

*The Art Expert's Guide for Touring Texas.*

May 1, 2013. (print edition) *Art Magazine*

Texas is home to many unique venues for artistic expression. The larger cities of Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, Austin and San Antonio have established institutions that are major contributors to the national and international dialogue. Smaller places, like Marfa, have also become respected centers for the visual arts, while other locations are gaining attention.

With some of the fastest growing cities in the nation for population and economic development, Texas fosters an art scene with tremendous expansion and artistic diversity. In just a decade, studio and artist-run spaces have increased greatly in number, and in an effort to align themselves with the evolution of the cities, several larger more established institutions are working towards reinventing themselves by expanding their outreach, increasing membership numbers, and widening their community engagement.

Unfortunately, residents can sometimes take for granted the art organizations of their hometown. This is usually not the result of a lack of interest, but rather of time. Daily routines and busy schedules can often prevent individuals from discovering and experiencing all that his or her local art scene has to offer. Furthermore, close proximity to art venues sometimes contributes to missing a time sensitive exhibit due to procrastination and the illusion of time. There is an advantage to living like a tourist, who realizes he or she might have just one chance to see a certain art installation. With the abundance of local art and frequent rotations of traveling exhibitions, it is essential that we learn to prioritize our art going experience with the spirit of a traveler.

Art Magazine interviewed four art experts, two curators and two museum directors, from neighboring Texas cities and invited them to share their favorite art venues ranging from the large established institutions to the smaller emerging galleries in San Antonio and beyond. Hopefully, the enthusiasm found within their responses, along with the freshness of their insights, will serve as a reminder to never stop exploring the art in our own backyard.

**Claudia Zapata is the Curator of Exhibitions and Programs at the Mexic-Arte Museum in Austin.**

Claudia Zapata received her B.A. and M.A. from the University of Texas in Art History, specializing in Pre -Columbian and U.S. Latino/Chicano art. She has curated over a dozen exhibitions as Curator of the Mexic-Arte Museum in addition to other Texas arts institutions including the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, Mexican American Cultural Center, Benson Latin American Library, and the Orun Cultural Center. Her recent projects include the co-founding of ChingoZine, a Latino art zine and the Puro

Chingon Collection, a Latino art collective.

AC: What are some of your favorite smaller art venues and art galleries in Austin that may not be as well known?

CZ: Austin galleries and spaces that I frequent are the Benson Rare Books Room and Hallway Galleries, the Community Gallery at the Mexican American Cultural Center, the Austin History Center, La Peña, Tiny Park, Farewell Books, and apartment galleries: SOFA and Red Space. In Austin, there are quite a few activations of space and alternative programming that would constitute an art form on display. The idea of a “venue” and even, how visual culture producers are identifying themselves and their creations are relative. Therefore, creations of either objects or creative audience interactions may be integrated into larger event-based programming.

AC: How do you compare and contrast the artistic infrastructures in the city of Austin and San Antonio?

CZ: San Antonio has a tremendous Latino arts scene that, in my opinion, has never received proper recognition with regards to its role in the larger contemporary arts scene. There is also a sense of mentorship and intergenerational fostering of talent that result in a sustained support of the artistic infrastructures of San Antonio. Austin is in a transitional period of growth resulting in higher levels of tourism and new residents. Largely a space for experimentation and nontraditional spaces, Austin is home to a new population that is not just matriculating and exiting but that is laying a new creative cultural foundation.

AC: What are your favorite places to explore arts and culture in San Antonio?

I have worked with many artists, activists, and programmers from San Antonio, and seeing their creative work wherever that may be is always the highlight of a S.A. visit. I enjoy visiting the San Antonio Museum of Art and the McNay for the permanent collection and temporary exhibitions; Blue Star Arts Complex for the UTSA satellite space and Blue Star Contemporary Art Museum; R gallery, Gravelmouth, Gallista, LadyBase, and Lullwood Group at Lone Star. The arts and culture of San Antonio that I gravitate towards is really the informal conversations and meetings. Being a part or witness to the organic process of San Antonio contemporary artists is what makes the city a breeding ground for collaboration and one of my favorite places for viewing art.

AC: Could you elaborate on the partnership of the Mexic-Arte Museum with the city of Austin in the development of the 5th Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor?

CZ: According to Sylvia Orozco, Executive Director of Mexic-Arte Museum, the Mexic-Arte Museum is working on getting a Master Plan funded by the City of Austin for all of 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The 5<sup>th</sup> Street Mexican American Cultural Heritage Corridor will interconnect and enhance the downtown's network of public parks and streets; celebrate the distinct history, culture and identity of the place; introduce public art works; and reinforce an authentic sense of place. Mexic-Arte Museum and other public and private entities will lead studies of the area that clearly document that the first Mexican and Mexican American community settled in what today is known as "Downtown Austin" along the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor and adjacent spaces. The Austin City Council supports the 5th Street Mexican American Heritage Corridor and thanks Mexic-Arte Museum, the Fiesta de Independencia Foundation, the Austin-Salttillo Sister Cities Association and other public and private entities for their efforts to plan and realize this project which will recognize past contributions of the Mexican American community, enhance the present and build a better future for Austin.

