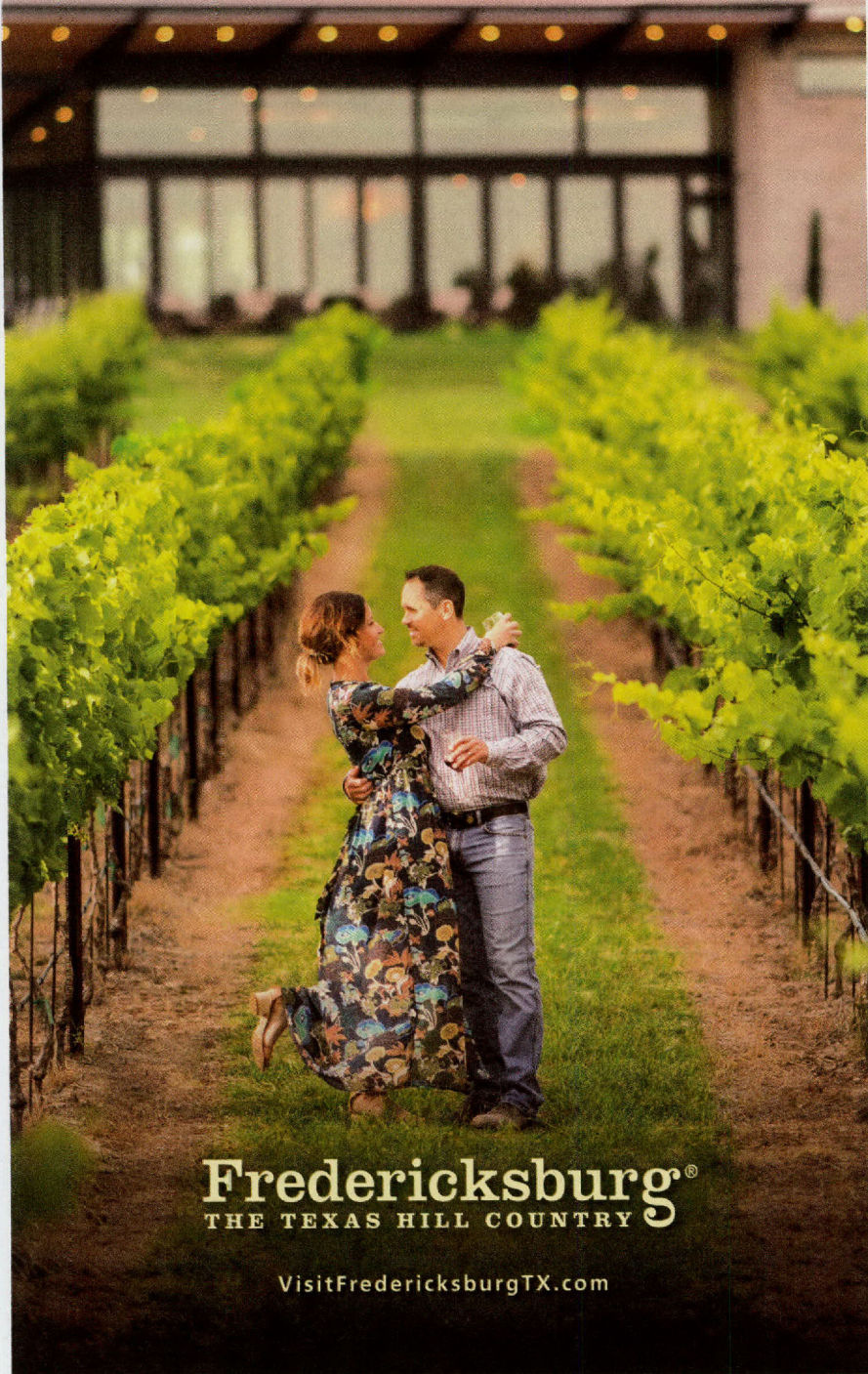
“I think it goes back to resiliency,” Massie explained. “If you’ve had experiences where you’ve struggled and survived, it gives you the guts to try it again. And this was a gutsy move. I had to shoot from the hip and make all kinds of decisions and trust myself and have faith that things will work out. And so far, so good.”

These are not new themes for Massie. In 1985, when he was in his early 30s, Massie was hired by American General Corp., an insurance and financial services business, where he worked his way up to executive vice president, managing billions of dollars in high-yield bonds. When American International Group bought AGC in 2001, Massie discovered inaccuracies and malfeasance hidden in their books. Digging deep to figure out the best path forward given what he knew, Massie decided to expose the fraud, a choice that resulted in professional ostracism—he lost his job and eventually won a legal settlement. In 2010, he published *The Whistleblower’s Dilemma*, a lively read on the risks and rewards of calling out corruption. The book, which has been

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Ride On

Gordon Massie shares his three favorite motorcycle drives in Texas.

Marathon-Big Bend-Terlingua-Presidio-Marfa-Fort Davis-Alpine-Marathon Loop: SH 385, FM 170, and SH 67.

“Broad, sweeping, and meandering roads take you through the austere Big Bend world of amazing mountain vistas and arid desert landscapes along the Rio Grande.”

Twisted Sisters in Rocksprings: SH 335, 336, and 337.

“Truly the best tight and twisty roads follow the river canyons and spectacular elevation changes in the westernmost part of the Texas Hill Country.”

Piney Woods in Palestine, Rusk, and Alto: SH 21, 23, and 851, and US 84.

“Wide, spacious curves through the dense East Texas Piney Woods showcase the forests, lakes, and rivers.”



FROM TOP: Biker Chic boutique owner Liz Waller-Broyal entertains patrons. The museum is housed in an old showroom for Model A Fords.



beneath the silver tin ceiling like a platoon of renegades awaiting their next move.

The 6,500-square-foot museum is dense with bikes from his personal collection and on loan from friends. For those unfamiliar with this world—unversed, say, in the differences between a café racer and a crotch rocket—it could be intimidating. But Massie has made these motorcycles’ stories and idiosyncrasies easy to grasp. He clustered bikes by brand and country, with placards to explain the quirks and qualities of each.

Spread out in front of a Union Jack flag are old English rides like a 1955 Norton Manx, a British bike that raced at the infamously dangerous Isle of Man TT that same year. Nearby is a shiny red 1966 Lightning by BSA, or the Birmingham Small Arms Company Limited, once the largest motorcycle producer in the world. The placard notes the same make and model bike was featured in the James Bond film *Thunderball*.

It’s hard to tell where form meets function. Which design choices were for cool points and which aim to get riders more smoothly from point A to B? Does the iconic extended front fork on a vintage Harley serve a purpose, or is it just for swagger? (Think Dennis Hopper in *Easy Rider*: A long front fork raises the front of the bike so the rider, in contrast, leans back low and easy behind the handlebars, his black leather boots kicked up on the foot peg.) “It’s mostly just to look cool,” Massie admitted.

taught in business schools, reveals how the ethics that guided Massie link back to wisdom offered from his father, who advised Massie when he faced a tough choice as a teenager at his first job working at a gas station.

“What do you stand for—not just now, but for the rest of your life?” Massie’s father asked him. A pattern emerged along the arc from Massie’s first job to his struggles with AIG to how he regained his life after the deaths of family members. A 3,500-mile ride throughout British Columbia in Canada on a 2017 Honda Africa Twin bike

taught him it’s not about giving up but instead finding a road forward.

Silver block letters on a freshly painted black facade proclaiming “The Art of the Motorcycle” welcome visitors traveling US 290 through Johnson City. Under the portico that once showed off Model A Fords, safety-orange vintage gas pumps installed by Massie stand sentinel over a sitting area of couches and chairs. Once inside the museum’s glass door, an elite fleet of motorcycle gold surrounds guests. Polished engines and exhaust pipes glint

Massie's most prized bikes are elevated on risers, like Olympic medal winners. There's the glossy black 1968 BMW R60. "When you ride that motorcycle, it's like you're cruising down the highway in a La-Z-Boy," Massie said. Many of the bikes in his collection have been modified. In some cases, Massie has the stock and customized versions side by side for comparison.

While visitors can breeze through the museum in 30 minutes, they also may find reasons to spend hours. From the sign at the entrance that invites people to "Sit a Spell" to the lounge area with a comfortable leather couch, the museum offers spaces where folks can chew the fat. A team of volunteer docents, mostly retired Johnson City locals, makes a friendly crew for swapping bike stories. "People think it's the most wonderful place they've been in around here in years," said docent Paul Morris, a former biker and retired technology specialist for the McDonald Observatory in Fort Davis.

Adjacent to the showroom, the Biker Chic boutique, with an aroma of leather, sells biker boots, jackets, and other wares. Owner Liz Waller-Broyal has also operated Liz on the Square, a shop in Blanco, since 1999. She was thrilled when Massie invited her to expand to his property in Johnson City. "We have Sunday afternoon gatherings open to everyone," Waller-Broyal said. "We serve sardines, Champagne, and saltines—all brain food. The museum catches people visiting wineries, people who don't want to go home yet."

A noteworthy art piece hangs over the showroom lounge area—a rendering of Jimi Hendrix, composed of 10,000 quarter-inch wooden square dowels. It's the creation of Massie's late son. Massie tells museum visitors of the detailed, painstaking work that went into its making. Hunter's death is the great sorrow of Massie's life, he told me, and one he will always carry.

"But life goes on," Massie said, "and we all have choices to make. We can stay stuck in our grief and never get past it, or we can follow our passions and maybe things will work out. The grief doesn't go away, but you can live with it. 🐾"

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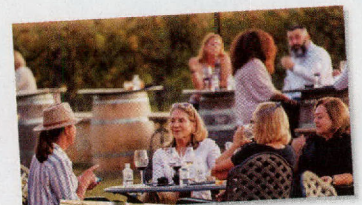
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A Collector's Fantasyland

A fourth-generation family shop deals in curious treasures

By James Hernández

Dave's: A Pawn Shop in downtown El Paso is more like an emporium of sideshow gaffs than a typical pawn shop. Inside, visitors are immersed in an almost otherworldly reality full of spine-tingling and historical rarities that challenge the wildest of imaginations. A stuffed "chupacabra," mermaid heads, a \$14,995 mummy, and even the purported trigger finger of Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa are a few of the items that tread a fine line between myth and fact.

"Everything in here is sort of a mix of what we see and like," fourth-generation owner Clay Baron says. "The beauty of it is that there is no real formula to it, and we create an experience unlike anywhere else."

Dave's hasn't always been a gloriously cluttered, one-of-a-kind gallery. Baron's great-grandparents first opened the shop as a military surplus store in the 1940s on a different side of South El Paso Street, but the business moved to its current location and transitioned into a pawn shop in 1953. Family owned and operated since its inception, the store is located inside the oldest existing building and last false-front structure in the city, dating to 1882. Over time, the clientele has evolved from GIs into a diverse group of locals, travelers, and celebrities—with musician and artist Jack White being the latest VIP to visit in May while on tour. White even signed one lucky customer's George Gershwin album dug up from the shop's vinyl crates.

"I can't really describe it, but we do have a reputation to uphold, a certain style to maintain," Baron says. "Collecting is an art, but it's also something that's learned. My grandfather and father taught me the same way my father learned from his grandfather."

The shop is a variation on the wonder rooms and cabinets of curiosities that preceded present-day art museums. The oddities for sale aren't just commonplace novelties; their purpose is mostly to raise eyebrows and evoke gasps. If you stick around long enough on any given day, you're bound to hear someone mutter, "Is this real?" For more information, visit facebook.com/daves.a.pawn.shop

Woven Through Time

Elliott Abbey crafts traditional baskets out of pine needles

By Julia Jones



◀ **Materials:** Cured longleaf pine needles, 12 inches in length or longer; natural raffia; doll needle (for sewing); and a lot of patience.

Sometimes while crafting a pine needle basket, Elliott Abbey is transported to the past: He recalls his aunts sending him into the forests of East Texas to collect pinecones and longleaf needles for their projects. They taught him how to tightly wrap raffia around bunches of needles to form sturdy containers. He often thinks back to the generations before them who did the same. Abbey, who grew up in Livingston and is a member of the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana and the Kawaknasi (Wildcat) clan, now utilizes the same techniques.

"It's really important for me to preserve those methods," says Abbey, who works as the real estate director for the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas. "We still try to get out and use plants and flowers to dye the material. Nothing has ever changed."

That includes the emotional side of the craft. Basket-making calls for a positive and mindful headspace. According to Abbey's tradition, the energy that goes into making the basket affects the energy of the basket once it reaches its recipient.

"My aunts always taught me to make baskets with good feeling," Abbey says. "Never try to make baskets when you have a bad day or aren't in the right mind frame to make them."

Though baskets were traditionally used to carry foraged plants and other small items, they are now mostly decorative. Their intricate designs often feature patterns, adornments like pinecones and flower petals, and multiple colors—achieved by drying the needles for different lengths of time and utilizing native plants to dye the raffia.

Abbey says there are now only a handful of Alabama-Coushatta members who make baskets regularly. He teaches classes to tribal members to pass on the tradition, just as his aunts taught him. "We've had several students in each class and one who would pick it up," he says. "Basket-making is one of those things you have to have patience for. With every basket you learn something different."



Protecting the Pines

Basket-making has been a tradition for the **Alabama and Coushatta tribes** for over 300 years. The process begins by harvesting longleaf pine needles without harming the trees. Though the tribe harvests the needles sustainably, other factors, including fire suppression policies, caused the loss of over 95% of longleaf forests, according to the Nature Conservancy. The tribe and environmental organizations are working to restore the pines through prescribed burns; while it may seem counterintuitive, longleaf pines depend on fire to thrive. The burns eliminate competitive trees that vie with longleaf pines and native plants for resources. nature.org/texas

10,266

Acreage of the Alabama-Coushatta Reservation

500-700

Number of pine needles used to make a 4-inch basket

110

Maximum height, in feet, of a longleaf pine tree

► Branching Out

Elliott Abbey sells carefully crafted baskets and holds occasional basket-making demonstrations around the state. Find upcoming events or commission a basket at pineneedleworkbyera.com.



Visit **Lake Tombigbee Campground**, located on the Alabama-Coushatta Reservation in Livingston, for a camping trip in the pines. The grounds offer cabins starting at \$55, RV spots starting at \$40, and tent campsites starting at \$20. Grab essentials at the on-site store and fish in the fully stocked lake. alabama-coushatta.com



The State Line Two-Step

Visit two states in one trip to this northeast Texas crossroads

By Paul McDonnold

There's only one post office in the nation where you're likely to step across a state border in the course of dropping off mail or buying stamps. The State Line Post Office and Federal Courthouse symbolizes Texarkana's distinctive position straddling the border of northeast Texas and southwest Arkansas. Texarkana—whose name also pays tribute to Louisiana, which is about 30 miles south—was established in 1873 at the junction of two expanding railroads. There's plenty to see on both sides of State Line Avenue, the historic strip that traces the border through downtown. The 1933 post office is a popular photo op; The Historic 1894 building—formerly a grocery store—features 12,000 square feet of art gallery space; and this fall brings the restoration of the 1925 Grim Hotel, now an eight-story apartment building. Surrounded by Piney Woods scenery and featuring local attractions dedicated to famous sons including musician Scott Joplin and businessman H. Ross Perot, Texarkana feels at once far-flung and at the center of everything.

A peaceful scene at Nettles Nest Country Inn



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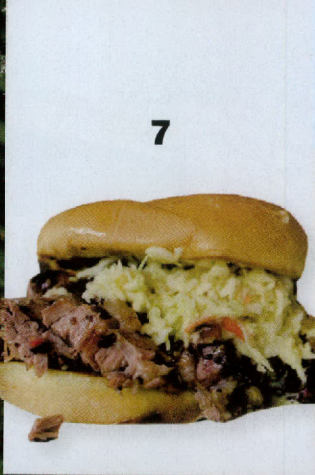
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3



4



1 / NETTLES NEST COUNTRY INN This cozy cabin (\$120/night) is nestled among 16 acres of forest. Amenities include a kitchenette, an outdoor pavilion with a grill, loaner mountain bikes, and kayaks and a paddleboat for use on the property's 5-acre lake. Two miles south, Wright Patman Lake offers hiking trails, boat ramps, and a public beach.



5 / PEROT LEADERSHIP MUSEUM "Sell it. You can't eat it," reads the sign on a replica 1930s cotton brokerage within the Texarkana College Library. The wood-sided building is part of an exhibit about the late Texarkana native H. Ross Perot. The son of a cotton broker, Perot was a pioneering computer technology entrepreneur who made two failed but influential presidential bids in the 1990s.



2 / SPRING LAKE PARK In October, this city park hosts an annual free screening of *The Town that Dreaded Sundown* (check the city website for a schedule update, ci.texarkana.tx.us). The 1976 horror film dramatizes a series of unsolved murders from 1946, today remembered as the "Texarkana Moonlight Murders." Daytime activities include a splash pad and disc golf course.



6 / FOUR STATES AUTO MUSEUM Browse memorabilia like vintage gas pumps with glass windows that show the gasoline inside. A rotating collection of rolling stock traces automobile evolution with examples such as a Ford Model T and a *Smoky and the Bandit*-style 1979 Trans Am. On Oct. 29, the fun spills into the surrounding streets as owners of vintage cars and hot rods arrive to compete in the Fall Car Show.



3 / ACE OF CLUBS HOUSE Legend holds that James Draughon, an early Texarkana mayor, was inspired by a winning poker hand to build this Italianate brick mansion in 1885 in the shape of a club. Featuring a spiral staircase and octagonal rooms, the house is now a museum filled with period furniture and former owners' personal effects.



7 / NAAMAN'S BBQ You might think this local joint took a risk in 2019 by moving from Texas to Arkansas. But this is Texarkana, and Naaman's new digs are literally just across the street. There's now more space for customers to enjoy the award-winning beef brisket and pork ribs, along with popular sides like twice-baked potatoes, mac and cheese, and cheesy corn.



4 / OLD TYME BURGER SHOP Old Tyme is a fitting name for this traditional eatery. But the menu offers a lot more than tasty burgers and fries. Favorites include homestyle plate lunches and dinners, chicken-fried steak, hamburger steak, chef's salad, and chili with cornbread. Breakfast classics include deluxe omelettes and biscuits and gravy.



