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

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FORT WORTH

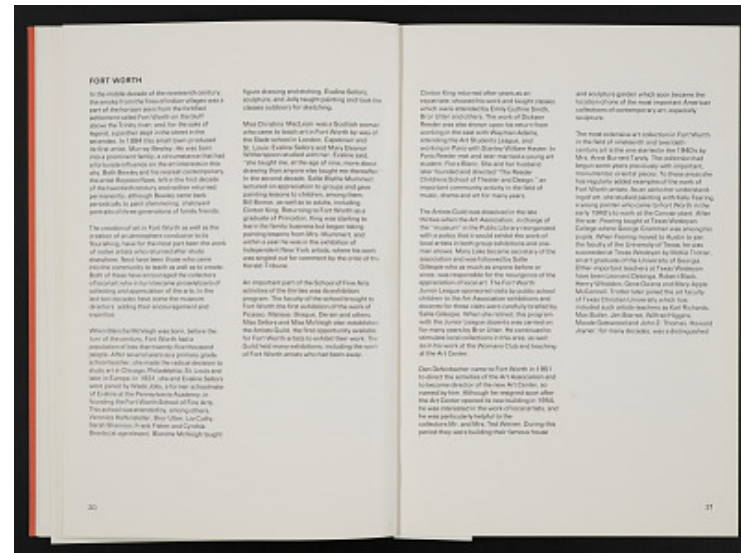
In the middle decade of the nineteenth century, the smoke from the fires of Indian villages was a part of the horizon seen from the fortified settlement called Fort Worth on the bluff above the Trinity river; and, for the sake of legend, a panther slept in the street in the seventies. In 1884 this small town produced its first artist, Murray Bewley. He was born into a prominent family, a circumstance that had a fortunate influence on the art interests in this city. Both Bewley and his nearest contemporary, the artist Royston Nave, left in the first decade of the twentieth century and neither returned permanently, although Bewley came back periodically to paint shimmering, chatoyant portraits of three generations of family friends.

The creation of art in Fort Worth as well as the creation of an atmosphere conducive to its flourishing, have for the most part been the work of native artists who returned after study elsewhere. Next have been those who came into the community to teach as well as to create. Both of these have encouraged the collectors of local art who in turn became proselytizers of collecting and appreciation of the arts. In the last two decades have come the museum directors adding their encouragement and expertise[expertise].

When Blanche McVeigh was born, before the turn of the century, Fort Worth had a population of less than twenty-five thousand people. After several years as a primary grade school teacher, she made the radical decision to study art in Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis and later in Europe. In 1931, she and Evaline Sellors were joined by Wade Jolly, a former schoolmate of Evaline at the Pennsylvania Academy, in founding the Fort Worth School of Fine Arts. This school was attended by, among others, Veronica Helfensteller, Bror Utter, Lia Culty, Sarah Shannon, Frank Fisher and Cynthia Brants (at age eleven). Blanche McVeigh taught figure drawing and etching, Evaline Sellors, sculpture, and Jolly taught painting and took the classes outdoors for sketching.

Miss Christina MacLean was a Scottish woman who came to teach art in Fort Worth by way of the Slade school in London, Capetown and St. Louis. Evaline Sellors and Mary Eleanor Witherspoon studied with her. Evaline said, "she taught me, at the age of nine, more about drawing than anyone else taught me thereafter." In the second decade, Sallie Blythe Mummert lectured on appreciation to groups and gave painting lessons to children, among them, Bill Bomar, as well as to adults, including Clinton King. Returning to Fort Worth as a graduate of Princeton, King was starting to learn the family business but began taking painting lessons from Mrs. Mummert, and within a year he was in the exhibition of Independent New York artists, where his work was singled out for comment by the critic of the Herald-Tribune.

An important part of the School of Fine Arts activities of the thirties was its exhibition program. The faculty of the school brought to Fort Worth the first exhibition of the work of Picasso, Matisse, Braque, Derain and others. Miss Sellors and Miss McVeigh also established the Artists Guild, the first opportunity available for Fort Worth artists to exhibit their work. The Guild held many exhibitions, including the work of Fort Worth artists who had been away.



Clinton King returned after years as an expatriate, showed his work and taught classes which were attended by Emily Guthrie Smith, Bror Utter and others. The work of Dickson Reeder was also shown upon his return from working in the east with Wayman Adams, attending the Art Students League, and working in Paris with Stanley William Hayter. In Paris Reeder met and later married a young art student, Flora Blanc. She and her husband later founded and directed "The Reeder Children's School of Theater and Design," an important community activity in the field of music, drama and art for many years.

The Artists Guild was dissolved in the late thirties when the Art Association, in charge of the "museum" in the Public Library reorganized with a policy that it would exhibit the work of local artists in both group exhibitions and one-man shows. Mary Lake became secretary of the association and was followed by Sallie Gillespie who as much as anyone before or since, was responsible for the resurgence of the appreciation of local art. The Fort Worth Junior League sponsored visits by public school children to the Art Association exhibitions and docents for these visits were carefully briefed by Sallie Gillespie. When she retired, this program with the Junior League docents was carried on for many years by Bror Utter. He continued to stimulate local collections in this area, as well as in his work at the Womans Club and teaching at the Art Center.

Dan Defenbacher came to Fort Worth in 1951 to direct the activities of the Art Association and to become director of the new Art Center, so named by him. Although he resigned soon after the Art Center opened its new building in 1954, he was interested in the work of local artists, and he was particularly helpful to the collectors Mr. and Mrs. Ted Weiner. During this period they were building their famous house and sculpture garden which soon became the location of one of the most important American collections of contemporary art, especially sculpture.

The most extensive art collection in Fort Worth in the field of nineteenth and twentieth century art is the one started in the 1940's by Mrs. Anne Burnett Tandy. The collection had begun some years previously with important, monumental, oriental pieces. To these areas she has regularly added examples of the work of Fort Worth artists. As an aid to her understanding of art, she studied painting with Kelly Fearing, a young painter who came to Fort Worth in the early 1940's to work at the Convair plant. After the war, Fearing taught at Texas Wesleyan College where George Grammer was among his pupils. When Fearing moved to Austin to join the faculty of the University of Texas, he was succeeded at Texas Wesleyan by McKie Trotter, an art graduate of the University of Georgia. Other important teachers at Texas Wesleyan have been Leonard Delonga, Robert Black, Henry Whiddon, Gene Owens and Mary Apple McConnell. Trotter later joined the art faculty of Texas Christian University which has included such artists-teachers as Karl Richards, Max Butler, Jim Sterret, Wilfred Higgins, Maude Gatewood and John Z. Thomas. Howard Joyner, for many decades, was a distinguished



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