



**Smithsonian Institution**

*Archives of American Art*

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

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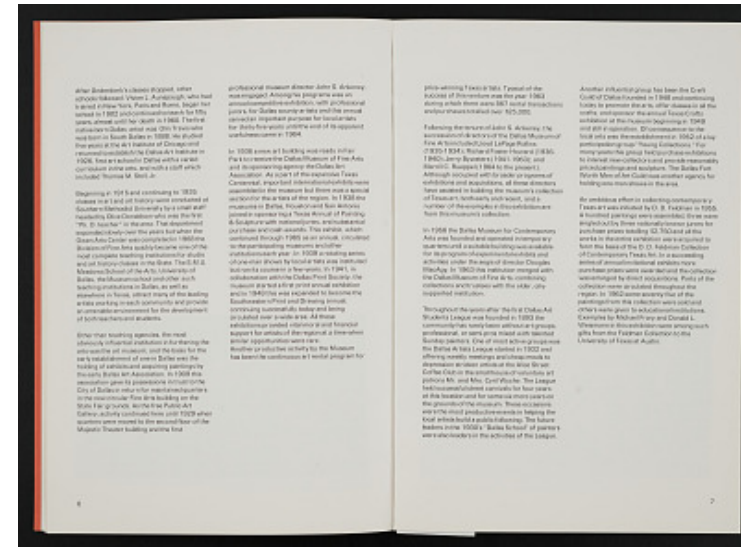
After Onderdonk's classes stopped, other schools followed. Vivian L. Aunsbaugh, who had trained in New York, Paris and Rome, began her school in 1902 and continued to teach for fifty years, almost until her death in 1960. The first native-born Dallas artist was Olin Travis who was born in South Dallas in 1888. He studied five years at the Art Institute of Chicago and returned to establish the Dallas Art Institute in 1926, first art school in Dallas with a varied curriculum in the arts, and with a staff which included Thomas M. Stell, Jr.

Beginning in 1915 and continuing to 1935 classes in art and art history were conducted at Southern Methodist University by a small staff headed by Olive Donaldson who was the first "Ph. D. teacher" in the area. That department expanded slowly over the years but when the Owen Arts Center was completed in 1968 the Division of Fine Arts quickly became one of the most complete teaching institutions for studio and art history classes in the State. The S.M.U. Meadows School of the Arts, University of Dallas, the Museum school and other such teaching institutions in Dallas, as well as elsewhere in Texas, attract many of the leading artists working in each community and provide an amenable environment for the development of both teachers and students.

Other than teaching agencies, the most obviously influential institution in furthering the arts was the art museum; and the basis for the early establishment of one in Dallas was the holding of exhibits and acquiring paintings by the early Dallas Art Association. In 1909 this association gave its possessions in trust to the City of Dallas in return for maintained quarters in the new circular Fine Arts building on the State Fair grounds. As the free Public Art Gallery, activity continued here until 1929 when quarters were moved to the second floor of the Majestic Theater building and the first professional museum director John S. Ankeney, was engaged. Among his programs was an annual competitive exhibition, with professional jurors, for Dallas country artists and this annual served an important purpose for local artists for thirty-five years until the end of its apparent usefulness came in 1964.

In 1936 a new art building was ready in Fair Park to receive the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts and its sponsoring agency the Dallas Art Association. As a part of the expansive Texas Centennial, important international exhibits were assembled in the museum but there was a special section for the artists of the region. In 1938 the museums in Dallas, Houston and San Antonio joined in sponsoring a Texas Annual of Painting & Sculpture with national juries, and substantial purchase and cash awards. This exhibit, which continued through 1965 as an annual, circulated to the participating museums and other institutions each year. In 1939 a rotating series of one-man shows by local artists was instituted but ran its course in few years. In 1941, in collaboration with the Dallas Print Society, the Museum started a first print annual exhibition and in 1948 this was expanded to become the Southwestern Print and Drawing annual, continuing successfully today and being circulated over a wide area. All these exhibitions provided vital moral and financial support for artists of the region at a time when similar opportunities were rare.

Another productive activity by the Museum has been the continuous art rental program for



Prize-winning Texas artists. Typical of the success of this venture was the year 1963 during which there were 867 rental transactions and purchases totalled over \$25,000.

Following the tenure of John S. Ankeney, the succession of directors the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts included Lloyd LePage Rollins(1935-1934); Richard Foster Howard(1936-1940); Jerry Bywaters(1941-1963); and Merrill C. Rueppel(1964 to the present). Although occupied with broader programs of exhibitions and acquisitions, all these directors have assisted in building the museum's collection of Texas art, both early and recent, and a number of the examples in this exhibition are from this museum's collection.

In 1956 the Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts was founded and operated in temporary quarters until a suitable building was available for its program of experimental exhibits and activities under the aegis of director Douglas MacAgy. In 1963 this institution merged with the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, combining collections and trustees with the older, city-supported institution.

Throughout the years after the first Dallas Art Students League was founded in 1893 the community has rarely been without art groups, professional, or semi-pros mixed with talented Sunday painters. One of most active groups was the Dallas Artists League started in 1932 and offering weekly meetings and cheap meals to depression stricken artists at the Alice Street Coffee Club in the small house of voluntary art patrons Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Wyche. The League held successful street carnivals for four years at this location and for some six more years on the grounds of the museum. These occasions were the most productive events in helping the local artists build a public following. The future leaders in the 1930's "Dallas School" of painters were also leaders in the activities of the League.

Another influential group has been the Craft Guild of Dallas founded in 1948 and continuing today to promote the arts, offer classes in all the crafts, and sponsor the annual Texas Crafts exhibition at the museum beginning in 1949 and still in operation. Of consequence to the local arts was the establishment in 1952 of a lay participation group "Young Collections." For many years this group held purchase exhibitions to interest new collectors and provide reasonably priced paintings and sculpture. The Dallas-Fort Worth Men of Art Guild was another agency for holding one-man shows in the area.

An ambitious effort in collecting contemporary Texas art was initiated by D.D. Feldman in 1955. A hundred paintings were assembled, three were singled out by three nationally known jurors for purchase prizes totalling \$2,750 and all the works in the entire exhibition were acquired to form the basis of the D.D. Feldman Collection of Contemporary Texas Art. In a succeeding series of annual invitational exhibits more purchase prizes were awarded and the collection was enlarged by direct acquisitions. Parts of the collection were circulated throughout the region. In 1962 some seventy-five of the paintings from this collection were sold and others were given to educational institutions. Examples by Michael Fray and Donald L. Weismann in this exhibition were among such gifts from the Feldman Collection to the university of Texas at Austin.

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