8 / THE DAPPER AT PARK PLACE Park Place has been a go-to spot for dining in Texarkana since opening in 1979. But after an ownership change, a pandemic shutdown, and a significant remodel, visitors drop in to the new-look Dapper for steaks, pasta, and chicken dishes as well as drinks at the bar. Some nights offer a DJ or live band. The owners say a cigar lounge is in the works. 🍷



BY IRE'NE LARA SILVA

City in Color

EXPLORE EL PASO THROUGH ITS VIBRANT PUBLIC ARTWORKS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIST CHÁVEZ

E

Even a short drive through El Paso reveals a city that's unmistakably itself. The breathtaking vistas of the Franklin Mountains give way to colorful skies as vivid as the city's landscape, anchored by architectural gems around every corner. Italian cypresses grow fast and tall, and ocotillo blooms dot the land with bursts of crimson.

It's no wonder El Paso would be home to several brilliant public artworks. These outdoor sculptures pay homage to El Paso's landscape, history, and culture without walls or visiting hours. It's art that can be touched, seen at dawn, dusk, and in the full light of day.

El Paso's Public Art Program began in 2006, created by city council in an effort to make art more accessible and to celebrate the city's diversity. As of July 2022, the city had completed its 82nd project, with 27 more currently in progress. Recent additions include *Bienvenido*, a big yellow door in the middle of downtown El Paso that debuted in May 2021; and *Flores Del Desierto*, an installation at the El Paso International Airport that was named one of the Top 100 public art pieces in the International 2020 CODAwards, which recognizes projects that integrate commissioned art into interior, architectural, or public spaces.

"Public artworks allow people to experience art every day," says Miriam Garcia, supervisor of El Paso's Public Art Program. "The artworks are part of the beautification of El Paso and give us a sense of its culture."

While a large percentage of the artists behind each project are local, many come from all over the country. According to Garcia, the meticulous selection process involves the artists, community members, and engineers, among others. Artists are asked to contemplate art that is "relevant to El Paso culture—whether it's Chamizal, the West Side, or downtown."

For travelers, the public artworks provide an ideal avenue to explore the city. These six artworks are a noteworthy sampling of what El Paso has to offer:



Radiance

BY SHANE ALLBRITTON AND NORMAN LEE

EL PASO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, 6701 CONVAIR ROAD

Twenty feet wide and shot through with light, *Radiance* is a three-dimensional mandala by Houston-based artists Norman Lee and Shane Allbritton that welcomes travelers to El Paso's airport in stunning fashion. The artists created acrylic shapes that pull from textiles, pottery, and other crafts derived from Mexican, Spanish, and Indigenous cultures, representing the historical inhabitants of the area. The color-changing material hangs from a steel canopy, playing with the light to imitate El Paso's sunset. "Like with all art, people bring their own interpretations and experiences to the works they encounter," Lee says. "*Radiance* conjures notions of the beauty of El Paso's cultural diversity and surrounding natural landscape." Beneath the structure, a swirling inscription of the poem "The River/El Rio: both Sides, No Sides" by award-winning poets and El Pasoans Bobby Byrd and Sasha Pimental caps the piece.



Sun Pavilion

BY DAVID DAHLQUIST AND MATT NIEBUHR

BLACKIE CHESHER PARK, 1100 N. ZARAGOZA ROAD

On bright and breezy days at Blackie Cheshire Park, where the structure *Sun Pavilion* casts its shade, families picnic, neighbors walk their dogs, and soccer games are punctuated by happy shouts. Here, Iowan artists David Dahlquist and Matt Niebuhr bring a piece of Hueco Tanks to passersby. Made of steel and aluminum, the installation imitates the granite hollows of the low-rising mountain-scape, incorporating Indigenous petroglyphs and pictographs found at

the natural site. The cutout design is a nod to the traditional Mexican paper craft of *papel picado*. The artwork both stands out and blends in, inviting visitors to sit beneath it and contemplate the shapes. “The patterned shadows and colors echo faces of the past and put us together in the present, creating a special, distinctive place for Blackie Cheshire Park and the community,” Niebuhr says. “The *Sun Pavilion* is a moment in the shade, a place to meet and enjoy each other’s company.”



Desert Bloom

BY CAROL MAY AND TIM WATKINS

**CHUCK HEINRICH MEMORIAL PARK, 11055 LOMA
DEL NORTE DRIVE**

Forty feet across, *Desert Bloom* incorporates two mosaic serpents and an archway both ancient and futuristic, like an elegant version of a *Star Trek* time portal. “*Desert Bloom* is a gateway to the natural world,” says Tim Watkins, who co-created the arch

with fellow Brooklyn-based artist Carol May. Originally made for a children’s playground that was put on hold, the structure is designed to be touched. The installation serves as one of the entrances to Franklin Mountain State Park, 27,000 acres of land that offer multiple hiking trails of varying levels of difficulty as well as opportunities for biking, mountain climbing, and camping.



Ocotillo

BY HOWARD KALISH

PEBBLE HILLS ROUNDABOUT, 12274 PEBBLE HILLS BLVD.

Ocotillo is not an exact representation of the flowering plant found throughout El Paso's desert land, but it manages to convey its sparseness and the thrill of its blooms. Standing at 14 feet, the structure made of steel and cast urethane feels massive when you're next to it. It's especially beautiful at night when the blooms are illuminated by LED lights. "I hope El Paso residents and visitors will see it as a beacon, visible from a distance," says creator Howard Kalish, a Brooklyn-based artist known for his public artworks, "and I hope they will appreciate its changing aspects from day to night." *Ocotillo* is located in an entirely unexpected spot. It's the centerpiece of the roundabout off of Loop 375, surrounded by a convenience store, a residential neighborhood, and an empty lot.



Woven Culture

BY CREATIVE KIDS

CAROLINA BRIDGE, FROM ALAMEDA AVENUE TO FRANKLIN DRIVE

It's hard to choose whether it's best to see *Woven Culture* while driving or walking over the Carolina Bridge. A close-up view allows time to feel the textures and colors. Viewing from the car reveals the whole of it—a mesmerizing rainbow structure jutting into the sky. Along either side of the roadway, the piece includes sarape-like patterns and depictions of nopales, or prickly pear cacti. The team behind Creative Kids, a nonprofit that provides art education to youth in El Paso, created the sculpture with a group of eight children. "This piece was done to reflect the diverse and rich culture we have living on the border—hence the name," Creative Kids executive director Andrea Gates-Ingle says. "This piece offers El Paso residents and visitors a symbol that signifies building bridges of community."






Mandala Sunrise

BY KORYN ROLSTAD

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO, 2850 SUN BOWL DRIVE

Located at and sponsored by the University of Texas at El Paso, *Mandala Sunrise* by Seattle-based artist Koryn Rolstad is an irresistible invitation to explore the school's unique combination of Southwest cultures. The colorful structure is influenced by the sand art of monks

from the Kingdom of Bhutan, the country in South-Central Asia. UTEP has a storied connection with Bhutan, channeling the country's architecture throughout campus. After visiting *Mandala Sunrise*, head over to the Lhakhang Cultural Exhibit to explore the Bhutanese temple gifted to the school by the isolated Himalayan kingdom. 

ONE

MAN'S

ACCLAIMED SCULPTOR JESSE LOTT'S ABILITY TO MAKE **ART OUT OF ANYTHING**
HAS MADE HIM A REVERED FIGURE IN HIS HOUSTON COMMUNITY

TREASURE

BY MICHAEL J. MOONEY



PHOTOGRAPHS BY NATHAN LINDSTROM

J

Jesse Lott's art studio, on the west side of Houston's Fifth Ward, looks like a wasteland of detritus from a natural disaster. On the ground outside is a massive nest of metal wire piled haphazardly with graying, brittle pieces of lumber, tangled twigs, and fragments of tattered furniture. By the front door: an ashy old basketball and wads of wetted, weathered newspaper molded into the vague shape of a human body slumping in a rocking chair. Inside the building it's more of the same: towering stacks of cardboard boxes overflowing with yellowing bundles of paper, dusty glass jars, and more broken pieces of furniture.

The space might seem like a repository of trash, the remnants of countless storage units hoarded and then dumped into this two-story corrugated steel building. But what happens here is almost supernatural—it's what earned Lott the Texas Commission on the Arts and the State Legislature's appointment as the 2022 Texas State Three-Dimensional Artist. This studio is where the nearly 80-year-old Lott, one of the most acclaimed artists in Texas history, fashions scraps of debris from the surrounding urban frontier into globally sought-after sculptures. It's also where Lott tries to inspire others to express themselves creatively, imbuing future generations of artists with the skills and methods he's developed over more than six decades.

That's what's happening on this warm Sunday in late spring. Lott is teaching an aspiring young Houston artist named Seema Nanda to twist together wire and wood until it looks like something else entirely. Nanda wears industrial work gloves as she curls a piece of a clipped wire coat hanger around

“HE’S A SHINING
EXAMPLE OF THE
CREATIVITY THAT
DRIVES ART IN
TEXAS.”

JENNIE ASH





OPENING SPREAD, FROM LEFT: Jesse Lott stands outside of his studio in Houston's Fifth Ward; A Lott sculpture beautifies the Harithas residence in Houston. **THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT:** *The Spirit of Transportation* resides at the Southeast METRORail in Houston; Lott is the 2022 Texas State Three-Dimensional Artist.

a spike of sanded lumber as Lott watches and coaches her on the particulars of his technique. "This is just to show you the basics," Lott says. "How to get started."

The idea, he explains, is to learn about the materials, how the castoff bits of our society can come together to look like something completely new, something with the power to stretch the public's understanding of both art and existence.

"Do the plain geometry and then, while you're doing your geometry, you can develop your technique," Lott says. "And then, once you get your technique, then you can go with symbolism. The same as you would if you were doing a drawing."

Lott is a legendary artist with dozens of shows on his resume. His works are mostly haunting Afrocentric human-esque figures gracefully made of wire, metal, and wood. Picture giant voodoo dolls constructed of rusted iron.

"He's a shining example of the creativity that drives art in Texas," says Jennie Ash, the executive director of Art League Houston. "There's a liveliness of spirit in his work, which offers new ways of looking and thinking about the role of the artist and the value of art in community."

His pieces sell for tens of thousands of dollars, have earned him countless awards, and have appeared in galleries like the Museum of Contemporary Art in Washington, D.C.; the Studio Museum in Harlem; and the Art Car Museum in Houston. Inspired by a lineage of Black artists and decades of community struggles, his art has a subtle activist bent, an unspoken rebelliousness. He's also done as much to advance wire sculpture as any artist in the world.

"Jesse is not only a Texas art icon, but also an American icon," says private wealth manager Craig Massey, who is a patron of Texas art and the chair of the Houston Arts Alliance, an organization that works with the Houston mayor's office to fund art projects across the city.

Through the years, Lott has become a godfather character in the Houston art scene, helping to start nonprofits that benefit up-and-coming artists and mentoring dozens of artists who've gone on to critically acclaimed careers. When he's out of the room gathering more hangers to cut and twist, Nanda calls Lott "a philosopher king."

In spite of the cane, Lott saunters when he walks. He's liable to break into a Stevie Wonder song or a

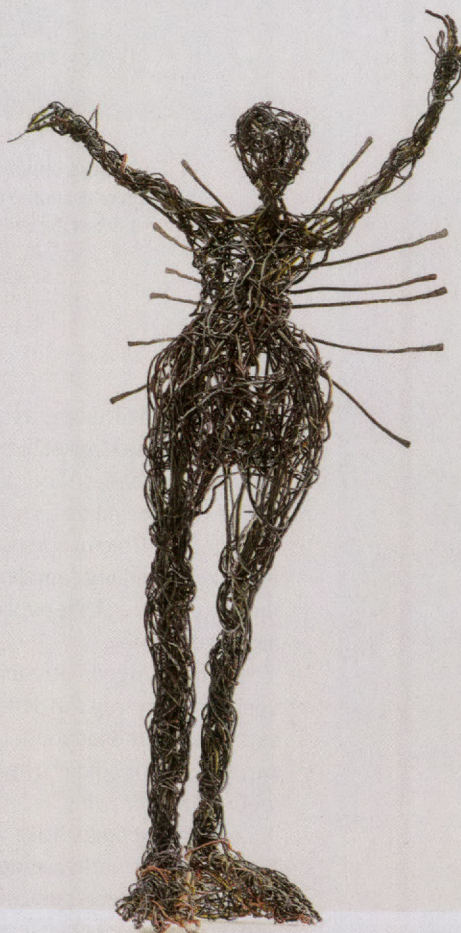
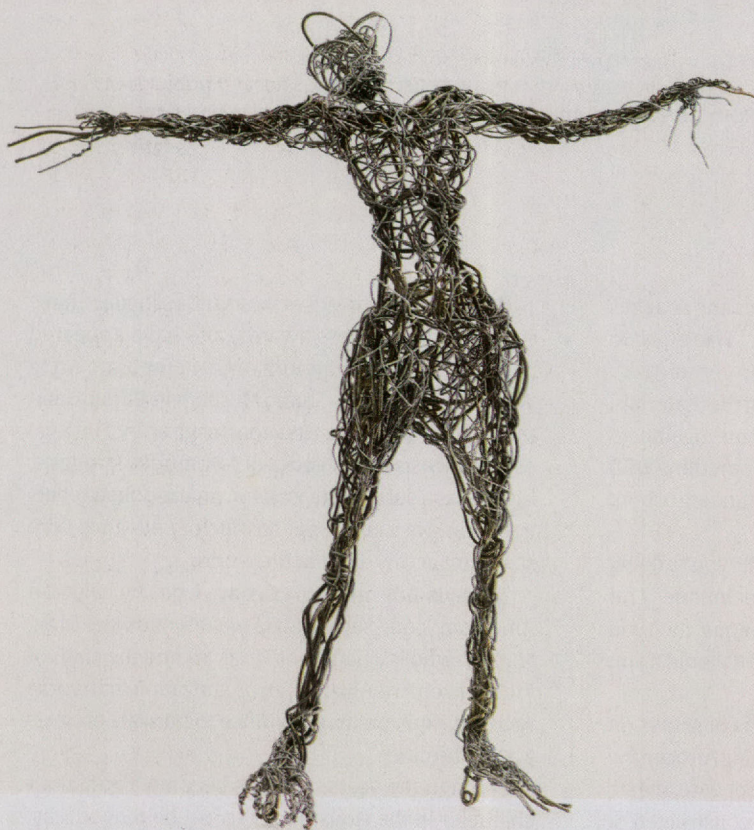
brief dance at any moment. He dots conversations with references to French pointillism painter Georges Seurat and quotes from civil rights leader Malcolm X. His descriptions of art and the creative process are a montage of poetic metaphors.

His thoughts are what he calls “wild horses running through the canyon that I call my mind” or “wild geese that fly through the open spaces.” On the development of an idea for a sculpture or drawing: “The vision precedes, and I must go where it leads,” he says.

The way Lott sees it, he changes the essential nature of the materials he uses in his art. Like the wooden leg of a coffee table. We

call it that, *the wooden leg of a coffee table*, because that’s what the object did—served as the leg of a table. But Lott might decide it’s actually the tail of a 5-foot-long mythical beast. Now that it’s part of a sculpture he stores along the back wall of his studio, the object has become what it *looks like*.

Explaining his approach to Nanda, Lott breaks down sculpting with wire to its most simple components. “The most fundamental of marks that can be made is a dot,” he says. “A series of connected dots is a line. A series of lines that cross each other, that intersect each other, can create an illusion of a shadow.”



TWISTS AND TURNS

See Jesse Lott's art around Houston.

The Spirit of Transportation, Elgin/Third Ward METRORail Station

This sculpture made from stainless steel and mixed metals—renamed *Hands Up, Don't Shoot!* by the community—depicts a colossal figure with its arms in the air.

Untitled, Hermann Park Lake Plaza

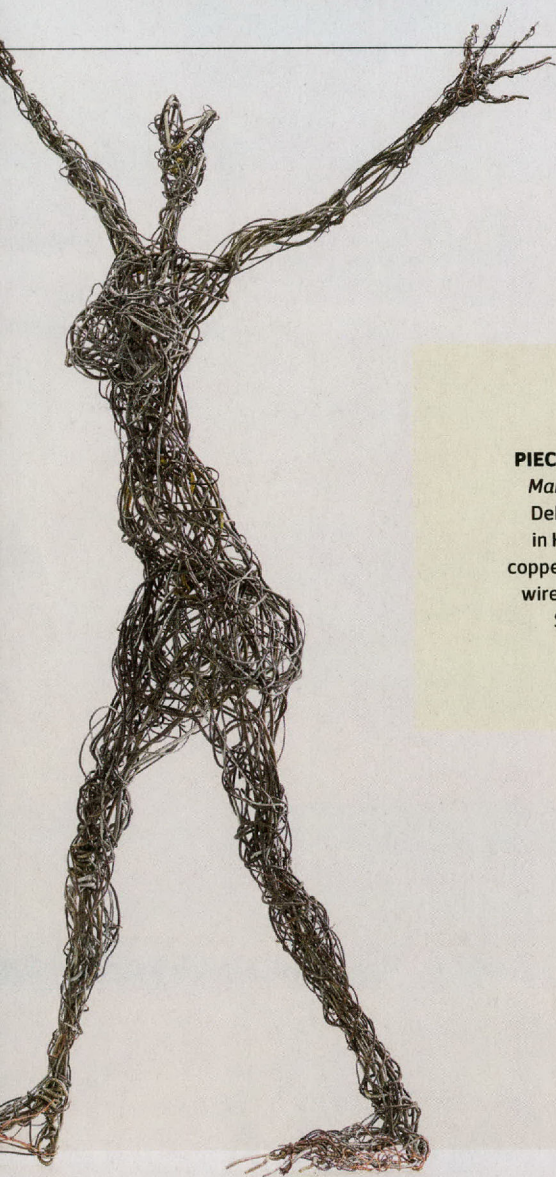
On the southern end of the Houston Museum District, there's an installation that looks like a Black face emerging from—or maybe sinking into—a mound of cement and stone.

Nanda watches as Lott slowly drags his giant, calloused hands through the air. “What you’re saying is, it’s a drawing, a three-dimensional drawing, right?” Nanda asks.

“A three-dimensional linear representation,” Lott says. “The shadow is no longer an illusion.”

MOST OF LOTT’S TIME IS DIVIDED between making art and helping other people make art. These endeavors serve a higher purpose than just creation.

“The freedom of expression is a fundamental building block



PIECES IN THE CELESTIAL

Manifestations Series at Deborah Colton Gallery in Houston are made of copper, aluminum, steel, and wire, and they range from \$12,000-\$15,000.

Celebration, Houston Hobby Airport

This 12-inch, red-haired, faceless character, made from steel, copper, and brass, is standing askew, arms extended, on a block of weathered, repurposed wood.

of our democracy,” he says. “But the question is, what good is the right to express yourself without the ability to express yourself?”