**Peter Doroshenko is the Executive Director of the Dallas Contemporary.**

Prior to working at the Dallas Contemporary, Peter Doroshenko's curatorial experience spanned institutions such as the Institute of Visual Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, S.M.A.K. in Ghent, Belgium and the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, United Kingdom.

AC: With your expert-eye and your international perspective our readers would love your professional insight on the visual arts in Dallas and San Antonio.

PD: I have been very fortunate to work at various international institutions with a wide-range of great artists over the years. When I first arrived to Dallas and later visited San Antonio, I was not ready for the scale and quality of the art scenes. Texas has so many dynamic institutions and contemporary artists that at first it is a bit overwhelming. Because of these vibrant art scenes, there is an active dialogue about contemporary art and this is what makes this part of the country unique.

AC: Please share what your favorite art spots are that may be off the radar to a visitor not well versed in the Dallas art scene?

PD: A great place to start is the Power Station near Fair Park; they bring in national and international emerging artists that take over the small, old, light and gas building. Another unique place near the Power Station is the Oliver Francis Gallery on Peek Street, which highlights young, informed contemporary artists. And another favorite space in Dallas is the Goss Michael Foundation on Turtle Creek; this is the best place to see contemporary British art outside of the United Kingdom.

AC: What have you found to be unique about the artistic forum in Dallas? What sets Dallas apart from some of the other cities you have worked?

PD: Dallas does not ask for anyone's permission in the art world to move forward with exhibitions, projects or interventions. Everyone is a self-starter and thinks independently with a focus on delivering new and important contemporary culture to the city. Dallas is more international with its programming and visitorship than ever before. The metropolitan area has so many modern and contemporary museums, yet each one has a focus and remit that does not overlap with others, it's very unique that way.

AC: What are your favorite art spots in San Antonio?

PD: The Linda Pace Foundation, ArtPace and Sala Diaz are must stops. Every time I visit those spaces, I see unbelievable art. San Antonio is very fortunate to have such great institutions.

AC: Could you tell our readers more about your Citywide Street Mural Project with Shepard Fairey?

PD: Dallas Contemporary has made a commitment to work with various communities and neighborhoods throughout Dallas by engaging local, national and international artists to create unique art works within public spaces. We invited Shepard Fairey in 2012 to launch a series of citywide public projects, which engaged larger audiences and empowered neighborhoods. We plan on working with local businesses and government agencies to continue the public interventions with artists such as JR, Retna, Faile and Invader in 2014. It's about adding visual art to the urban landscape and bringing contemporary visual diversity to Dallas.

### **Toby Kamps is the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at The Menil Collection in Houston.**

Toby Kamps presents expertise in a broad spectrum from curatorial experiences that range from international and national institutions, but he is also knowledgeable of Houston's artistic fabric from his three-and-a-half years at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston prior to working at The Menil Collection.

AC: What are your favorite art spots that might be off the radar to a visitor not as knowledgeable of the Houston artistic landscape?

TK: I always take visitors to Project Row Houses, an exhibition space and "social sculpture" located in historic shotgun shacks in the Third Ward. There's always something wonderful on view in the row houses, and it's wonderful to see art and real life interact so powerfully and beautifully. On the way there from the Menil, I stop by the Station Museum, a privately funded museum that shows terrific art from all over the

world—and Houston—that usually has a great subversive, political side. Also on the same street at the Station Museum, West Alabama Street, is “This Old House,” a big wooden Victorian house that Gonzo 247 and other of the city’s best graffiti artists regularly cover in amazing colors and words. Of course, no visit to Houston is complete without stops at our great folk and visionary art stops: the Flower Man and his house and “yard art” installation on Francis (he’s a city legend and always a glorious ray of creativity); the beer can house, a typical Texas bungalow engulfed in aluminum cans; and the Orange Show, an amazing shrine to the power of citrus fruit built by a USPS letter carrier.

AC: What have you found to be unique about the arts scene in Houston? What sets Houston apart from some of the other cities you have worked?

TK: I’m always impressed by how much love and support there is for art in Houston. People here really make sure that art is a part of their city and their lives. And it’s an extremely collaborative city. Everyone knows everyone else, and there aren’t a lot of rivalries that stand in the way of getting things done. Somebody said it: the distance between idea and inception is extremely short in Houston. I love the rich ecology of museums, alternative spaces, and artist-run “for-profit not-for-profits,” spaces that artists and others open out of love and a feeling of urgency more than a sound business model. Of course, our gallery scene is terrific and it is always offering a terrific range of local heroes and international superstars.

AC: What are your favorite visual arts venues in San Antonio?

TK: After ArtPace, I love Sala Diaz, a scrappy, spirited house gallery in a communal neighborhood of artists, is amazing. And across the street is Unit B, a tiny gallery in a tiny guest house run by Kimberly Aubuchon is phenomenal. Both organize terrific exhibitions and host wonderful openings with artists and great San Antonio bands like Wolverton and Buttercup. For a Houstonian, it’s a treat to get out of the humidity and head to San Antonio.

