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Celebrating 175: Mel Casas, Clippings, 1980-1987

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FORUM FEBRUARY 1981

[3 columns]

[column 1]

frustration built-in for a long time, and I think makes it hard for the coalition. There have been several attempts in the past.

MC: Actually, in terms of economics the most successful gallery, is the airport. I saw it as we came in. My wife and I had a good chuckle at some of the stuff. That's commercial.

MC: I am not involved with that. I don't know who runs it, but as far as exposure, in a sense, I think most artists want to be commercial. But, perhaps, art is kind of like Baskin-Robbins; you know, thirty-one flavors, one for everybody.

MC: They are there on the walls.

You've got thirty-one flavors and more. But, you are right. They talk about the new Atlanta airport with its art, and Seattle airport and its international reading center, and in any airport you've got many people waiting to do nothing. It's a great place to have a mini-type museum.

MC: It is successful. People call in and say, "I saw this painting on your wall. Please tell me how much it is, or send it to me." So in that sense it is a success.

So you think the airport is functioning as the best gallery in town in terms of dealing with a lot of people.

MC: For those who want to sell their work, yes.

AM: Of that kind.

That's the other problem. We have a very fine Plaza Art Fair; well, it would be equal to your setting on the river, only we have it without the river. A lot of artists don't want to be in that context. They are very particular about not only who buys their work, but where it's sold.

Do you find that same attitude?

AM: Oh, well, sure.

12[[column 1]]

[column 2]

The situation here is, I imagine, similar to Kansas City as you describe it. I would say there are a hundred or so people who I would call relatively good to relatively awful commercial artists. The problem is that there are more artists that there is art support in the town.

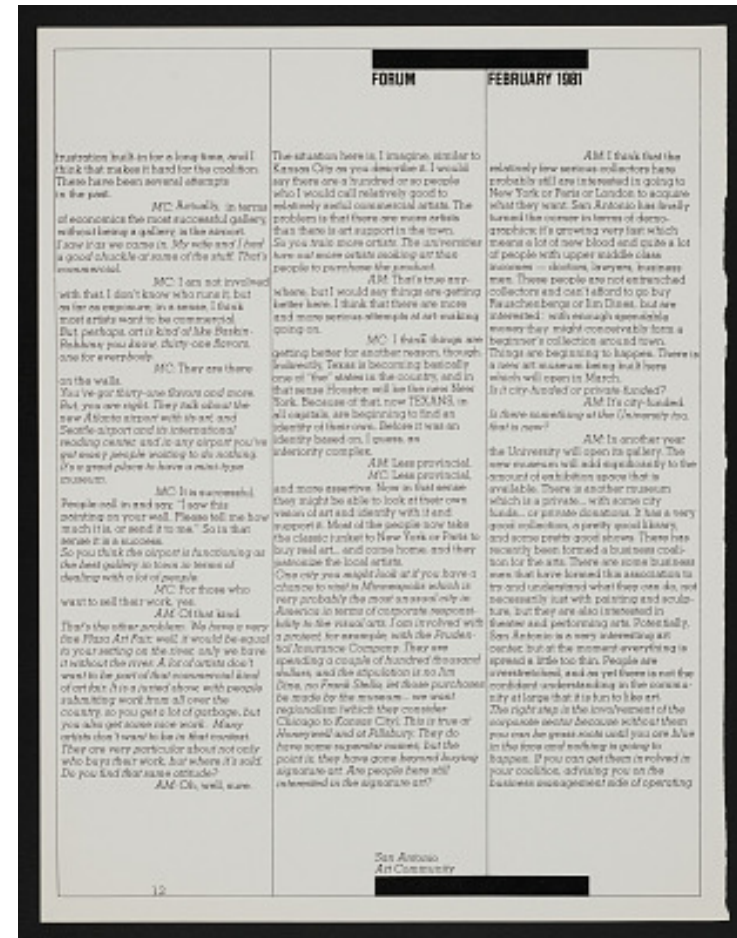
So you train more artists. The universities turn out more artists making art than people to purchase the product.

AM: That's true anywhere, but I would say things are getting better here. I think that there are more and more serious attempts at art-making going on.

MC: I think things are getting better for another reason, though. Indirectly, Texas is becoming basically one of "the" states in the country, and in that sense Houston will be the new New York. Because of that, now TEXANS, in all capitals, are beginning to find an identity of their own. Before it was an identity based on, I guess, an inferiority complex.

AM: Less provincial.

MC: Less provincial, and more assertive. Now in that sense they might be able to look at their own vision of art and identify with it and support it. Most of the people now take the classic junket to New York or Paris to buy real art...and come home, and they patronize the local artists. One city you might look at if you have a chance to visit is Minneapolis which is very probably the most unusual city in America in terms of corporate responsibility to the visual arts. I am involved with a project, for example, with the Prudential Insurance Company. They are spending a couple of hundred thousand dollars, and the stipulation is no Jim Din, no Frank Stella, let those purchases be made by the museum... we want regionalism (which they consider Chicago to Kansas City). This is true at Honeywell and at Pillsbury. They do have some superstar names, but the point is, they have gone beyond buying signature art. Are people here still interested in the signature art?



San Antonio
Art Community [[/column 2]]
[[column 3]]

AM: I think that the relatively few serious collectors here probably still are interested in going to New York or Paris or London to acquire what they want. San Antonio has finally turned the corner in terms of demographics; it's growing very fast which means a lot of new blood and quite a lot of people with upper middle class incomes - doctors, lawyers, business men. These people are not entrenched collectors and can't afford to go buy Rauschenbergs or Jim Dines, but are interested; with enough spendable money they might conceivably form a beginner's collection around town.

Things are beginning to happen. There is a new art museum being built here which will open in March.

Is it city-funded or private-funded?

AM: It's city-funded.

Is there something at the University too, that is new?

AM: In another year the University will open its gallery. The new museum will add significantly to the amount of exhibition space that is available. There is another museum which is a private...with some city funds...or private donations. It has a very good collection, a pretty good library, and some pretty good shows. There has recently been formed a business coalition for the arts. There are some business men that have formed this association to try and understand what they can do, no necessarily just with painting and sculpture, but they are also interested in theater and performing arts. Potentially, San Antonio is a very interesting art center, but at the moment everything is spread a little too thin. People are overstretched, and as yet there is not the confident understanding in the community at large that it is fun to like art.

The right step is the involvement of the corporate sector because without them you can be grass roots until you are blue in the face and nothing is going to happen. If you can get them involved in your coalition, advising you on the business management side of operating
[[/column 3]]

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