For Lott, art is a means of storytelling—using scientific observations to invoke history to remark on the present and future. For example, one series of wire figures on display at Deborah Colton Gallery in the West University neighborhood of Houston consists of four humanlike characters with their arms stretched upward, each with sharp rusted fingers and toes. These figures seem like they might be exalting the heavens—or maybe they’re screaming into a torturous void.

“History books will be burned,” Lott says. “History will be mistold. But the art is there to be interpreted by each person every time they look at it. So, you can tell many, many, many stories with one picture.”

Lott’s curiosity and desire to express himself go back to his early childhood in the swamp country of Simmesport, Louisiana, where he dug in the mud to see what came up. His family moved to Houston when he was a boy, and he attended school through Kashmere High School, where he played basketball. In 1957, he sold his first piece of art—a painting—at just 14 years old.

At the time, there were almost no public art exhibitions in Houston featuring the works of Black artists. Still, Lott’s family encouraged him. His father would protect his son’s time in the studio. “The space to do nothing,” Lott calls it. “The space to be who I am.”

These days, because he uses only found objects—he’s been called a “maggie artist”—Lott’s pieces are often confused for folk art. But he was classically trained. Muralist John T. Biggers, the founding chair of the art department at Texas Southern University, was an early mentor to Lott. Biggers encouraged him to stop focusing on the European-based concept of what art is, and to look instead to African art for inspiration.

Biggers also encouraged Lott to enroll at Hampton Institute, now Hampton University, a historically Black college in Virginia. After two years there, Lott transferred to California State University, Los Angeles. Then he attended LA’s Otis Art Institute, now Otis College of Art and Design, where social realist Charles White was his drawing teacher and adviser.

Lott was enthralled by the notion that art influenced by myths and cultures thousands of miles away and hundreds of years in the past could still serve as commentary on the social divides and injustices of contemporary society.

He showed painting and drawing talent, but in his mid-20s he also started producing sculptures made from repurposed objects—the work he’s most known for now. It was in line with the Black Arts Movement in America, which focused on community building in the 1960s and ’70s. When Art League Houston gave

“JESSE SO DEEPLY BELIEVES IN HIS MISSION IN LIFE THAT IT JUST FLOWS.”

DEBORAH COLTON

him the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016, one piece on display was a giant wire hand that somehow looked both robotic and prehistoric. A paper construction he did, *Farmer*, depicts a man in boots, overalls, a red striped shirt, and a big-collared yellow jacket with floral lining. His 1980 sculpture *Big Girl (A Tribute to Eula Love)* has a metal face so mysteriously evocative it's impossible not to feel emotional while looking at it.

His three-dimensional pieces and drawings are mesmerizing, stylized yet detailed. A 3-foot metal and glass sculpture called *Dragon Dog* features dozens of coiled wires comprising a mysterious creature, with spiked, rusted hooks for fangs. Some of his largest wire figurines appear to have thin nests of copper strings that look like individual strands of hair.

Lott returned to Houston from LA in the mid-'70s, and in 1977 he had his first large solo show, *Relics of the Future*, at Robinson Galleries. His approach to visual art was like nothing the Houston art scene had ever witnessed—and local collectors immediately took notice. By decade's end, he was gaining national attention, specifically for his 9-foot, 200-pound rebar and wire sculpture *Zoroaster: Fire Spitter*.

Over the next few decades, his list of accolades grew, as did the demand for his works. In the '90s, he was one of seven Houston artists who founded Project Row Houses, an effort to transform a block and a half of derelict shotgun houses in the Third Ward into a venue for showcasing aspiring artists and a resource for the community. The group came together with local volunteers to fortify the structures and remove needles and trash, turning blight into hope in a way that's garnered worldwide acclaim. In addition to art shows, the program includes housing for young single mothers trying to better the lives of their families.

Rick Lowe, a Houston painter, recipient of a MacArthur “genius” grant, and co-founder of Project Row Houses, cites Lott as a key influence. “His creativity is not bound to the specificity of materials,” Lowe says.

People in the community are effusive over Lott. The most high-profile members of Houston's art scene talk about him like he's a religious figure, referencing everything from his vision and his creative spirit to the countless acts of private charity he's extended to the homeless and poverty-stricken.

“Jesse so deeply believes in his mission in life that it just flows,” says Deborah Colton, whose gallery represents Lott. “It's from the deepest depths of his soul, in terms of what his art can bring to the world and how it can inspire others.”

María C. Gaztambide, the executive director and chief curator of public art of the University of Houston System, says, “Lott serves as a constant reminder that everyone is





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Lott talks with Third Ward artist Phillip Pyle, II; Kyla Prince attends the Project Row Houses 29th anniversary in July; A work in progress by Lott awaits completion.

capable of expressing themselves creatively and how we can all come together through art.”

AS LOTT CONTINUES TO EXPLAIN how something goes from a vision in his mind to a finished piece of art, Nanda nods and bends the wire. Lott points at the shape forming in her hands. “You see how this looks like a skeleton?” he says.

“A spine sort of thing,” she replies.

Lott points out that the wire being reshaped is now something new. “Remember until very recently this used to be a coat hanger,” he says. “You can’t put no coat on it now.”

Using such mundane source material—and transforming it into singular art—is a key aspect of his work. It’s not just a way to prove an artist’s supplies needn’t be economically prohibitive. It’s a way of looking at the world. The objects around Lott’s studio that might look like clutter could be something else soon. The magazines might be the flesh of a character who doesn’t exist yet. The legs of a stool might be the bones of an animal that lives in Lott’s imagination.

“We don’t make nothing,” he says. “We make decisions.”

The belief that every aspect of the world could be recontextualized is commentary, a call to reconsider everything

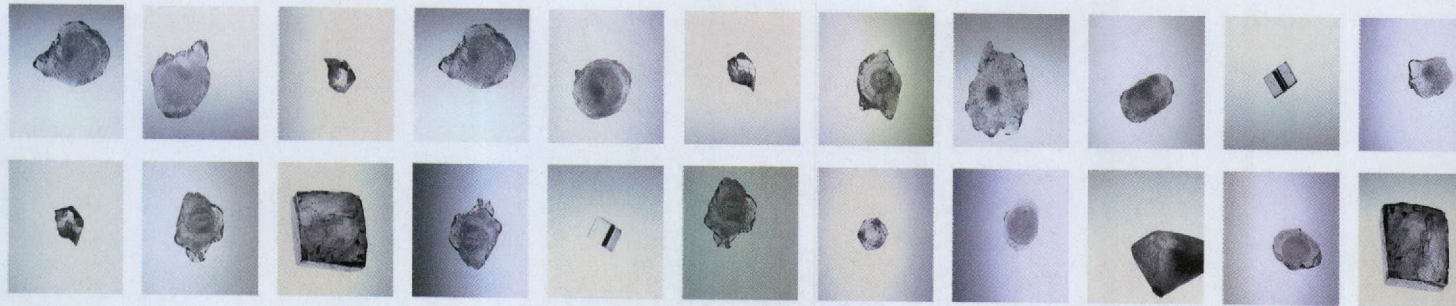
from our justice system to how society views beauty.

It’s something else, too. It’s a metaphor for a foundational aspect of the human experience. Most of us move through life trying to make the best of what we have in this world, what we’re given, what we’ve found, what we’ve hoarded. We aspire to transform the objects and the wisdom we’ve acquired into something meaningful, something that reminds the world we were here. That’s not how Lott sees it, though.

“My objective is to ride the wild stallion through the canyon of my mind, to go somewhere,” he says. “You don’t have to worry about it. They’ll take you to some water.”

After an hour of philosophizing, student and teacher decide to go get lunch. Nanda volunteers to drive. Lott stands up and grabs his cane. Once outside, he turns his head to the sky and lifts his hands, giving thanks for the sunshine. As he nears the car, he sees something in the street: a piece of stained wood that looks like it came off the bottom of a recliner or a couch.

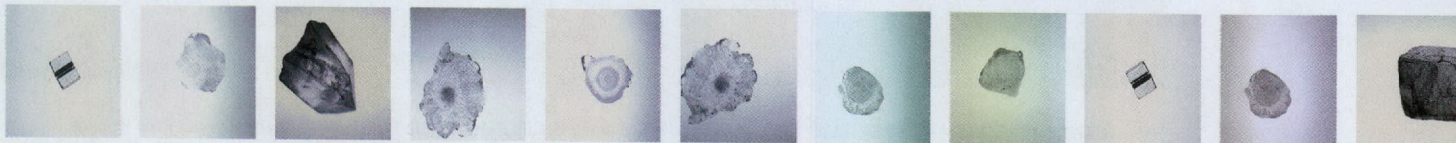
Lott uses his cane to move the wood closer, then he picks it up and tosses it on a pile of debris in front of his studio. “If you stop and observe,” he says. “There’s always something there.”



N A T U R A L



A T T R A C T I O N

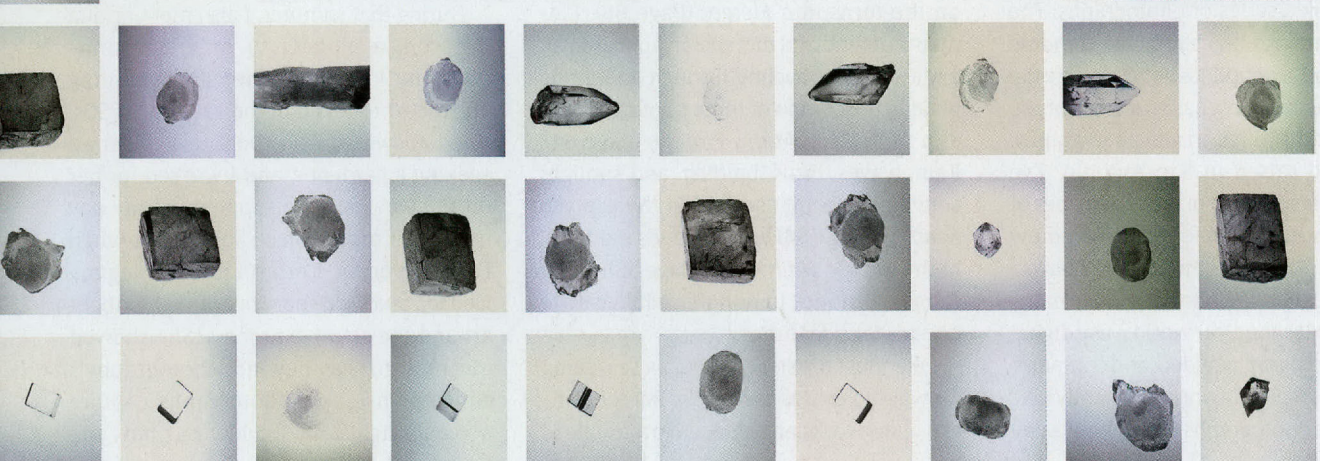




A WEST TEXAS PHOTOGRAPHER CHASES A



CONSTANTLY CHANGING LANDSCAPE



STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY E. DAN KLEPPER



J U S T B E Y O N D T H E B I G B E N D

community of Marathon, where I've lived and maintained an art studio and gallery for the past 22 years, the surrounding desert grasslands give way to weathered hillocks and low-rise mountains. Standing out among them lies a distinct knoll shaped like a pyramid. Each fall, the full moon rises directly over this hilltop as the setting sun infuses the landscape with an ember-like glow. The moon, golden as it peaks over the summit, grows brighter while the sunlight fades, intensifying until it dominates the entire vista.

Determined to capture this dramatic transition one evening, I set up my camera and took a series of photographs. The result, a composition called *One Hundred Moons* (right), exemplifies how I explore the real and the abstract characteristics of the natural world through art and photography.

Born and raised in San Antonio, I've long found inspiration in the landscapes of Texas. The scenery of the high desert drew me to a life in the Big Bend, where I have a front row seat for the transformative natural forces that shape our world. I use digital and film photography, video, and computer software to create my work, frequently taking multiple photographs throughout a day

or a season, and then combining them into composites and mosaics. They can suggest the passage of time over minutes or centuries, depict altered realities and dimensions, and often reflect the curious laws of nature that guide our existence.

My subject matter—like the shifting population of winter finches above melting snow in the composite *Birdcage* (Page 67)—illustrates the natural world in its constant state of change. Nothing ends up as it begins in nature. A morning glory vine overwhelms the garden trellis and, bottom side up, becomes a tornado in the composite *Twister* (Page 60). A falling tumbleweed on fire turns into *Meteor* (Page 66). Elements of time and dimension appear in an endless train traveling through an infinite plain in the combo of three photos, known as a triptych, in *Marfa Plateau* (Page 64). Rain, waves, birds, baitfish, and sunlight converge in a split second in the triptych *Seabirds* (Page 64) before clouds move on. In the mosaic *Hailstones* (Page 56), water forms hailstones in minutes while calcite crystals take centuries.

Like most artists, I'm always searching for ways to evolve creatively. But the genesis of my work can be traced to a couple of

experiences early in my career. One summer in the 1970s, while I was a student at the University of North Texas in Denton, I got a job photographing the area for the Army Corps of Engineers. The project was designed to identify and document archeological sites, historic structures, towns, and landscapes that would be affected or submerged by the creation of the 29,000-acre Lake Ray Roberts. Farming communities would suddenly find themselves lakeside while miles of pastures, creeks, and trees would disappear underwater. My job was to capture the character of the people and places before the transformation occurred.

During that summer, I also met Carlotta Corpron, a pioneer of American photography known for her light-bending abstracts produced in the 1940s and '50s. I had answered Corpron's newspaper ad seeking a gardener, and I worked for her on the weekends to supplement my pay from the Corps project. Sometimes when I'd take a break, Corpron would bring me iced tea and we'd share our thoughts about art and the creative process. She showed me how to see beyond photography's conventions—how photographs capture not only light and shadow but how the



medium explores ideas of space, dimension, time, and transformation.

Transformation is the fundamental principal driving the natural world. The summer of 1975 drove home this realization with unusual clarity as I photographed landscapes that would soon undergo dramatic alterations or disappear completely. But the fact is, nothing I photographed during those years would remain the same, whether reshaped by floodwaters or simply the

passage of time.

During the decades that followed, some of the images from that period fell by the wayside. I remember taking them. At least I think I do. Perhaps I've misplaced them or thrown them away, likely because I felt they weren't good enough to keep. But I'm reminded of something else Corpron taught me. The images that really matter are the ones that survive. Seasons change. Memories fade. But art? Art endures.

OPENING SPREAD:

HAILSTONES

A photo mosaic of hailstones, calcite crystals, fluorite crystals, and optical squares in Marathon; 2010–2017.

ONE HUNDRED MOONS

A mosaic comprising a series of harvest moon photographs taken in Marathon; 2005. The band Explosions in the Sky selected the image for the cover of its 2021 album, *Big Bend*.





TWISTER

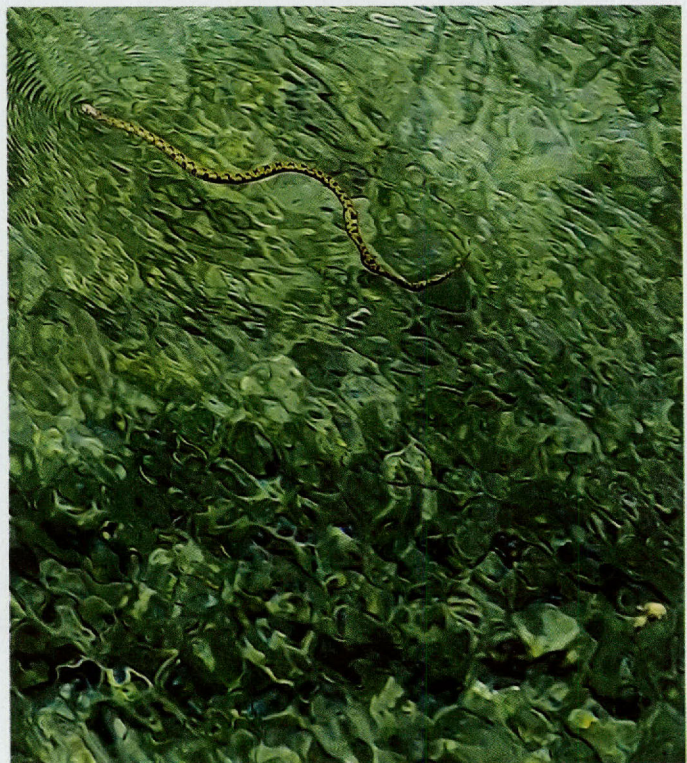
A photo composite of morning glory vines and a pumpkin vine growing on a wire trellis in Marathon; 2020.

GENTLING GRASS

A mirrored image of a lightning storm over the Marathon Grasslands; 2007.

NUECES QUATRO (DETAIL)

A photo of a watersnake in the Nueces River near Camp Wood; 2014.