AC: What special events and exhibits at The Menil would you recommend for a visitor to Houston this summer?

TK: Our Forrest Bess exhibition, up through August 18 is amazing. A true Texas original, a visionary, somewhat solitary painter who tapped into universal archetypes in visionary ways, Bess is finally getting his due. Also, *Byzantine Things in the World* presents a new and astonishingly beautiful way of looking at art from the Byzantine region by pairing it with modern and non-Western art. Organized by scholar Glenn Peers, it’s a terrific continuation of the long tradition of nontraditional and interdisciplinary thinking at the Menil. As usual, we offer a wide range of readings, concerts, and film throughout the year. I’m particularly excited about James Salter’s reading on May 6, a talk on a

permanent collection show of late Surrealism on June 6, and a talk by Mexico City-based superstar curator Cuauhtemoc Medina on June 10.

**Louis Grachos is the Director of AMOA-Arthouse in Austin.**

Louis Grachos has an impressive background with experience at prestigious institutions including internships at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and employment at SITE Santa Fe, Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego, Center for the Fine Arts in Miami, Queens Museum of Art, The Americas Society in New York, and his most recent ten-year term as Director of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York.

AC: What are your favorite smaller art venues and galleries in Austin?

LG: What has been very exciting to discover since I moved here, and I have only been here since mid January, is that it is thrilling to see that there are so many young and awesome artist driven spaces that exist here that are growing to become a vital part of the scene. I am thinking of organizations like Co-Lab Projects and Mass Gallery, which just really began programming on the East Side in this beautiful new converted warehouse space. And Big Medium and Fusebox of course, they have already demonstrated that they are capable of organizing major programs. The Fusebox Festival is performance based and very exciting. Other initiatives that are really burgeoning and really supportive in terms of Texas art are the Texas Biennial, which is organizing itself to happen again in the fall. I really feel that there is this great energy here that is coming from the artist community and these smaller nimble and very innovative organizations are contributing in a very big way to the contemporary art scene in Austin. And of course, I have to mention the one that has grown to hold a national reputation, Okay Mountain, a group of artists that continue to grow and develop their profile in the community through their programs, and it is absolutely fundamental to the artistic growth in our community. Some smaller galleries have also popped up. Women and Their Work is also an important part of the fabric of this community and continue to do outstanding work. So it goes on and on, it is really a healthy scene and I am very thrilled to be part of it.

AC: What have you found in Austin's art scene that is unique from some of the other cities you have worked?

LG: I think we have some unique organizations with some unique histories and I think I can even start with our own organization, which is the merger of Arthouse and the Austin Museum of Art, which is Laguna Gloria. What I would say is unique about our merger, and we are in the process of thinking about our name and rebranding our identity for the future right now, but what is interesting, is for example, Laguna Gloria has been an incredibly interesting site for many years, it is so unique to Texas, its location, its history, its natural beauty, and the great physical beauty of Laguna Gloria. Over our history it has

sporadically transformed with artist lead projects, and I think what you are going to see in the future is our aspirations to really activate Laguna Gloria. That's a unique thing in our community and that was one of the things that really excited me about Austin. I love the richness of the opportunity here. The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin is an encyclopedic museum. The Harry Ransom Center and the great archives kept there are very interesting and dynamic; it is an incredible resource here. They also have a phenomenal program that many visiting artists are interested in. And the other thing is that we have a dynamic school of architecture here at UT, and that is something I am actively pursuing collaborations with as well. These are the things I am discovering early on in my time here that I'm hoping will be great opportunities for collaborations.

AC: What are your favorite art institutions in San Antonio? If you haven't had a chance to visit, what is on your radar to see?

LG: I first traveled to San Antonio to attend an opening at ArtPace many years ago and I started to learn about San Antonio through that context. I started to understand that it also was a place with some real riches that were beautiful surprises. One of my favorite museums in Texas, which is the McNay, was really a great discovery for me. I have known the Chief Curator, Rene Barilleaux, for many years and I have an enormous respect for his work. So I really follow the McNay, ArtPace and the Pace Foundation, the San Antonio Museum of Art, and Blue Star, who has been very important in contributing especially in the areas of emerging artists. I know it is really a dynamic place. The gallery scene in San Antonio is very rich as well. One of my favorite spaces is the Lawrence Markey Gallery.

Some AMOA-Arthouse summer highlights include:

Temporary Insanity: Pinaree Sanpitak

April 20–June 30

The Jones Center // Second Floor Gallery

One hundred brightly colored, interactive, soft sculptures that engage the senses and transform the gallery into a meditative installation.

Devon Dikeou: Please

July 13–September 1

The Jones Center // First Floor Gallery and Lobby

An exhibition of sculptures and photographs inspired by and reimagining the last sixteen still lifes made by 19<sup>th</sup>-century modernist painter Édouard Manet.

Mary Reid Kelley with Patrick Kelley: The Syphilis of Sisyphus

July 13–September 1

The Jones Center // Film & Video Gallery

Set in 1852, a poetic, pun-filled monologue of a pregnant, unmarried young woman named Sisyphus as she loudly traverses the garrets, alleys, and hospitals of her city.