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Celebrating 175: Mel Casas, Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1971-1974

Extracted on Aug-08-2022 10:21:33

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THE ARTS IN TEXAS

The earliest artists in Texas were European born and trained colonists found scattered across the territory in the various settlements. Theodore Gentilz had come had come to Castroville; Carl G. von Iwonski came to New Braunfels, as did Hermann Lungkwitz and Richard Petri before moving on to Fredericks-burg; H. A. McArdle first lived in Independence, then in Belton; Elizabeth Ney settled near Hempstead; William H. Huddle came to Paris; Seymour Thomas lived in San Augustine and Frank Reaugh in Terrell.

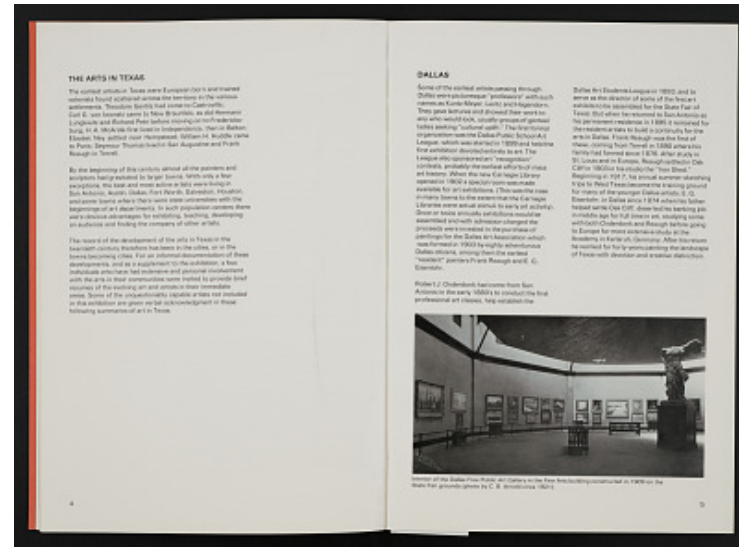
By the beginning of this century almost all the painters and sculptors had gravitated to larger towns. With only a few exceptions, the best and most active artists were living in San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Galveston, Houston, and some towns where there were state universities with the beginnings of art departments. In such population centers there were obvious advantages for exhibiting, teaching, developing an audience and finding the company of other artists.

The record of the development of the arts in Texas in the twentieth century therefore has been in the cities, or in the towns becoming cities. For an informal documentation of these developments, and as a supplement to the exhibition, a few individuals who have had extensive and personal involvement with the arts in their communities were invited to provide brief resumes of the evolving art and artists in their immediate areas. Some of the unquestionably capable artists not included in this exhibition are given verbal acknowledgement in these following summaries of art in Texas.

DALLAS

Some of the earliest artists passing through Dallas were picturesque "professors" with such names as Kuntz-Meyer, Lentz and Hagendorf. They gave lectures and showed their work to any who would look, usually groups of genteel ladies seeking "cultural uplift." The first formal organization was the Dallas Public School Art League, which was started in 1899 and held the first exhibition devoted entirely to art. The League also sponsored art "recognition" contests, probably the earliest efforts of mass art history. When the new Carnegie Library opened in 1902 a special room was made available for art exhibitions. (This was the case in many towns to the extent that the Carnegie Libraries were actual stimuli to early art activity). Once or twice annually exhibitions would be assembled and with admission charged the proceeds were invested in the purchase of paintings for the Dallas Art Association which was formed in 1903 by eighty adventurous Dallas citizens, among them the earliest "resident" painters Frank Reaugh and E.G. Eisenlohr.

Robert J. Onderdonk had come from San Antonio in the early 1880's to conduct the first professional art classes, help establish the Dallas Art Students League in 1893, and to serve as the director of some of the first art exhibits to be assembles for the State Fair of Texas. But when he returned to San Antonio as his permanent residence in 1895 it remained for the resident artists to build a continuity for the arts in Dallas. Frank Reaugh was the first of these, coming from Terrell in 1890 where his family had farmed since 1876. After study in St. Louis and in Europe, Reaugh settled in Oak Cliff in 1903 in his studio the "Iron Shed." Beginning in 1917, his annual summer sketching trips to West Texas



became the training ground for many of the younger Dallas artists. E. G. Eisenlohr, in Dallas since 1874 when his father helped settle Oak Cliff, deserted his banking job in middle age for full time in art, studying some with both Onderdonk and Reaugh before going to Europe for more extensive study at the Academy in Karlsruhe, Germany. After his return he worked for forty years painting the landscape of Texas with devotion and creative distinction.

[[image - photograph]]

Interior of the Dallas Free Public Art Gallery in the Fine Arts building constructed in 1909 on the State Fair grounds (photo by C. B. Arnold circa 1921).

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