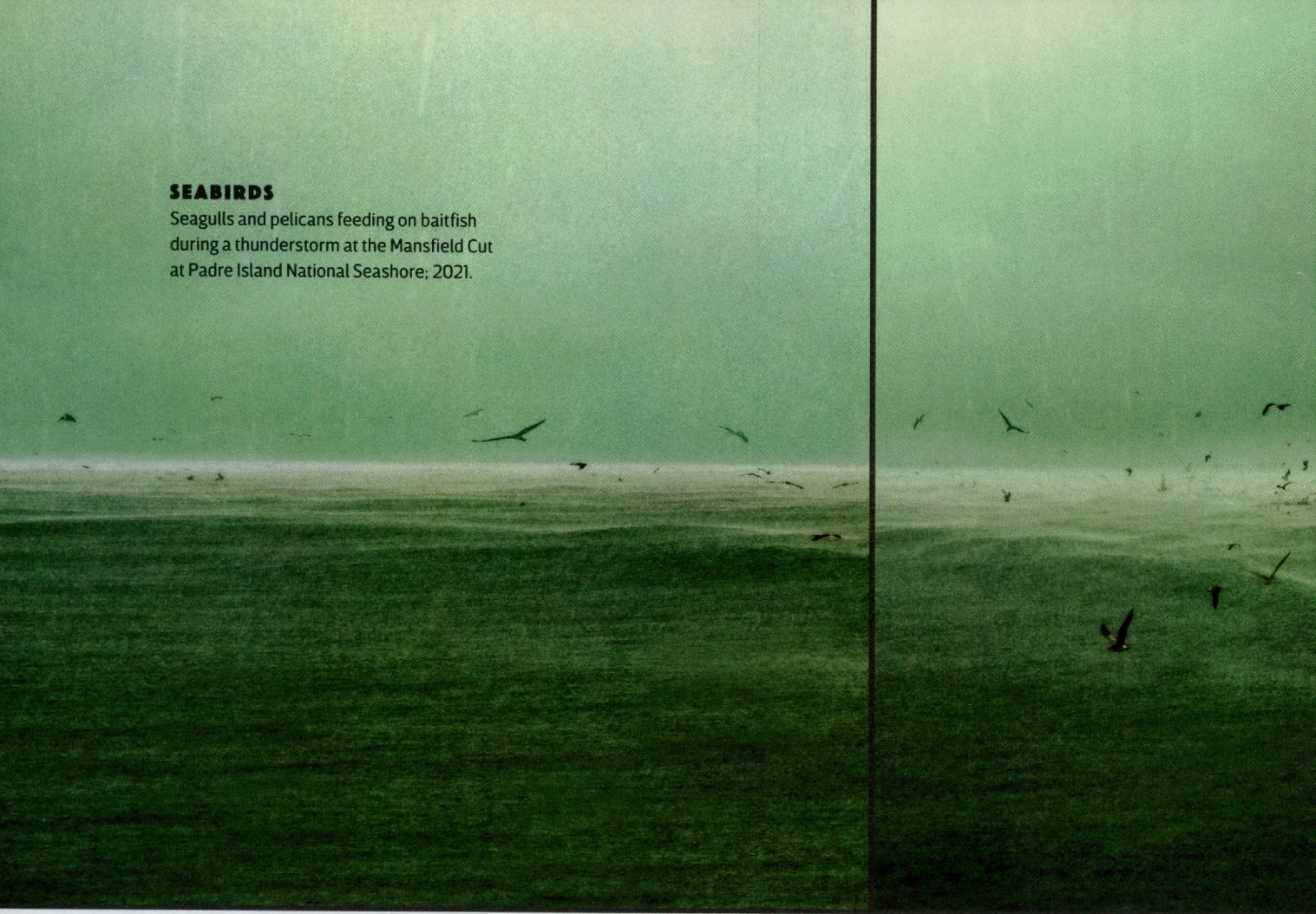
RIO GRANDE FLOOD

A photo composite of a dog, flowers, and flood debris at Fresno Rapids in Big Bend Ranch State Park; 2008.



SEABIRDS

Seagulls and pelicans feeding on baitfish during a thunderstorm at the Mansfield Cut at Padre Island National Seashore; 2021.



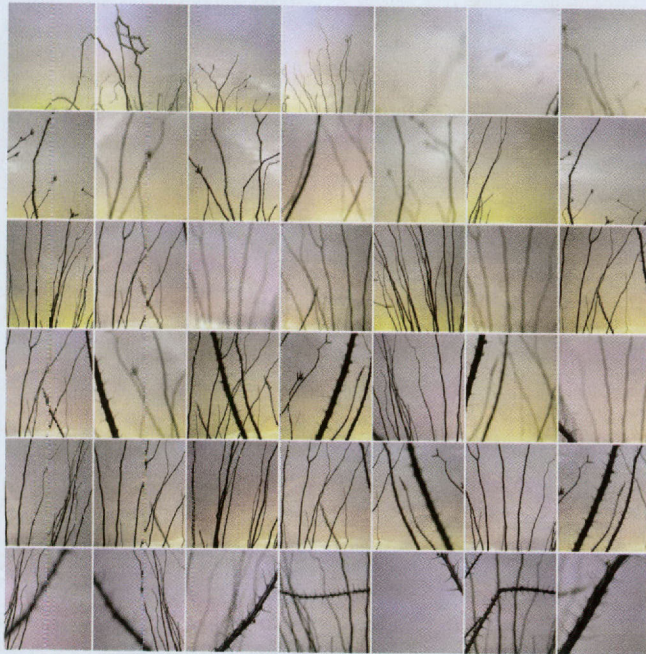
MARFA PLATEAU

A sequence of three photos of a train on the Union Pacific Railroad crossing the Marfa Plateau; 2018.



DUST DEVILS

Dust devils on a fire-scorched landscape near Valentine with the Sierra Vieja Mountains in the background. 2010.

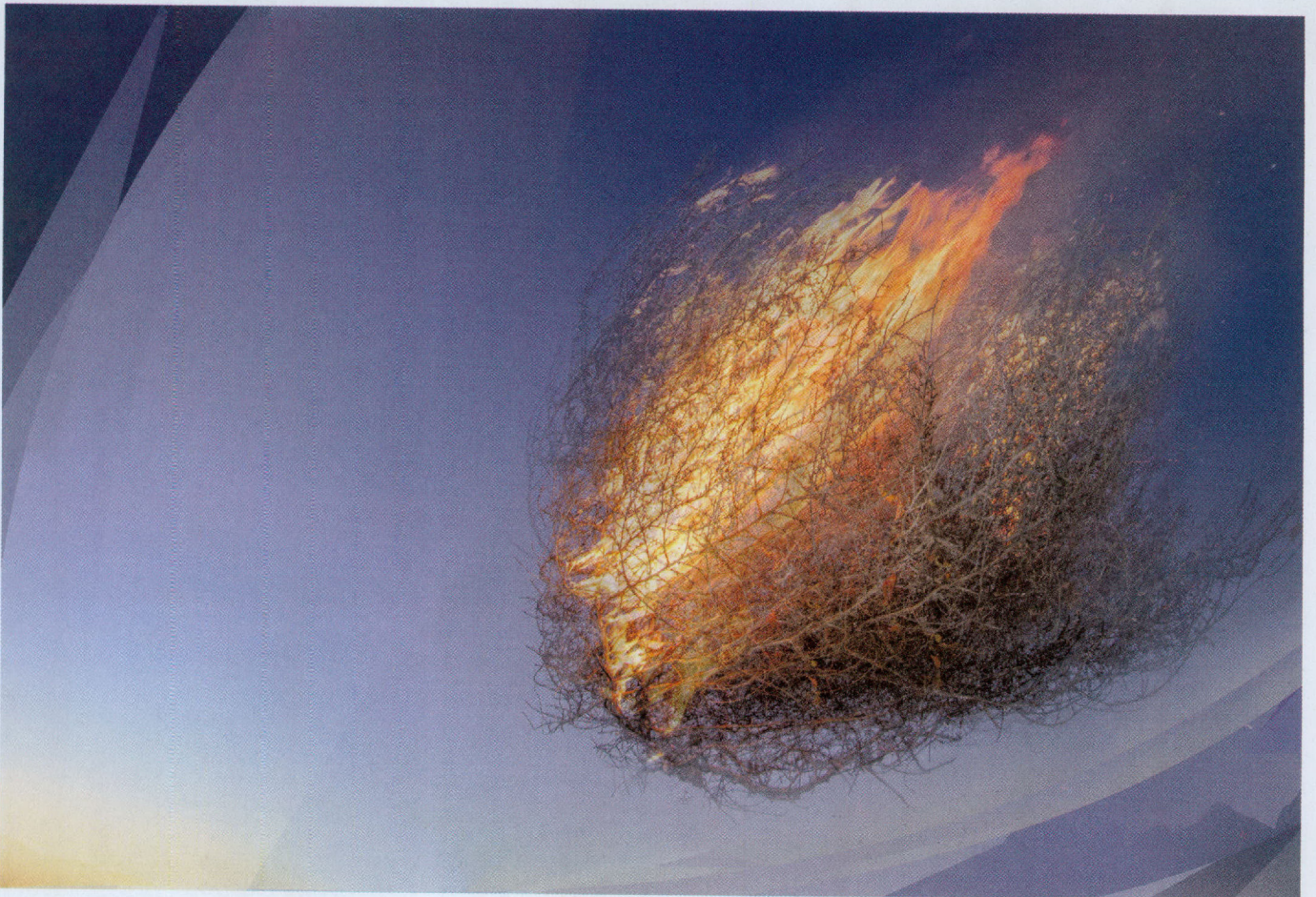


OCOTILLO FOREST

A photographic mosaic of ocotillo branches at dusk at Fresno Ranch, 2010.

METEOR (BURNING TUMBLEWEED)

A photo composite of a burning tumbleweed in Marathon, 2021.





BIRDCAGE

A photo composite of finches
in a Fresno tree in Marathon; 2020.



GYPSUM

A dust storm in the salt basin
below Guadalupe Peak, 2016.



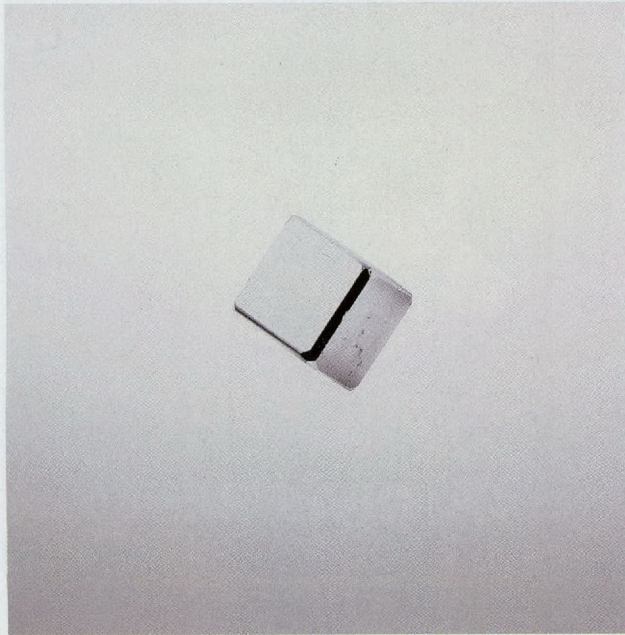
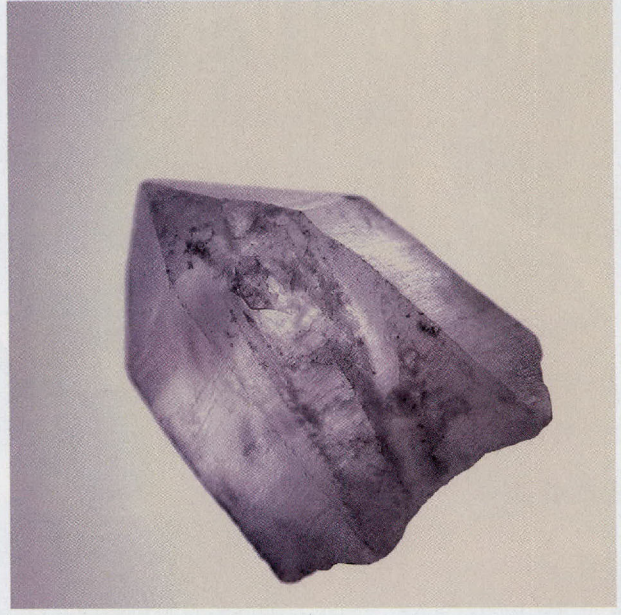
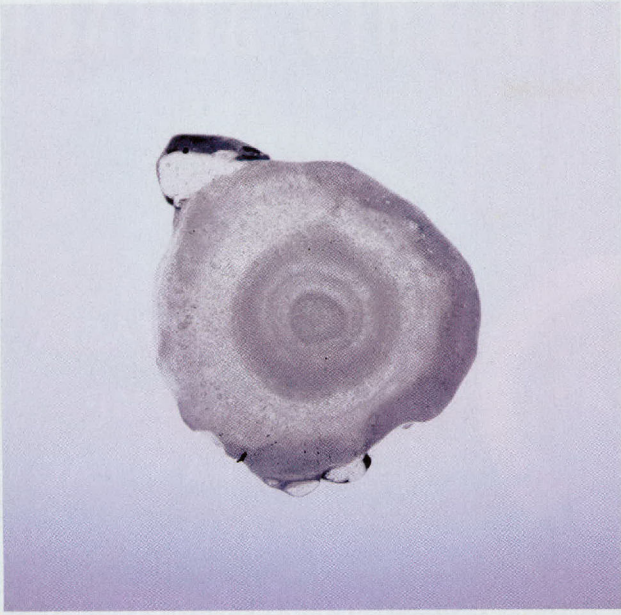
COTTONWOOD

A photo composite of a cottonwood tree on Alamito Creek south of Marfa; 2020.

HAILSTONES (DETAIL)

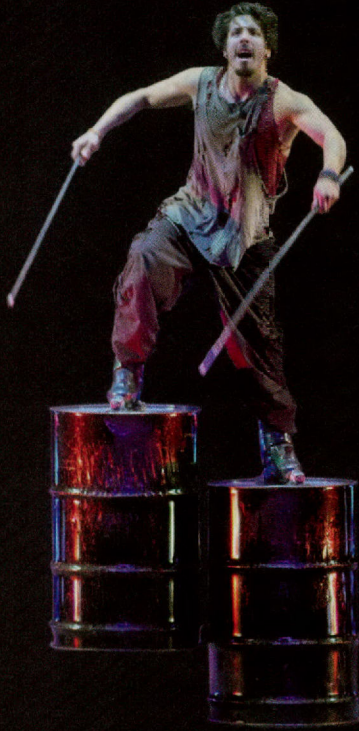
A photo mosaic of two hailstones, a calcite crystal, and an optical square; 2010-2017.





E. DAN KLEPPER has written multiple books, including 2017's *Why the Raven Calls the Canyon*, a collection of photos and prose about Fresno Ranch, a borderland expanse that's now part of Big Bend Ranch State Park. You can see Klepper's work at Klepper Gallery, located at 105 N. Ave. D in Marathon. The gallery is open by appointment; call 432-386-6789. Klepper is represented by Foltz Fine Art, which exhibits his work in its Houston gallery. edanklepper.com

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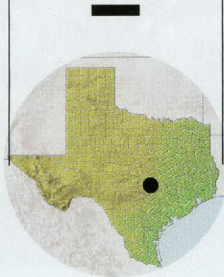
Crepe Expectations

A creperie in Dripping Springs whips up European-inspired delights

By Heather Brand

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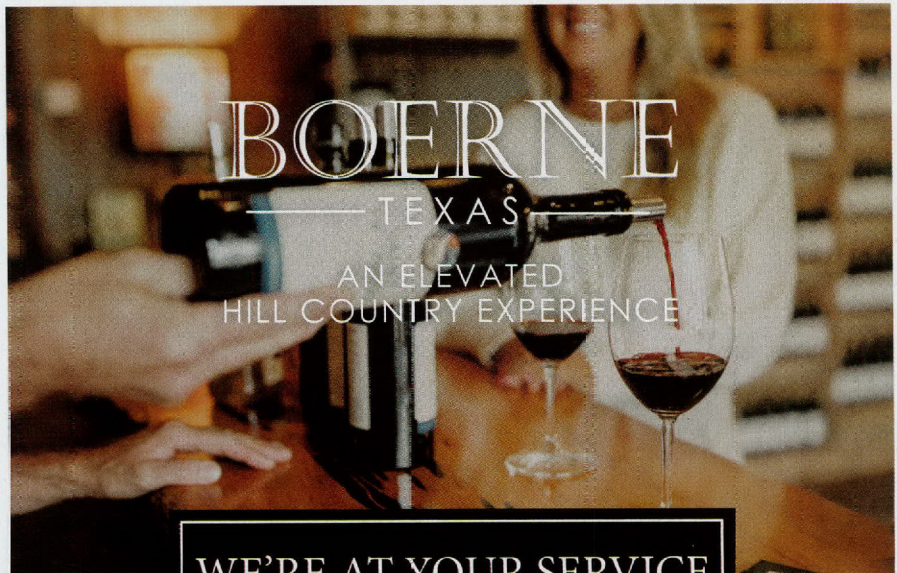


It's not polite to point. At least, that's what my mother always said. But at Crêpe Crazy, a petite eatery just off US 290 in Dripping Springs, pointing is not only acceptable—it's encouraged.

"Point and ye shall receive," reads a sign by the counter, where a menu lists a smorgasbord of sweet and savory options. That's because most of the people who work there—including the owners, husband-and-wife team Vladimir and Inna Giterman—are deaf and use American Sign Language. For those unfamiliar with the complex visual language, pointing is the easiest way to order—but choosing among the multitude of crepes is a harder task.

"I personally like the brie and apple with bacon," Vladimir signs. "But there are so many good ones. I never tire of them, to be honest."

Crepes, which originated in northwest France, are thin pancakes stuffed with either sweet or savory fillings. According to the Gitermans, some of the most popular choices at Crêpe Crazy are the chicken with basil pesto and the avocado and turkey. A sweeter favorite is the Nutella with strawberries and bananas crepe, along with one featuring sweet cream with strawberries and raspberry coulis.



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FROM LEFT:
The original Crêpe Crazy in Dripping Springs, the Sweet Cheese Delight is a customer favorite.



“There are so many different ways to offer crepes. You can have them at any time of day—breakfast, lunch, or whenever.”

Inna spent three years developing the menu. She and Vladimir traveled to Belgium, Germany, Holland, and other several small cities in France to sample local flavors for inspiration. “There just are so many different ways to offer crepes,” Inna signs. “You can have them at any time of day—breakfast, lunch, or whenever.”

For instance, you could start the morning with a Norwegian crepe (lox and scrambled eggs with lemon-dill cream cheese), then later indulge in the vegetarian Florentine (garlicky sauteed mushrooms, spinach, and a trio of cheeses), and top it off with a dessert like the brown sugar and cinnamon crepe drizzled with caramel sauce. Monthly specials keep customers returning to try the latest flavors. One recent special, the strawberry lemon angel crepe, incorporates pound

cake, lemon curd, and fresh strawberries drenched in a strawberry sauce.

Inna, who hails from Ukraine, learned to cook crepes, as well as other recipes, from Vladimir's mother in Russia. The couple met at a deaf club in Minsk, Belarus, in 1987, and by 1990, they had immigrated to the United States and settled in Brooklyn. In search of a more affordable town with better work opportunities, they relocated to Austin in 1996. They were also drawn to the large deaf community in the city, which is home to the Texas School for the Deaf.

"We thought this would be a good place to start up a food business because there wasn't much variety then, mostly just Mexican food, pizza, and barbecue," Inna signs. "At that time, there were no crepes in town. So, we thought, why not try crepes?"

In 2006, the Gitermans began serving their custom crepes at festivals around the state and were met with praise. Customers repeatedly asked them if they had a restaurant they could visit. In trying to meet demand, the Gitermans spent a couple of years searching for a brick-and-mortar spot in Austin, but they were unable to secure the necessary financing.

