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

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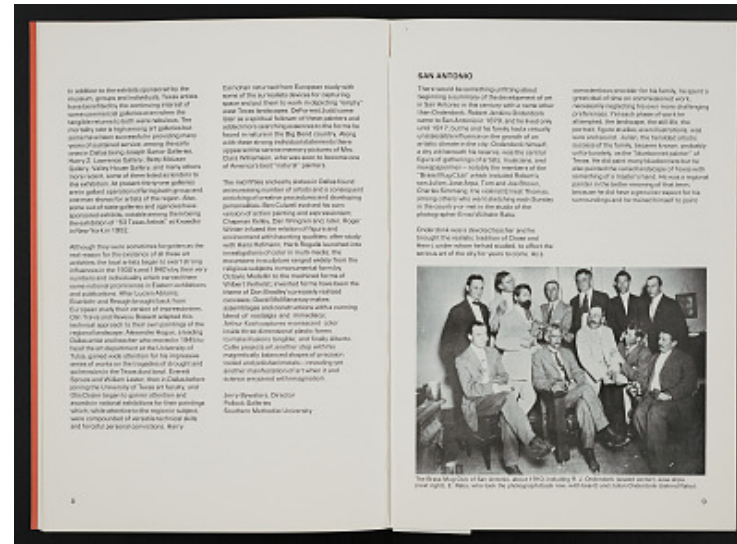
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In addition to the exhibits sponsored by the museum, groups and individuals, Texas artists have benefited by the continuing interest of some commercial galleries even when the tangible returns to both were nebulous. The mortality rate is high among art galleries but some have been successful in providing many years of sustained service, among the early ones in Dallas being Joseph Sartor Galleries, Harry Z. Lawrence Gallery, Betty McLean Gallery, Valley House Gallery, and many others more recent, some of them listed as lenders to this exhibition. At present thirty-one galleries are in gallant operation offering both group and one-man shows for artists of the region. Also, some out-of-state galleries and agencies have sponsored exhibits, notable among them being the exhibition of "53 Texas Artists" at Knoedler in New York in 1952.

Although they were sometimes forgotten as the real reason for the existence of all these art activities, the local artists began to exert strong influences in the 1930's and 1940's by their very numbers and individuality which earned them some national prominence in Eastern exhibition and publication. After Lucien Abrams, Eisenlohr and Reaugh brought back from European study their version of impressionism, Olin Travis and Reveau Bassett adapted this technical approach to their own paintings of the regional landscape. Alexandre Hogue, a leading Dallas artist and teacher who moved in 1945 to head the art department at the University of Tulsa, gained wide attention for his impressive series of works on the tragedies of drought and soil erosion in the Texas dust bowl. Everett Spruce and William Lester, then in Dallas before joining the University of Texas art faculty, and Otis Dozier began to garner attention and awards in national exhibitions for their paintings which, while attentive to the region in subject, were compounded of versatile technical skills and forceful personal convictions. Harry Carnohan returned from European study with some of the surrealists devices for capturing space and put them to work in depicting "empty" west Texas landscapes. DeForrest Judd came later as a spiritual follower of these painters and added more searching essences to the forms he found in nature in the Big Bend country. Along with these strong individual statements there appeared the serene memory pictures of Mrs. Clara Williamson, who was soon to become one of America's best "natural" painters.

The mid-fifties and early sixties in Dallas found an increasing number of artists and a consequent enriching of creative procedures and developing personalities. Ben Culwell evolved his own version of action painting and expressionism; Chapman Kelley, Dan Wingren and, later, Roger Winter infused the relation of figure and environment with haunting qualities; after study with Hans Hofmann, Herb Rogalla launched into investigations of color in multi-media; the excursions in sculpture ranged widely from the religious subjects in monumental form by Octavio Medellin to the machined forms of Wilbert Verhelst; invested forms have been the theme of Don Bradley's precisely realized canvases; David McManaway makes assemblages and constructions with a cunning blend of nostalgia and immediacy; Arthur Koch captures evanescent color inside three-dimensional plastic forms to make illusions tangible; and finally Alberto Collie projects art another step with his magnetically balanced shaped of precision tooled and polished metals-revealing yet another manifestation of art when it and science are joined with imagination.

Jerry Bywaters, Director
Pollock Galleries
Southern Methodist University



SAN ANTONIO

There would be something unfitting about beginning a summary of the development of art in San Antonio in this century with a name other than Onderdonk. Robert Jenkins Onderdonk came to San Antonio in 1879, and he lived only until 1917, but he and his family had a virtually unassessable influence on the growth of an artistic climate in the city. Onderdonk himself, a dry wit beneath his reserve, was the central figure of gatherings of artists, musicians, and newspaperman—notably the members of the "Brass Mug Club" which included Robert's son Julian, Jose Arpa, Tom and Joe Brown, Charles Simmang, the violinist Ernest Thomas, among others who went sketching each Sunday in the country of met in the studio of the photographer Ernst Wilhelm Raba.

Onderdonk was a devoted teacher and he brought the realistic tradition of Chase and Henri, under whom he had studied, to affect the serious art of the city for years to come. As a conscientious provider for his family, he spent a great deal of time on commissioned work, necessarily neglecting his own more challenging preferences. Yet each phase of work he attempted, the landscape, the still life, the portrait, figure studies, even illustrations, was sure and sound. Julian, the heralded artistic success of the family, became known, probably unfortunately, as the "bluebonnet painter" of Texas. He did paint many bluebonnets but he also painted the varied landscape of Texas with something of a master's hand. He was a regional painter in the better meaning of that term, because he did have a genuine respect for his surroundings and he trained himself to paint

[[image - group photograph]]

The Brass Mug Club of San Antonio, about 1910, including R. J. Onderdonk (seated center), Jose Arpa (next right), E. Raba, who took the photograph (back row, with beard) and Julian Onderdonk (behind Raba).



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