Then, in 2014, they were voted the best food vendor at the Dripping with Taste Food and Wine Festival in Dripping Springs, about a 35-minute drive west of Austin. It just so happened the owners of Oak Creek Cafe in Dripping Springs were looking to lease out one of their buildings. The space had a limited amount of room for indoor dining so the Gitermans added an awning to the patio to accommodate more seating outside. Its location, right along the busy highway, was ideal for catching the eye of passing travelers.

"It was a gamble," Inna signs. "We went ahead and jumped in knowing nothing about what we were doing. We just decided to do it." They quickly scaled up the menu to add a larger variety of crepes and began welcoming a stream of eager customers. "People were really excited about the crepes," Inna signs. "They were thrilled to see that we were offering something different."

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The venture was a success. The Gitermans opened a larger second location on South Lamar Boulevard in Austin less than two years later. The Austin restaurant differs somewhat in that it is open until 8 p.m., offers beer and wine, and serves only crepes. The Dr. Pepper Springs site is open until 3 p.m. and also has sandwiches and salads on the menu. For both locations, it was important to the Gitermans to hire

“People were really excited about the crepes. They were thrilled to see we were offering something different.”


deaf staff whenever possible. However, as Inna is quick to note, they don't cater only to a deaf clientele.

“We get a variety of customers, some who know basic sign language, some who don't,” she signs. “People are curious: they want to learn more about us and about the restaurant. When people sign incorrectly, our workers will show them the correct sign and help them out.”

FROM LEFT:

Inna and Vladimir Giterman; Crêpe Crazy's location in South Austin.



Inna adds that the restaurants have eased the difficulties of finding work for deaf persons by providing support that few other local businesses offer. "Just because someone is deaf doesn't mean they can't do something," she signs. "Deaf people can do whatever anyone else can do, except hear. We are showing that deaf people can do anything." 

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LYDIA MENDOZA signed this portrait "Cariñosamente Lydia Mendoza" in 1948.

The Lark of the Border

With grit and bravery, Lydia Mendoza soared above difficult times to become a star

By Hector Saldaña

Lydia Mendoza was only a teenager when she became an icon of Mexican American music.

The year was 1934. The song was "Mal Hombre," or "Bad Man." A brave choice for a solo debut, the bitter tango of lost innocence and contempt forever defined her. The lyrics, quite possibly a prostitute's lament, struck a nerve.

But the moment was more than that.

The beautiful singer from Houston with piercing Cleopatra eyes was speaking for every woman who had been hurt by a thoughtless guy. This fearless, discarded girl was willing to confront him. Though Mendoza did not write the song, she made it her own. A half-century before young pop singers Madonna and Selena embodied such defiant female empowerment, Mendoza had arrived.

"It took a lot of guts for a young girl at that time in history to sing a song like that," said Chris Strachwitz, the musicologist who helped spark Mendoza's revival with the 1976 documentary film he co-produced, *Chulas Fronteras*. "I don't think any other woman had sung something that direct."

The first known depiction of Mendoza appeared in a late 1934 newspaper advertisement. Her name was misspelled as "Lidya." The drawing—outlined with shimmering rays usually reserved for La Virgen de Guadalupe—gave a face to the voice that had only been heard on the radio and in public plazas, *carpas* (tent shows), restaurants, and farming camps.

At the time, Texas was largely rural and poor. The Great Depression added to the economic woes in a state that had been transformed in the 1910s and '20s by an influx of migrants fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution. For Latinos, Spanish-language radio programs and new Victrola record players were a refuge. Mendoza was their voice.

Accompanying herself on an Acosta

12-string guitar, the self-taught teen sang and played with conviction and a street-toughened vernacular, also reflected in songs like “Tú DÍras” (You Say) and “Adiós Muchachos” (Goodbye Boys).

Bluebird Records, a division of RCA Victor, captured “Mal Hombre” on March 27, 1934, inside a makeshift studio at the now-defunct Texas Hotel in San Antonio. Mendoza’s mournful rendition, with its swooping, elongated phrases, redefined the relationship between artist and audience. She was one of them.

Mendoza’s powerful voice was hardly operatic or sophisticated in the classical sense. But this forlorn child of the Jazz Age was versed in the styles of contemporary singers found in her father’s meager record collection, such as Italian opera singer Enrico Caruso and Cuban-born Pilar Arcos, a popular New York soprano jazz and tango singer.

With a raw guitar style—not unlike Texas bluesman Lead Belly, who also rose to prominence in the 1930s—Mendoza added her own flair, including the *pasadas* (passing chords and melodies) used by conjunto bajo sexto players. She was versed in boleros, tangos, waltzes, *corridos*, and *rancheras*.

There was profound beauty in the sadness of Mendoza’s songs. She sounded like she’d lived them. Conjunto music legend Flaco Jiménez once described her voice as “like listening to the stars fall out of the sky.” From those earliest days of her solo career, Mendoza was known as *La Alondra de la Frontera* (Lark of the Border) and *La Cancionera de los Pobres* (Songstress of the Poor).

Strachwitz, the founder of Arhoolie Records who traveled the South recording a treasure trove of folk music in the 1960s, recalled the first time he met Mendoza in the early ‘70s. She was making tamales at her Houston home. For him, she remains *la unica* (the only one), the Queen of Tejano music. With Mendoza and coauthor James Nicolopoulos, he documented her life in the 1993 book *Lydia Mendoza: A Family Autobiography*.

“The story of ‘Mal Hombre’ was part of

“One of the most interesting events to attend in Texas!”

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An Unsung Hero

A bronze bust of Lydia Mendoza greets visitors as they enter the Texas Music Gallery within The Wittliff Collections at Texas State University in San Marcos.

Created by sculptor Clete Shields, the bust is decorated with scenes from Mendoza's life and is positioned near the bust of another titan of Texas music, Willie Nelson.

Mendoza's talent, independence, and determination embody the theme of "The Songwriters: Sung and Unsung Heroes of The Wittliff," an exhibit I curated in my position as Texas music curator at the Wittliff. Mendoza reminds us that Texas music has always been much more than Willie and Waylon and the boys.

The exhibit—open through September 2023—also features a poster based on a Bluebird Records newspaper advertisement from 1934, which is believed to be the earliest known depiction of Mendoza. Guests can view one of the beautiful handmade dresses Mendoza sewed herself and wore onstage. For guitar aficionados, a rare example of a 1930s Acosta brand 12-string guitar similar to the one Mendoza played is on display.

The Wittliff Collections at Texas State University opens Mon–Fri 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Weekend hours vary. 512-245-2313; thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu



THE U.S. POSTAL
Service created
a stamp in 2013
to honor Lydia
Mendoza.

her DNA and the DNA of many women," Strachwitz said.

Born in Houston on May 31, 1916, Mendoza had an impoverished and nomadic childhood. Her father, Francisco, a violent man when drinking, often uprooted the family to Monterrey, Mexico, where he had worked at a brewery. Her mother, Leonor, was a self-taught guitarist, singer, and songwriter.

Mendoza took solace in musical instruments. When her mother made the guitar off-limits, Mendoza fashioned one out of a wooden board and rubber bands. By the time she was 8, she was accomplished on guitar. She also taught herself the mandolin, violin, and piano.

In a story with echoes of the Carter Family—the influential country band from Virginia that made its first recordings in the 1920s—the Mendozas forged a family group, Cuarteto Carta Blanca, with the parents singing in unison with Lydia and one of her sisters, Francisca. Young Lydia played the mandolin. They traveled to San Antonio in 1928, enduring several flat tires, to answer an ad to make a recording for Okeh Records.

But the road to "Mal Hombre" actually began two years earlier in Mexico. At a humble Monterrey theater, Mendoza first heard the song that would change her life. Her father had brought her to see a musical variety show. A young woman appeared onstage to sing two tangos. One of them was "Mal Hombre," a song most likely of Argentine origin.

Mendoza couldn't believe it. She had the words to the song in her pocket, she recounted in her autobiography. In those days, a couplet or stanza of a song's lyrics would be printed on the wrappers of Mexican chewing gum. Mendoza collected them. The youngster was familiar with the song's heartbreaking words, if not its melody. The girl listened intently. She didn't care much for the singer, whom Strachwitz said may have been recording artist Elisa Berumen. Lydia was too busy memorizing the melody to later arrange on her *guitarra doble*.

By the late 1930s, Mendoza was the most beloved Mexican American performer of the common man. Accounts of her first appearance in Los Angeles in 1937 described thousands in the street

outside the Mason Theater.

But her career was short-lived: Mendoza stopped touring in her 20s because of the economic pall of World War II and the demands of becoming a mother. She would later briefly reunite with her family's vaudeville-style act and continue recording for small labels. Later, after Strachwitz's film, she was rediscovered and honored during the Chicano movement of the 1970s.

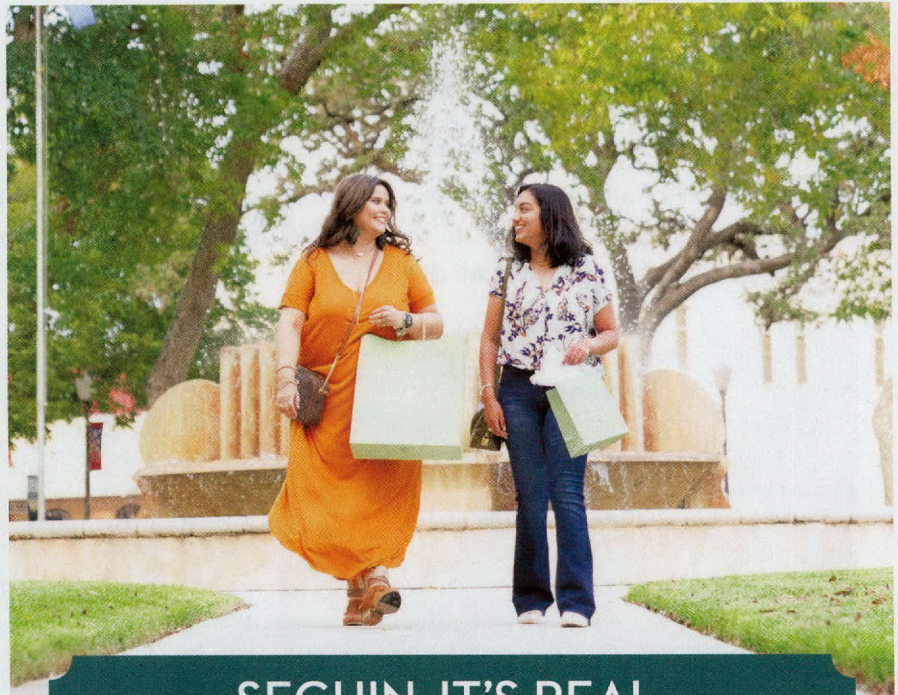
Then in her 60s, Mendoza lived in a modest home on Beverly Street in the Heights area of Houston. She sewed and decorated her colorful sequined stage dresses by hand: If a light was on in the house, she was sewing, her granddaughter Ann McKinney recalled.

"She called me 'mijo,'" remembered conjunto accordionist Santiago Jiménez Jr., Flaco's brother, who recorded in San Antonio with her in the early '60s. "Lo puedes hacer," she assured the young musician. *You can do it.* Everything was one take. "She played with all her soul," he said. "She had no fear."

Despite her greatness, she had troubles, too. In the late 1980s, Mendoza poured out her heart to Denver playwright Anthony J. Garcia with harrowing accounts of domestic abuse and struggles with alcohol. Garcia presented his 1991 play, *Lydia Mendoza: La Gloria de Tejas*, at the Guadalupe Theater in San Antonio. The singer attended the opening in a white limousine.

In those days, Mendoza didn't sing without a six-pack of beer nearby. Fans always called out song requests, and Mendoza would oblige. She continued performing through the 1990s until she suffered a stroke. Mendoza died at age 91 in San Antonio on Dec. 20, 2007.

Mendoza's grave is in a quiet, sun-baked area of San Fernando Cemetery No. 2 near the corner of Castroville and Cupples roads in San Antonio. Next to a flat headstone, a Texas Historical Commission marker honors Mendoza as "one of the first and most famous singers of the Texas-Mexico border and Latin America ... famous for both her voice and skills playing the 12-string guitar." 🎸



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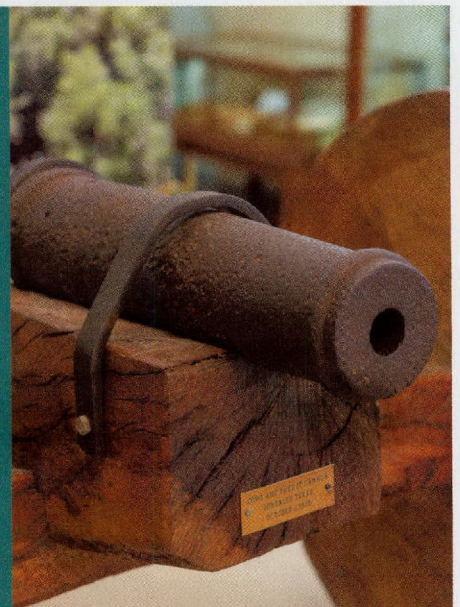
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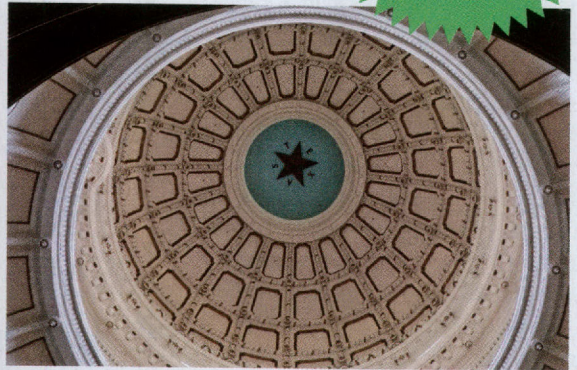
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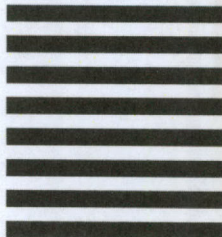
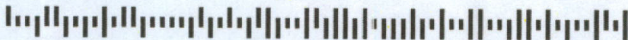
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As far as a remote beach in Nicaragua, vehicles have been spotted with a decal of an armadillo emblazoned with the words “True Texan.” That sticker is one of the most popular items sold by the *Texas Highways* Mercantile, the magazine’s e-commerce site offering products made in the Lone Star State.

The Mercantile (formerly the Gift Shop) turns 30 this year, and it has evolved significantly since its launch in 1992. Although the Mercantile now draws customers from far and wide due to its online presence, it began as a modest two-page catalog within each issue of *Texas Highways*. Texas-themed products were a natural fit for the magazine—a way to celebrate the state and its diverse destinations. The catalog highlighted a handful of items for sale, such as a poster of the Alamo and a wall calendar featuring landscape photography of a field awash in bluebonnets and a hilltop sunset vista, among other spectacular views.

Over the following decade, the shop’s offerings grew to encompass a wider array of travel-themed merchandise, including home décor, apparel, accessories, and jewelry. By 1994 shoppers could not only find these products in the magazine’s catalog but also purchase them on-site at a shop tucked within the *Texas Highways* offices in Austin. Ana Perez, who today works in accounts receivable for the magazine, used to manage the shop. “The shop was a newsstand for *Texas Highways*, but it also had posters, puzzles, and guidebooks representing different parts of the state, from north to south and east to west,” she recalls. “It was meant to draw people in to explore more about Texas.”

With the rise of e-commerce, the Gift Shop shifted from a physical location in 2012 and instead focused on growing its online offerings, though many of those items were sourced outside the state. The following year, the magazine underwent a redesign centered around the concept of “True Texan,” and the Gift Shop soon followed suit, thanks to an initiative spearheaded by Joan Henderson, then marketing manager for *Texas Highways* and now director of the TxDOT’s Information Division. “The store was in danger of being

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Mug, Luling Icehouse Pottery,
\$44.00, 40116



closed because it just didn't offer anything unique," she says. "I thought we needed to take 'True Texas' to the store: if we could feature products by makers across Texas, then people might want to travel to those places to buy more, so it's a win-win for everyone."

Among the Texas-based craftspeople she initially recruited were Carolyn Kimball, who makes graphic tea towels under the name Kimball Prints; and Kris and Kelley Denby, of Hemlock & Heather, who use reclaimed materials to handcraft wall art in the shape of Texas.

Allison Douglas, the e-commerce marketing manager, says this approach has achieved great results. "The Mercantile is a huge gifting destination, which speaks to the uniqueness of the items that you're probably not going to find elsewhere. And you can rejoice in the fact that you're celebrating local makers and supporting local businesses—keeping it Texan through and through."

The phrase "shop local" takes on new meaning across Texas' 268,597 square miles. Naturally, many of the featured makers hail from big cities. Among those based in Austin are Chloé Jane Gray, whose wildflower painting appears on prints and postcards; William Knopp and Jessica Tata of Son of a Sailor, who create handmade beaded jewelry, bottle openers, and leather goods; Lys Santamaria, whose hand-beaded earrings are inspired by native wildflowers; Tabria Williford, who designs runners with bold patterns

under the name Tawa Threads; and Aletha St. Romain, whose exquisite wildflower watercolor paintings emboss notecards as well as an apron and a tote bag made from 100% organic Texas cotton.

Yet the Mercantile aims to represent craftspeople from across the state, including small towns. For instance, the site stocks handmade ceramics by Elyse Canc in Helotes, leather goods by Bear Creek Leather out of New Braunfels, and eye-catching jewelry incorporating sea glass by Maggie Dietrick of Margrit Co. in Lorena. "In the future, I'm excited to highlight makers in more remote locations where people may not have as much access to their craft," Douglas says.

The magazine's publisher, Andrea Lin, adds, "Texas Highways is all about inspiring people to travel to and within Texas. A big part of that is stimulating the economy of the local businesses and destinations and attractions all across Texas. The Mercantile is just another way to get people inspired about what our state has to offer. We highlight Texas-based artisans in an effort to highlight Texans' creativity."

Even though the selection of merchandise is ever-changing, a few of the old favorites remain—the wall calendar is still one of the top sellers, as is apparel bearing the slogans "Don't mess with Texas" and "True Texan." As an e-commerce site, the Mercantile brings these Texas-made goods to a global market, but at the same time, a reminder that there's no place like home and no better place to shop.

Order Online at Shop.TexasHighways.com

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TEXAS-MADE  CRAFT GOODS



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Texas Icons Tea Towels, Kimball Prints, \$16.00, 40120, 40121, 40122, 40123 | Texas Trapper Pocket Knives, Moore Maker Inc., \$89.95, 40090, 40091, 40092 | Blue Star Howdy Mug, Luling Icehouse Pottery, \$42.00, 40117 | Blue Star Octagon Serving Platter, Luling Icehouse Pottery, \$56.00, 40118

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EVENTS



On the Hook

Anglers on Wheels offers a free Port Aransas fishing trip for outdoors enthusiasts with disabilities

Held in May and September, Anglers on Wheels fishing trips give people with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy the open water with their friends and family. A charter boat takes participants to the bays and flats around Port Aransas to fish for black drum, redfish, skipjacks, speckled trout, and sharks. Door in the Wall, a nonprofit in Port Aransas focused on improving the lives of disabled people through making recreation experiences accessible, has hosted the event for 27 years.

The trips are free for participants. Fishing licenses are provided by Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the nonprofit provides a fishing pole, bait, tackle, and deck hands. Participants range from small children to those in their 80s. "Everyone's welcome, which is important because the young children on board who are just facing their lives with disabilities get to see older individuals out there fishing and having fun," Door in the Wall co-founder Barbara Blair says. "So many disability programs are geared for children only, and disabled adults don't have much out there for them. So, we welcome everyone."

The Island Queen II fishing boat is a converted ferry that's wheelchair accessible and covered to protect against the sun. A trough on board is filled with water to allow anglers to see the fish they catch up close, and free snacks and drinks are provided. Reservations must be made, as space is limited. Participants are selected on a first-come, first-served basis. —Amanda Ogle

Anglers on Wheels
 Sept. 16-17
 Island Queen II Fishing Charter
 210-749-0004; ditwtexas.org

BIG BEND COUNTRY

ALPINE

Trappings of Texas

Sept. 15-Nov. 5

The 36th annual Trappings of Texas is the nation's longest-running exhibit of Western art and custom cowboy gear. Enjoy an opening reception and sale, daytime artist demonstrations, and a ranch roundup party. Museum of the Big Bend, 400 N. Harrison St. 432-837-8145; museumofthebigbend.com

ALPINE

Native Plant Society of Texas

Fall Symposium

Sept. 22-25

Every fall, the event convenes in a different region which serves as the focus of the year's symposium. Field trips, workshops, and exhibits complement presentations that are open to the public. Alpine Civic Center, 801 W. Holland Ave. 830-997-9272; npsot.org/wp/event/fall-symposium-hybrid

DEL RIO

16 de Septiembre Celebration

Sept. 16-17

Celebrate Mexican Independence Day with live music, vendors, food trucks, dancing, and games for kids. Brown Plaza, 305 Cantu St. 830-775-3551

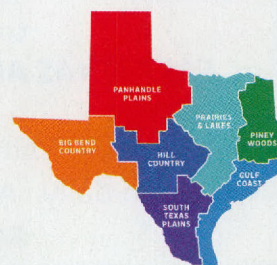
GULF COAST

GALVESTON

Shrimp Festival

Sept. 23-24

Featuring some of the best shrimp gumbo the Gulf Coast has to offer, the festival includes a seafood cookoff, gumbo tasting, Lil' Shrimps



Parade, live music, a children's area, and vendors. *Downtown Galveston*, 2314 Strand St. visitgalveston.com

HOUSTON

Asiatown Bus Tour

Sept. 17

Experience an insider's perspective of Houston's vibrant Asiatown while browsing the aisles of an Asian market, exploring a temple, or visiting Houston's Vietnam War Memorial. *Houston Asiatown*, 5300 N. Braeswood Blvd. 281-303-3452; ccchouston.org/tour

HOUSTON

ARTcetera Houston

Sept. 24

A selection of Houston artists—both local art scene mainstays and rising stars—create and sell works at auction throughout the evening. A portion of the proceeds benefits the Pablove Foundation, a pediatric cancer charity. *Sawyer Yards*, 2101 Winter St. 713-341-5731; artceterahouston.com

KINGWOOD

In A Pickle Festival

Sept. 10

Vendors at the festival carry at least one pickle-related item, such as pickle pizza, pickle ice cream, pickle desserts, fried pickles, pickle beer, and pickle lemonade. Activities include pickle-eating and juice-drinking competitions for kids and adults. *Kingwood Town Center Park*, 8 N. Main St. 512-796-8857; facebook.com/getyourselfinapickle

ROCKPORT-FULTON

HummerBird Celebration

Sept. 15-18

The annual HummerBird Celebration features a reception, workshops, HummerBird Malls, bus and boat tours, exhibits, banding, and lectures presented by world-renowned experts. *Various locations*. 361-729-6445; rockport-fulton.org/hb

SINTON

Fiddlers Fest

Sept. 24-25

Live music, a corn hole tournament, a car show, a barbecue cookoff, food trucks, vendors, kids' activities, and rides are all part of the fun. *San Patricio County Fairgrounds*, 219 W. Fifth St. 361-364-2307; sintonchamber.org/events

DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT?

If you think your event might be of interest to *Texas Highways* readers, submit your information at texashighways.com/submit-event



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TOMBALL

GroovFest

Sept. 17
The 39th annual car show features 150 classic and new Volkswagens and Porsches. See Beetles, campers, classic vans, and other vehicles competing for 20 awards. Enjoy live music all day and a performance by Beatles tribute band The Fab Five. *Tomball's Historic Railroad Depot, 201 South Elm St. 713-377-0738; nhvclub.wordpress.com/page*

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN

Pecan Street Festival

Sept. 17-18
This free festival attracts hundreds of local and national artisans offering original handcrafted creations in a variety of mediums, from metal, wood, fiber, clay, leather, glass, and stone to repurposed materials of all kinds. *Historic Sixth Street, 501 Old Pecan St. 512-478-0098; pecanstreetfestival.org*

AUSTIN

Fantastic Fest

Sept. 22-29
Fantastic Fest is the largest genre film festival in the U.S., specializing in horror, fantasy, sci-fi, and action. *Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, 1120 S. Lamar Blvd. 512-478-0098; fantasticfest.com*

AUSTIN

Texas Tribune Festival

Sept. 22-24
The multiday celebration features big ideas about politics, public policy, and news, all taking place near the Texas Capitol. Speakers this year include Joaquin and Julián Castro, Hilary Clinton, Carl Rove, Jen Psaki, and Dr. Anthony Fauci. *Downtown Austin. 512-716-8638; trib.it/fest*

AUSTIN

Blended Festival

Sept. 24-25
Dubbed "the ultimate social experience," the Blended Festival is a wine-centric event with a 100-foot wine tent, culinary stations and celebrity chef appearances, circuit of the Americas, 9201 Circuit of the Americas Blvd. 512-478-0098; blendedfestival.com/pages/blended-festival-austin

BANDERA

Western Heritage Music Festival

Sept. 2-4
Enjoy musicians and entertainers

all weekend long at the "biggest little bar in Texas." *11th Street Cowboy Bar, 307 11th St. 830-796-4849; 11thstreetcowboybar.com*

BANDERA

Celebrate Bandera Roundup

Sept. 3-4
Bandera honors its cowboy and Western heritage with a Longhorn Cattle Drive Parade, arts and crafts, music, gunfight reenactments, a ranch rodeo, and Lil' Wrangler activities. *Mansfield Park and Main Street, 2886 SH 16 N. and 500 Main St. 830-796-3045; banderacowboycapital.com*

BANDERA

Direction Wide Open RV and Motorcycle Rally

Sept. 22-25
The first rally specifically designed for RVers and motorcyclists, trikes, and sidecars includes seminars, All-Wheels trivia, and the first ever "NewlyRig Show." *Bandera Crossing Resort, 4300 SH 16 North. 972-395-5263; dwo.net/rally*

BANDERA

Rumble on the River

Sept. 30-Oct. 2
Biker Rallies of Texas' Rumble on the River celebrates its 20th anniversary with tent camping, a poker run, vendors, food, field events, music, a bike show, biker games, and a tattoo contest. *Mansfield Park, 2886 SH 16 North. 409-655-8800; bikerralliesoftexas.com*

BARTLETT

Metaphysical Night Gallery and Paranormal Tour

Sept. 10
The ghost town of Bartlett opens for guests to tour the Night Gallery full of oddities and spooky art booths. Shop from vendors and enjoy light refreshments. *Common Space, 138 Clark St. 808-291-0550; austinghostours.com/downtown-bartlett-ghost-walk*

BOERNE

BierFest

Sept. 24
Tickets include a craft beer tasting, art demonstrations, live music, and participation in the stein hoist competition and keg toss. *The Agricultural Museum, 102 City Park Road. 210-269-8349; ci.boerne.tx.us*

BRADY

World Championship Barbecue Goat Cookoff

Sept. 2-4
The biggest and longest-running cookoff of its kind celebrates its 48th anniversary. Enjoy an activity-

packed weekend with live music throughout the day, axe throwing, an arts and crafts fair, children's games and activities, a horseshoe and washer pitching tournament, food vendors, and a concert on the main stage Saturday and Sunday night. *Richards Park, Memory Lane. 325-597-3491; facebook.com/BradyGoatCookOff*

BROWNWOOD

Eclectic World of Boyd Harris

Sept. 1-30
The Brownwood Art Center features multimedia artist Boyd Harris during September. *Brownwood Art Center, 215 Fisk Ave. 325-641-2916; brownwoodart.org*

FREDERICKSBURG

Vereins Quilt Guild Show

Sept. 2-3
"Quilted Fields of Dreams" is the theme of the 11th biennial judged quilt show, featuring over 100 quilts, old-fashioned bed turning, vendors, boutiques, scissor sharpening, a tea room, and a prize quilt drawing. *Fredericksburg United Methodist Church, 1800 N. Llano St. vereinsquiltguild.org*

FREDERICKSBURG

Fall Festival

Sept. 24
At this festival, visitors can choose from a wide selection of pumpkins and unique fall décor items, watch live music and pumpkin painting, and enjoy food and drinks. *Wildseed Farms, 100 Legacy Drive. 830-990-1393; wildseedfarms.com*

FREDERICKSBURG

Lone Star Gourd Festival

Sept. 30-Oct. 2
The three-day festival brings artists from across the country to compete in a gourd art competition. Visitors also find gourd art sales, gourd supplies, and technique classes. *Gillespie County Fairgrounds, 530 Fair Drive. 512-964-5540; texasgourdsociety.org*

FREDERICKSBURG

Oktoberfest

Sept. 30-Oct. 2
Celebrate Fredericksburg's German heritage with three days of music, food, drink, dancing, arts and crafts, and children's entertainment. *Marktplatz, 100 block of West Main Street. oktoberfestinfbg.com*

GEORGETOWN

Art Hop XV

Sept. 30
This annual event features a competition between artists from



Texas Renaissance Festival

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TexRenFest.com

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across Texas. The competition categories include 2D abstract, 2D representational, 3D, and photography. Georgetown Art Center, 816 S. Main St. 512-930-2583; georgetownartcenter.org

GEORGETOWN

GTX Film Festival

Sept. 30-Oct. 1

The GTX Film Festival promotes independent films and artists in the community, across the U.S., and abroad. Judges are industry professionals and locals. *City Lights Theatre*, 420 Wolf Ranch Parkway. 512-818-0472; gtxfilmfestival.godaddysites.com/2022-festival-information

INGRAM

Texas Arts and Crafts Fair

Sept. 24-25

For its 50th anniversary, the fair features work from over 120 artists. Browse and shop for art and attend demonstrations from blacksmiths, knife makers, quilters, and potters. *Hill Country Arts Foundation*, 120 Point Theater Road. 830-367-5121; txartsandcraftsfair.com

KERRVILLE

River Festival

Sept. 17

Celebrate the Guadalupe River at the third annual festival with live music, river activities, food, and games. *Louise Hays Park*, 202 Thompson Drive. 830-257-7300; kerrvilletx.gov

KERRVILLE

Outdoor Painter's Event

Sept. 19-25

This fine art event brings nationally recognized outdoor painters to Kerr County to paint *en plein air*. Watch artists paint around the county, then visit the gallery to see dozens of paintings created locally during the event. *Kerr Arts and Cultural Center*, 228 Earl Garrett St. 830-895-2911; kaccckerrville.com

KERRVILLE

Roundup and Exhibition Sale

Sept. 22-24

The 39th annual roundup and sale is an exciting weekend full of art, food, drinks, music, and dancing. *Museum of Western Art*, 1550 Bandera Highway. 830-896-2553; museumofwesternart.com

KERRVILLE

Triathlon Festival

Sept. 24-25

Competitors participate in eight distance events and a free kids' run. *Louise Hays Park*, 202 Thompson Drive. kerrvilletri.com

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Capital of the Texas Hill Country!



Paint Kerrville!
Outdoor Painters Event
September 19th - 25th, 2022



Texas State Arts & Crafts Fair
September 24 - 25, 2022



Kerrville Chalk Festival
October 15 - 16, 2022



Kerrville Texas CVB • 830-792-3535

KYLE

Pie in the Sky

Sept. 3
The celebration features a vendor market, live music, a kids' play area, and tethered hot air balloon rides. There are pie eating contests, a pie baking contest, and vendors selling sweet and savory pies. *Gregg-Clarke Park, 1231 W. Center St. 512-268-1010; pieinthesky.com*

LAKEHILLS

Medina Lake Cajun Festival

Sept. 25
The 41st annual festival brings food, music, and culture from Louisiana to the Hill Country. Dance to Cajun and zydeco bands, enjoy authentic Cajun food, and sample gumbo in the Great Gumbo Cookoff. Foods include crawfish pies, jambalaya, fried catfish and shrimp, and bread pudding with whiskey sauce. *Lakehills Community Center, 11225 Park Road 37. 830-460-0600; cajunfestival-medinalake.com*

LUCKENBACH

LuckenRod Car Show

Sept. 10
Enjoy classic cars and a live music festival featuring rockabilly and honky tonk bands. *Luckenbach, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop. luckenbachtexas.com*

MASON

Old Yeller Day

Sept. 24
Celebrate the frontier heritage of Mason and the late local writer Fred Gipson with arts and crafts booths, food, authors, performers, and a dog parade. There's also a free showing of the film *Old Yeller*, based on Gipson's book, at the historic Odeon Theater. *Heritage Park, 424 Moody St. 325-347-5446; mason.ploud.net/old-yeller-day*

NEW BRAUNFELS

Gruene 10K

Sept. 10
Participants enjoy a leisurely or competitive run through the Texas Hill Country with medals for each age group. There's a post-race social with food and beer for all participants. *Gruene Historic District. 830-708-2991; athleteguild.com/running/new-braunfels-tx/2022-gruene-10k5k*

SAN MARCOS

Mermaid Promenade and Downtown Street Faire

Sept. 24
Local pubs and restaurants host parade watch parties and offer specials created for this event.

Festivities continue at the street faire with art, live music, food, and fun. *Downtown Square, 111 E. San Antonio St. 512-825-2819; splash.mermaidsocietysmtx.com/downtown-mermaid-promenade*

SONORA

Dry Devils River Music Flood

Sept. 24
Giovannie and The Hired Guns headline this music festival complete with food vendors and a cookoff. *Sutton County Park and Pavilion, 1700 N. Crockett St. 325-387-2880; sonoratexas.org*

TARPLEY

Labor Day Barbecue and Parade

Sept. 4
This event that includes a Labor Day parade, barbecue, raffle, and auction. *Tarpley Volunteer Fire Department, 264 Valentine Lane. 830-562-3403; tarpleyvfd.org*

TAYLOR

Texas Mamma Jamma Ride

Sept. 17
This bike event raises funds to support Lone Star Circle of Care's mobile mammogram service. Distances include 15 miles, 25 miles, 50 miles, and 70 miles. *Heritage Square Park, 400 N. Main St. 512-297-7740; mammajammaride.org*

TAYLOR

SPJST Barbecue Cookoff

Sept. 23-24
Cooking competitions include various meat, bean, and sauce categories. *SPJST Hall, 5025 FM 619. 512-365-1110; facebook.com/taylorspjst*

PANHANDLE PLAINS

ANSON

Party in the Park

Sept. 17
Join in a day of live bands, shopping, kids' activities, and food for sale. *Anson City Park, 2201 Avenue G. 325-823-3259; ansonchamberofcommerce.com*

CANADIAN

Canadian River Beach Club Calf Fry and Barbecue Cookoff

Sept. 24
This event features a calf fry and barbecue cookoff. *Jones Pavilion, 1101 N. Sixth St. 806-217-2703*

GRAFORD

Possum Fest Barbecue and Chili Cookoff

Sept. 30-Oct. 1
Enjoy food and drinks, live entertainment, shopping from

local vendors, and silent and live auctions. *Possum Kingdom Chamber of Commerce, 362 FM 2353 North. 940-779-2424; possumkingdomlake.com*

LEVELLAND

Cotton and Crude Festival

Sept. 17
The second annual festival features a parade, a street fair with over 100 outdoor vendors, and an evening concert with Will Banister and headliner Giovannie and The Hired Guns. *Downtown Levelland. 806-894-3157; levelland.com*

QUANAH

Fall Festival

Sept. 10
At the 39th annual Quanah Fall Festival, visitors can enjoy arts and crafts, food, games, and tractor, car, and truck shows. *Downtown Quanah, 300 S. Main St. 940-663-2222; facebook.com/quanahchamberofcommerce*

SAN ANGELO

Cowboy Gathering

Sept. 9-10
This two-day festival celebrates traditional country and Western swing music. Fifteen bands perform over the weekend, including Jake Hooker and the Outsiders, Jody Nix and the Texas Cowboys, Jeff Woolsey and the Dancehall Kings, Darrell McCall, and Tony Booth. *First Financial Pavilion, 50 E. 43rd St. 325-763-9923; sanangelocowboygathering.com*

SAN ANGELO

Concho Valley Archaeology Fair

Sept. 17
Dozens of booths and stations offer programs and hands-on activities. The program covers historic and prehistoric cultures that have called the Concho Valley home over the past five centuries. *Fort Concho National Historic Landmark, 630 S. Oakes St. 325-657-4444; fortconcho.com*

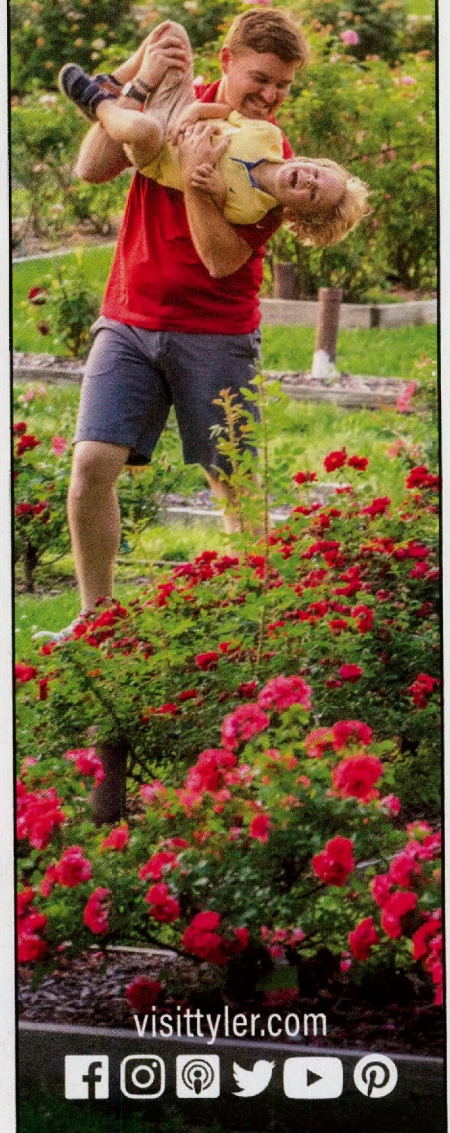
SAN ANGELO

True Texas II: Folk and Traditional Arts from the Concho Valley to the Rio Grande

Sept. 22-Nov. 27
In this exhibit, 22 craftsmen are featured from 9 of the 18 counties that make up the Concho Valley Region. Many of the handworked craft forms featured have been an integral part of the folkways of the region since early settlers arrived. *San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, 1 Love St. 325-653-3333; samfa.org*

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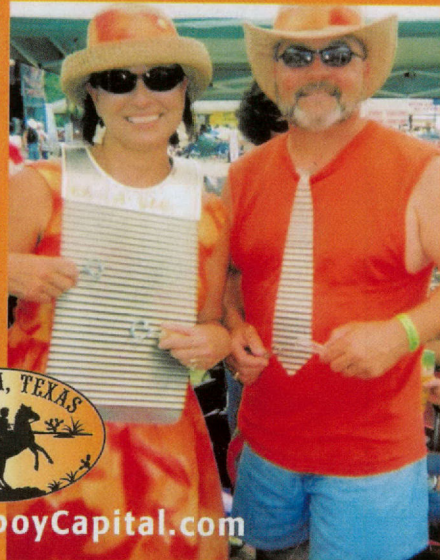


We are Texan, We are Cowboy,

And Sometimes Cajun!

Celebrate
Bandera Roundup
Sept. 3 - 4, 2022

Medina Lake
Cajun Festival
Sept. 24, 2022



Tessa Kolodny

BanderaCowboyCapital.com

EVENTS | SEPTEMBER 2022

PINEY WOODS

GLADEWATER

Arts and Crafts Festival

Sept. 17-18

Shop arts and crafts, ceramics, dolls, needlework, jewelry, and clothing at the 49th annual festival. *Broadway Elementary Front Lawn, 200 Broadway Ave. 903-845-5501; facebook.com/gladewatercrafts*

HUNTSVILLE

Antiques Show

Sept. 17-18

More than 75 dealers from across the U.S. offer antiques to suit every budget and taste. *Walker County Fairgrounds, 3925 SH 30 West. 936-661-2545; huntsvilleantiqueshow.com*

JEFFERSON

Antique Tractor Show

Sept. 17

The main streets in Jefferson are closed to traffic to accommodate antique tractors, antique trucks, working and stationary antique engines, and swap meet vendors. The day includes a tractor parade, slow tractor race, swap meet, and awards. *Downtown Jefferson. 903-445-9796; facebook.com/jeffersonantiquetractorshow*

JEFFERSON

Land o' the Pines Rallye

Sept. 30-Oct. 2

See more than 150 vintage motorcycles on display, participate in field events, and ride in the Rolling Concours. *Diamond Don's RV Park and Events Center, 1602 SH 49 East. ntnoa.org*

LUFKIN

Texas State Forest Festival

Sept. 15-18

The 38th annual festival features game competitions, yummy festival food, carnival rides, and live shows. *George H. Henderson Jr. Exposition Center, 1200 Ellen Trout Drive. 936-634-6644; texasforestfestival.com*

NACOGDOCHES

ArtFest

Sept. 24

Support local makers from the East Texas area by shopping from a selection of handmade goods and listening to live music. *Downtown Nacogdoches, 200 E. Main St. 936-564-7351; facebook.com/artfestnacogdoches*

TYLER

Piney Woods Ultra

Sept. 24-25

Run through dense forests of 100-foot pines in Tyler State Park. After the race, jump into the 64-acre, spring-fed lake to recover. Distance options are 5K, 10K, 25K, 50K, and 100K. *Tyler State Park, 789 Park Road 16, 210-749-1118; ultraexpeditions.com/piney-woods-ultra*

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

ADDISON

Oktoberfest

Sept. 15-18

This festival brings a Texan twist to the popular celebration of German culture, food, music, and beer. Watch polka bands and other traditional entertainers on multiple stages, play interactive games for all ages, and enjoy the beloved the Dachshund Dash. *Addison Circle Park, 4970 Addison Circle, 972-450-2800; addisonoktoberfest.com*

BRENHAM

Washington County Fair

Sept. 10-17

Established in 1868, the Washington County Fair is the first and oldest county fair held in Texas. Enjoy a variety of events including concerts, rodeos, livestock shows, arts and craft shows, special attractions, a carnival, and commercial exhibits. *Washington County Expo Center, 1305 E. Blue Bell Road, 979-836-4112; washingtoncofair.com*

CALDWELL

Kolache Festival

Sept. 10

Learn Czech philosophy, dance to polka music, and sing along to traditional tunes. There is an arts and crafts show, authentic Czech foods, a kolache eating contest, the kolache baking championship, a 5K Kolache Krunch run, a car show, a tractor show, and kids' activities. *Downtown Caldwell, 100 W. Buck St. 979-567-0000; burlesoncountytx.com/kolache-fest*

CEDAR HILL

LatinFest

Sept. 17

The inaugural LatinFest is a family-friendly event with food, entertainment, and hiring opportunities from local businesses. There is live music throughout the day with a final performance by the Selena Forever Tribute band. *Valley Ridge Park, 2850*

Park Ridge Drive, 469-272-2902; visitcedarhilltx.com

FAIRFIELD

Big T Memorial Barbecue Cookoff

Sept. 9-10

The cookoff features a state championship Lone Star Barbecue Society-sanctioned competition in chicken, brisket, and pork spare ribs. There is also a Kids' Cookoff Challenge. All proceeds go to support people with special needs in the area. *WL Moody Reunion Fairgrounds, 839 E. Commerce St. 903-519-3414; bigtmemorial.com*

GATESVILLE

Spurfest

Sept. 17

Visit the Coryell Museum and Historic Center for the free annual festival featuring old-time demonstrations, contests, music, kids' activities, and over 6,000 spurs from the Lloyd Mitchell Spur Collection. *Coryell Museum, 718 Main St. 254-865-5007; coryellmuseum.org*

GRANBURY

Spooky Spectacle

Sept. 24-25

Ghost hunters and fans of horror, sci-fi, cosplay, fantasy, and the paranormal converge at this event. *Granbury Square, 119 E. Bridge St. 817-559-0849; visitgranbury.com/events/spooky-spectacle/15101*

GRAND PRAIRIE

Groove Fest IV

Sept. 17

Catch R&B singers Keith Sweat, Blackstreet, Ginuwine, Dave Hollister, and Blaques live in concert. *Texas Trust CU Theatre, 1001 Texas Trust Way. 972-854-5050; texastrustcuthattheatre.com/events/detail/?event_id=434158*

HALLETTSVILLE

Kolache Fest

Sept. 24

This festival begins with a 5K run followed by a parade, arts and crafts vendors, food concessions, a kolache eating contest, a kolache baking demonstration, a dominos tournament, and polka music. *Hallettsville KC Hall, 321 US 77 South. 361-798-2662; hallettsville.com*

HARKER HEIGHTS

Food, Wine, and Brew Fest

Sept. 10

The 14th annual festival features wines, craft brews, live music, and vendors. *Harker Heights Community Park, 1501 E. FM 2410. 254-699-4999; hhfoodandwine.com*

HEARNE

Crossroads Sand Sculpting Competition

Sept. 16-18

The beach comes to Hearne as master sand sculptors compete for best masterpiece. There are craft and food vendors and live music while you watch the sculptors at work. All ages can get their hands in the sand and learn how it all happens. *Hearne Depot Grounds, 39 W. Ninth St. 979-595-8150; hearnechambertx.com*

LEWISVILLE

Western Days

Sept. 23-24

Held each year in Old Town Lewisville, the festival celebrates Western culture with live music on multiple stages, kids activities, and the World Tamale Eating Championship. There is free parking and complimentary remote shuttle parking. *Wayne Ferguson Plaza, Old Town, 150 W. Church St. 972-219-3401; lewisvillewesterndays.com*

MESQUITE

Heritage Fall Rodeo

Sept. 17

The second annual Heritage Fall Rodeo showcases talented African American cowboys participating in rodeo events like open bull riding, steer wrestling, calf roping, and barrel racing. *Mesquite Arena, 1818 Rodeo Drive. 972-285-8777; heritageroдео.com*

NEW BERLIN

Sausage Festival

Sept. 4

At the 71st annual Sausage Festival, attendees can eat homemade sausage, play bingo, enter a raffle, shop at a country store, play games, and dance to music by Clint Taft and the Buckwild Band. *New Berlin Community Center, 8815 Farm to Market Road 775. 210-343-9570; facebook.com/nbtexasausagefest*

NOCONA

Wheels and Grills Barbecue Cookoff

Sept. 16-17

Camp, cook, and enjoy some of the best company in Texas at this two-day cookoff. Categories include steak, chicken, brisket, ribs, salsa, stuffed jalapeños, and bloody marys. There is also a horseshoe tournament, corn hole, and a classic car show. *Horton Classic Car Museum, 115 W. Walnut St. 940-825-1022; wheelsandgrillscookoff.com*

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PLANO

North Texas Pride Festival

Sept. 17
The 11th annual festival of family-oriented events features vendor booths, food and beverages, giveaways, activities for all ages, bands, DJs, dancing, and entertainment. *Saigling House, 902 E. 16th St. northtexaspride.com*

PLANO

Balloon Festival

Sept. 22-25
The official Hot Air Balloon Capital of Texas hosts this annual celebration that features more than 30 hot air balloons, a RE/MAX parachute team exhibition, live entertainment, a fireworks show, food concessions, arts and crafts vendors, and a kids' fun zone. *Oak Point Park and Nature Preserve, 5901 Los Rios Blvd. 972-867-7566; planoballoonfest.org*

SEGUIN

Celebrating the Americas

Sept. 11
From folklórico dancers to Gershwin's *Cuban Overture*, this show features sound and movement from the cultures of North, Central, and South America. There is also a performance of Artie Shaw's jazzy clarinet concerto. *Jackson Auditorium at Texas Lutheran University, 1000 W. Court St. 830-463-5353; mtmsymphony.org*

SERBIN

Texas Wendish Festival

Sept. 25
Enjoy authentic Wendish food and drink and children's activities like stick horse races and a coloring contest. Demonstrations include sausage stuffing, sauerkraut making, soap making, noodle making, quilting, weaving, tatting, blacksmithing, and stone grinding

cornmeal on a 1918 grist mill. *St. Paul Lutheran Church Picnic Grounds, FM 2239 and CR 212. 979-366-2441; texaswendish.org/category/events*

SHERMAN

Hispanic Heritage Festival

Sept. 10
Celebrate the Texoma region's Hispanic heritage at this festival that features live music and entertainment, food vendors selling authentic cuisine from different countries, and activities that celebrate Hispanic culture. *Sherman Municipal Grounds, 405 N. Rusk St. 903-892-7230; shermantx.org*

SHERMAN

Sherman Arts Fest

Sept. 17
The 41st annual festival features musical acts; chalk art; a Kids' Alley; food and beverage vendors; arts and crafts vendors; a wood-carving exhibit; youth and adult art shows; art history displays; and the Sherman Education Foundation 5K. *Sherman Municipal Grounds, 405 N. Rusk St. 903-892-7230; shermantx.org*

SULPHUR SPRINGS

Lone Star Heritage Quilt Guild Quilt Show

Sept. 23-24
More than 100 quilts are on display at the 21st annual show. Lisa Erlandson, an American Quilter's Society appraiser of quilted textiles, is the guest speaker. Vendors are present for shopping and there are door prizes for patrons. *The ROC, 115 Putman St. 903-439-8557; sulphurspringstxquilts.com*

TEMPLE

Night Brite Bike Ride

Sept. 17
Bike through Pepper Creek Trail on a professionally lit route. Glow-in-

the-dark, flashing, and reflective gear is encouraged. A helmet, a front bike light, and a back light reflector are required. *Pepper Creek Trail, 546 N. Kegley Road. 254-298-5690; templeparks.com/specialevents*

WACO

Beast of the Brazos

Sept. 11
This event is an open-water swim on Brazos River in Waco with 1.2- and 2.4-mile route options. All registered swimmers receive a swim cap and T-shirt, as well as a finisher's medal. *Indian Springs Park, 101 S. University Parks Drive. 254-757-5638; runsignup.com/race/events/tx/waco/beatofthebrazos*

WACO

Waco Wild West 100 Bike Ride

Sept. 24
The Waco Wild West 100 has been around since 1985 to encourage and motivate people to cycle. This year's bike tour through Central Texas benefits the Be The Match Registry. *Heritage Square, 300 Austin Ave. 254-405-2466; wacowildwest100.com*

WACO

Cultural Arts Fest

Sept. 30-Oct. 2
Festivities at the free event include art activities, music, and food. *Indian Springs Park, 100 Washington Ave. 254-723-6830; wacoartsfest.org*

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

BEEVILLE

Michael Kennaugh Exhibition

Sept. 17-Dec. 17
Abstract artist Michael Kennaugh's work is exhibited, including

selected paintings and sculptures. *Beeville Art Museum, 401 E. Fannin St. 361-358-8615; bamtxexas.org*

SAN ANTONIO

Donald Moffett + Nature Cult + the McNay

Through Sept. 11
This exhibit features a presentation of Donald Moffett's paintings, artworks from the McNay's modern and contemporary collection, and material drawn from the artist's personal collection. The show begins in the AT&T Lobby, bringing an immediate experience of the artist's work for the first time in his native San Antonio. *McNay Art Museum, Tobin Exhibition Galleries, 6000 N. New Braunfels Ave. 210-824-5368; mcnayart.org/exhibition/donald-moffett-nature-cult-the-mcnay*

SAN ANTONIO

Georgia O'Keeffe and American Modernism

Through Dec. 11
This exhibition features works by Georgia O'Keeffe alongside American Modernist artists from throughout the 20th century. Known as the "mother of American Modernism," O'Keeffe figures prominently in this early 20th century artistic movement. *McNay Art Museum, 6000 N. New Braunfels Ave. 210-824-5368; mcnayart.org*

SAN ANTONIO

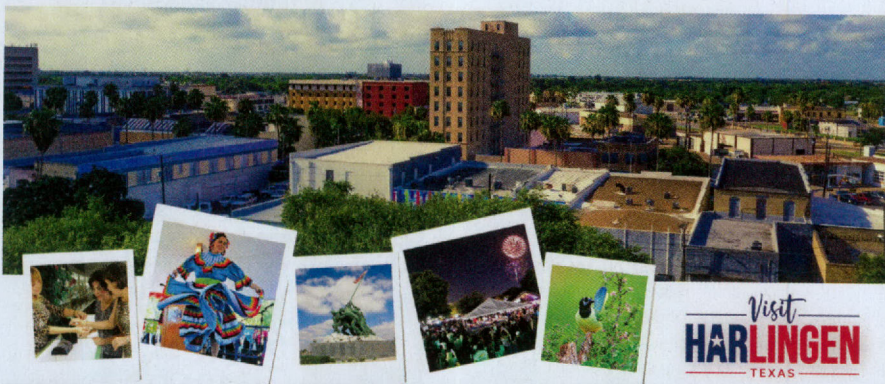
The Sons of Charlie Russell: The Cowboy Artists of America

Through Sept. 5
Since their founding in 1965, the Cowboy Artists of America have maintained an artistic style of representational realism that continues to define the canon of traditional Western American art. The exhibit shares the story of the evolution of contemporary Western art. *The Briscoe Western Art Museum, 210 W. Market St. 210-299-4499; briscoemuseum.org/sons*

SAN ANTONIO

Tangible/Nothing

Sept. 8-April 30, 2023
The exhibition features around 40 works by artists with Texas roots—Rick Lowe, Dario Robledo, Alejandro Diaz, Adam Schreiber, Katie Pell, and Chuck Ramirez—and other national and international artists. Many works represent apparent voids, vestiges of what's missing, or subjects not pictured. Other works represent or incorporate mundane, everyday objects that stand in for big ideas. Admission is free. *Ruby City, 150 Camp St. 210-227-8400; rubycity.org*



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continued from Page 21

geese, cranes and doves, written about beautifully by John Graves—were once as seasonally common as the arrival and departure of that light. To our eye, the buttery light that falls upon the theater is no different than how it fell last year or the year before. It is the precise color and angle of light that residents would have witnessed falling upon that same space where the theater and the town were yet to be.

So, the light is still the same, and I have come, like the geese, to see it and to bathe in it, if only for a little while. Did I take it for granted when I lived in its midst—in its center? Possibly.

There's very little public land within the triangle of light—the state and national parks lie farther south—so the light is the real wilderness. In moving north, I have traded light for land.

It might seem odd and quaint to list the Alpine Public Library as one of the must-see attractions within the triangle of light. I went there just to send a scan. A sweet library is another thing, in the unpeopled Yaak Valley, that I miss about civilization.

The day is bathed in sunlight, and the tizz in my blood is effervescent. I feel like I am the only one who can see this, feel this; that everyone else is simply walking around taking it for granted. How easy it would be for this splash of light, hurled into space long ago like a net cast into the sea, to miss the spinning speck of our blue planet.

The parking lot's empty. I walk toward the library as if toward a portal that leads back to childhood, and, somehow, also into the future. In a land where the Marfa Lights strobe and glimmer, why not?

The broad sidewalk outside the library is decorated with pastel chalk, a phys-ed hopscotch course encouraging patrons on their way in or out to engage in a bit of play. Childhood indeed.

There's almost no one in the library, which is immaculate. As libraries used to be back in the olden days, it's filled with

books, all neatly arranged. As the Bible verse says, "In my Father's house are many mansions." There are a few computers but mostly empty desks. A mother with her young daughter, reading to her.

There's a used bookstore adjacent to the lobby. It's not yet open, but what a wonderful acknowledgement of the relationship that keeps a book-and-library culture alive. Sometimes you check one out; other times you want to buy one, to own and mark and dog-ear and loan, or just to give as a gift. The best books make the best gifts.

The day is bathed in sunlight, and the tizz in my blood is effervescent. I feel like I am the only one who can see this, feel this; that everyone else is simply walking around taking it for granted.

It won't surprise a visitor to learn the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation chose the Alpine Public Library as one of the top three small libraries in America in 2013. It has a children's section in the center of the building and there's an exercise program, citizenship classes, and a jail library program. There are no fines for overdue books that are returned.

It's another dimension—a place where our relationship with time is redefined. You walk in and walk out feeling changed, no matter what age.

It's time to return to the dreamland that is my northern life, writing fiction in the mornings and then wrestling with my government in the afternoons. North and west of Fort Davis, I drive through the cold austerity of the Davis Mountains, where bighorn crossing signs similar to the ones I see in Montana remind me that our country has a spine that travels south to north. The creeks and rivers that begin their journey up high and flow down to the green living things below are not *like*

the veins and arteries of a living thing; they are the thing itself.

I stop and sleep in the desert north and west of El Paso, beneath cold stars, just a bit south of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. It's Jan. 28, and since the pandemic began, I've been craving the sight of tens of thousands of sandhill cranes, geese, and ducks flying back to roost in reddening sun. These same birds herald the spring in Montana with exuberant, grating calls as they stalk and wade the meadows and marshes, their cries echoing off the mountains

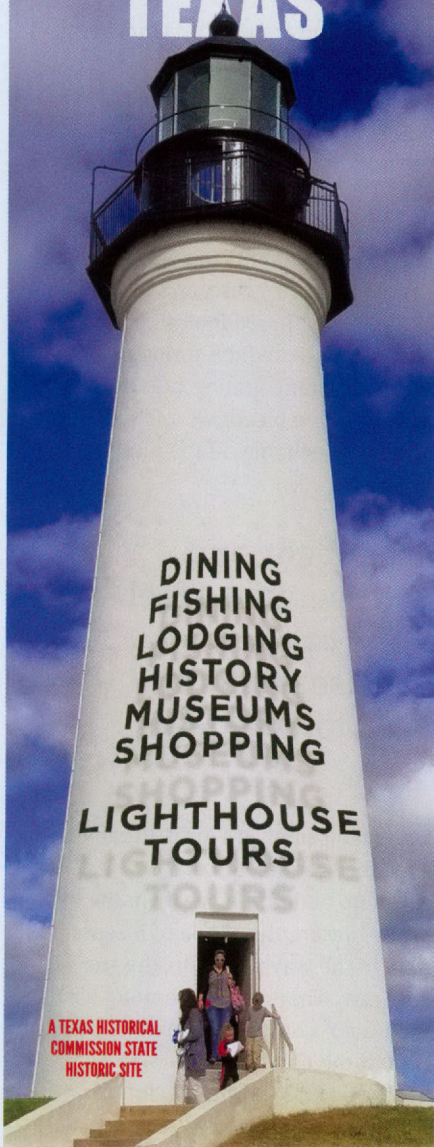
covered in snow. It's April, usually, by the time they get to Montana.

I'm up and driving early in the big empty desert, the shape of it remarkable in the way it accepts the sun's first rays. There are few among us who would not consider it the most beautiful part of the day.

No one knows what the future will bring. Half the country is freezing during my January trip, and the other half is baking. The West—which to my thinking begins on the Balcones Escarpment, in the arid oak-juniper grasslands—is facing its worst drought in 1,200 years. It's warmer in Montana than it is in Texas, but at least I have found the sunlight. Is this craving related to age? "You do not have to be good," writes Mary Oliver in her poem "Wild Geese." "You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves."

I get back in my little silver car and begin the rest of the long drive back north toward home. Toward a refuge that is not yet a refuge. Out of the light and back into the cool dark. **L**

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THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5



Waxahachie

Heart and soul

BY CHET GARNER

Keep your “wax” for your candles and surfboards; the name of this town 30 miles south of Dallas is pronounced “walks-a-hatch-ee.” Dubbed “Hachie” by locals, this 40,000-person town—nicknamed the Gingerbread City for its delicately designed gingerbread-style architecture—shows its sweetness at every restaurant and small business in town.

Downtown Waxahachie

Exit Interstate 35 East for the historic square anchored by the ornate Ellis County Courthouse. Detailed carvings of faces decorate the building's facade: Local legend states the faces were based on a local stonemason's fit of unrequited love. The Ellis County Museum houses artifacts and exhibits on how cotton and the railroad built the town. The square's many small businesses add to the local character: Stock up for a barbecue at Meat Church BBQ Supply and play retro games at The Arcade.

Pop's Burger Stand

Photos and knickknacks on the walls of this joint date back to the golden age of burger drive-ins. It's hard to beat the stand's classic cheeseburger, but I recommend the Low and Slow burger, which is served with bacon, grilled onions, cheddar cheese, and house-made barbecue sauce. Wash it down with some of Pop's World-Famous Root Beer on tap.

Munster Mansion

Waxahachie hosts the world's only full-size replica of the home where The Munsters lived at 1313 Mockingbird Lane in the popular 1960s sitcom. Homeowner and superfan Sandra McKee dutifully watched all 70 episodes to recreate the house in detailed fashion. She didn't overlook anything, from Grandpa's dungeon to Spot the dragon living under the stairs. Book a private tour and let your imagination wander.

878 Airsoft

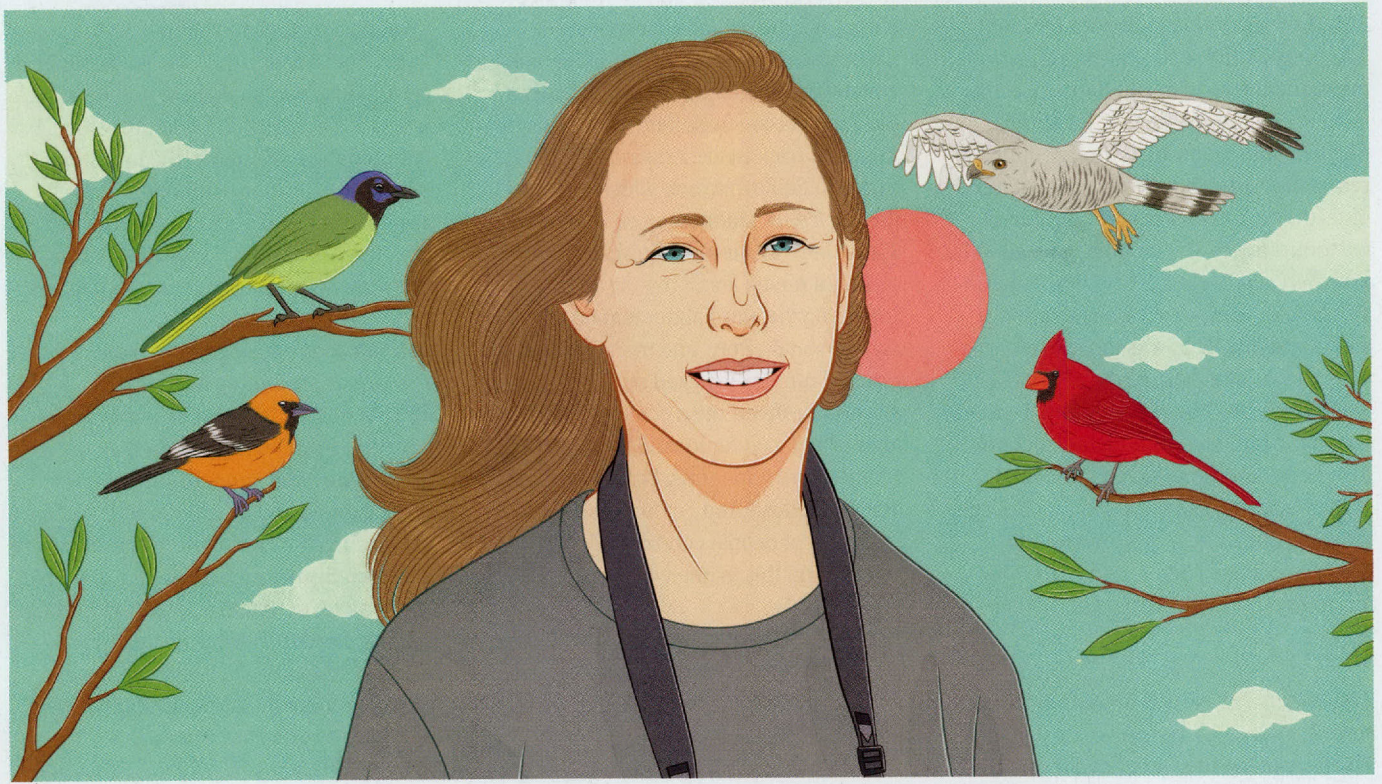
This military simulation game is set on more than 170 acres of varied terrain and features obstacles like trenches and bunkers along the land's hills and ravines. The owners use off-road vehicles and helicopters for combat recreations, and they'll rent everything you need to give it a shot. Participate in a team game or an intensive 24-hour “ops” experience.

Southern Roots Brewing Co.

Finish the day with a local craft beer inside this historic train depot. The brewery's revolving menu of specialty beers, such as their margarita sour or Jackaroo dry-hopped pilsner, ensure the day stays interesting. Try an El Diablo handcrafted pizza, with cream cheese, bacon, and jalapeño slices.

So whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path,
I hope to see you on the road.

Chet Garner is the host of The Daytripper® travel show on PBS.
To view the Waxahachie episode, visit thedaytripper.com.
Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chettripper.



Going Big for Birds

Tiffany Kersten scoured the country on a record-setting birdwatching quest

By S. Kirk Walsh

A warm breeze rustled the fronds of sabal palm trees as Tiffany Kersten pulled into the parking lot of Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco. A spirited symphony of birdsong filled the tropical summer air as the rising sun brightened a vibrant yellow Couch's kingbird perched on a utility wire. From the hatchback of her Chevy Spark, Kersten retrieved a telescope, daypack, and binoculars. Setting off on the park's trail, I joined Kersten for an excursion among the park's wetlands and prairies. In just two hours, we spotted 36 species, including South Texas natives like the Altamira oriole and the plain chachalaca.

"I came to the [Rio Grande] Valley because of the birds," notes Kersten, who grew up in Wisconsin. After studying wildlife ecology in college, Kersten worked a series of wildlife survey and park jobs before landing a position at the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in 2012. She later worked at the Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center in McAllen

"I'm hoping to set an example for women—to show women there is space for us if we want it in the competitive birding arena and as woman bird guides."

and the McAllen Nature Center before starting a birding tour company—Nature Ninja Birding Tours.

A tour client first suggested Kersten try for a "Big Year"—an informal competition among birders to spot as many bird species as possible within one year in the lower 48 states. At first, Kersten found the idea a little ridiculous. She has a dog, and a mortgage to pay. "It was almost a month later, when I flushed a scaled quail in the Franklin Mountains, I thought, 'Maybe I could try it,'" Kersten recalls. "I was very stressed about everything else. It was a focus for me while I waited for the rest of my life to sort itself out."

One sighting led to another, and over the course of 2021, Kersten set a Big Year record by spotting 726 birds. Crisscrossing the country, she saw everything from a Cuban pewee in Florida to a blue-footed booby off the California coast. She's used her moment in the spotlight to encourage others—especially women—to appreciate birds and to consider the limitless possibilities in the world of birding.

TH: *How did you first get into birding?*

TK: I was 12 and took a birding class with my mom at Mosquito Hill Nature Center in New London, Wisconsin. I was the only kid among mostly retired people. I remember struggling to see some of the birds through my binoculars. But then we took a trip to see sandhill cranes, and there were about 2,000 of them in a cornfield. They were calling, courting, and displaying. That was the moment where I was like, "OK, birds are cool." I was a backyard birder from there. I would watch the bird feeders and the juncos in the wintertime at my parents' feeder. I started birding again at Northland College, where I studied field ornithology and wildlife ecology. Then, I started to work on surveys for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

TH: *Why is Texas such a great birding state?*

TK: Here in the Rio Grande Valley we are at the intersection of four ecosystem types: the desert influence from the West, the coastal influence of the East, the temperate from the North, and the tropical from the South. We're in a subtropical habitat called the Tamaulipan thornscrub forest, and it's a globally imperiled habitat that is only found in the Rio Grande Valley and very northern Mexico. A lot of the birds we saw today belong in Mexico but the habitat type comes up here into the Rio Grande Valley.

TH: *Do you have a favorite Texas bird?*

TK: The gray hawk. It is a raptor, so it's kinda badass for that reason, but it is also subtly beautiful. The hawks have these very fine gray and white streaks on them. It's both powerful and beautiful.

TH: *What are your favorite Texas birding spots?*

TK: Here—Estero Llano Grande State Park in Weslaco. There is such a diversity in habitat, which leads to such a diversity in the bird species. In about 200 acres, you can see 100 species. The Hill Country is also great. South Llano River State Park is a gorgeous park with great bird life.

It's in Junction, which is northwest of San Antonio. That was my launch point whenever I would drive west during my Big Year. I drove from here to the Florida Keys and back twice. Arizona four times. Twice to California, one which included driving from California up to Washington State. Halfway through the year, I posted on social media about my Big Year and spreading the word about female birders and personal safety, and many strangers reached out. They picked me up from the airport or offered me a place to stay that night. They paid for lunch for me. It was a joint effort. A lot of Big Year birders are like, "I did this!" And I'm like, "No, literally hundreds of people contributed to my ability to do this in one way or another."

TH: *You've spoken publicly about being sexually assaulted in 2018. And during your Big Year you raised funds to distribute personal safety alarms to women you meet on the trails. What was it like to embark on these trips alone?*

TK: I committed to doing my Big Year, but I wondered if I was just putting myself in a situation for this to happen again. During one of my first big trips, I was in a remote spot along the Sandia Crest [a mountain flanking the east side of Albuquerque, New Mexico]. These two men wandered down this path and out of view, and then they came back to the trailhead and loitered. I was getting super dizzy, which is how my body responds to anxiety. I almost passed out. They did eventually leave. I had a couple of similar instances like this. But as the year went on, I realized how many good people are out there. Bad things do happen, and you need to be vigilant. I thought my Big Year would harden me, whereas it softened me instead.

TH: *Could you describe the moment when you broke the Big Year record?*

TK: I was in Oklahoma looking at Smith's longspurs, halfway between Tulsa and Stillwater. This was Dec. 18. I got a text message at 9 a.m. that the bat falcon had been re-found at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge [in Alamo]. And I was like,

"We need to go. I don't know where I need to go, but I need to go." I booked a flight out of Tulsa two hours later and flew back. It was a 20-minute drive to the refuge. I sprinted the half-mile to the tower and stuck my eyeball in someone's scope. I saw the bird, and I broke the record by spotting 725 species. I was still wearing my winter clothes, and it was 85 degrees.

TH: *What do you hope your accomplishment does for female birders?*

TK: I'm hoping to set an example for women—to show women there is space for us if we want it in the competitive birding arena and as woman bird guides. I've been in lots of situations myself where I've been dismissed because I'm a woman. There's a lot of that; it's not just in birding. I've just started offering all-inclusive women's retreats. I'm excited to have a more emotionally safe space for women to learn and grow as birders.

TH: *What can birders do to help with conservation?*

TK: Purchasing duck stamps is always good. [Proceeds from the federal stamps, which serve as hunting licenses for waterfowl, fund wetlands conservation.] These dollars go straight toward conserving land in the National Wildlife Refuge system. Another way to help is to create your own backyard habitat. In Texas, having a water source is even more important than having a seed source. Also, plant native species. Native plants and water are the best ways to create habitat for birds. 🌿

Tiffany Kersten's Nature Ninja Birding Tours offers birdwatching excursions in the Rio Grande Valley and an upcoming expedition to Panama. Kersten also leads a series of women-only tours. tiffanykersten.blogspot.com

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BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



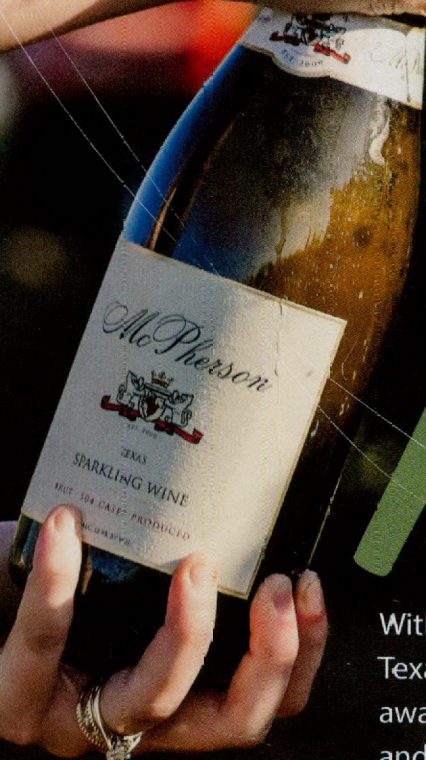
Pass of the North

EL PASO, 1938

El Paso native Tom Lea, born in 1907, wore many hats over his 93 years, among them muralist, illustrator, historian, novelist, and World War II artist correspondent. In this 1938 photo, Lea is shown painting *Pass of the North*, his 11-by-54-foot mural in El Paso's Federal Courthouse, where it is still on display. Lea spent one year and used 50 pounds of oil paint to complete the epic depiction of El Paso's borderland history. Employing a movable scaffold, Lea glued strips of linen directly to the courthouse wall, then painted on the linen using painstaking one-eighth-inch strokes. "I tried to make [the mural] as authentic as I possibly could and had a great, great pleasure in doing that," Lea told an interviewer in 1993 for an oral history archived at the University of Texas at El Paso. It was an eventful time in Lea's life: While working on *Pass of the North*, he met Sarah Dighton, who was visiting from Illinois. He completed the mural on July 6, 1938, and married Dighton later that month. The couple lived the rest of their lives in El Paso, which is now home to the Tom Lea Institute, a nonprofit that preserves and promotes Lea's work. **L**

Know of any fascinating vintage Texas photographs? Send copies or ideas to tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com.

Photo: Courtesy Tom Lea Institute



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