

## HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group

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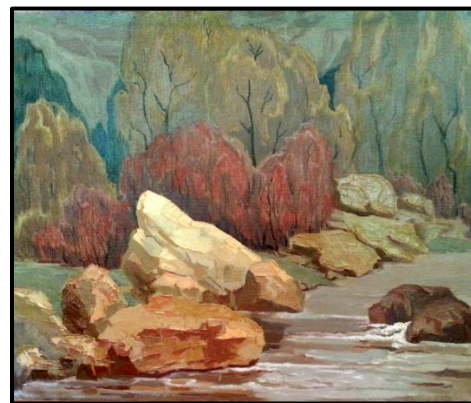


Jack Key Flanagan [*Townscape*] c.1946

### HETAG Newsletter November/December 2017

Here it is almost the end of another year. Yes, they do fly by, but there's no time to dwell on that. As you will see later in the newsletter, planning is already well underway on a number of fronts for exciting HETAG, CASETA and other exhibitions, gatherings and publications in 2018 relating to Earlier Houston and Early Texas Art. Stay tuned for another exciting year.

The newsletter image theme for this issue: Works by some Earlier Houston Artists you may never have heard of. Plus a recreation of a special Emma Richardson Cherry exhibition at the end.



Charles Allyn Gordon [*Farmhouse*] c.1935-1940 (l); Florence B. Grant *Winter in Houston* c.1943 (r)

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Upcoming HETAG meeting:

## MOODY GALLERY

Our next HETAG meeting will be a visit to

Betty [Moody Gallery](#)

2815 Colquitt St., Houston

Sunday January 7, 2018, at 2:30 p.m.

Betty will welcome us for a look at the amazing paintings by

Sarah Williams



Sarah Williams *Abilene* 2017 Oil on Board 18x24

And the end-of-year gallery artist group exhibition.

There will be lots of fun and fascinating stories about the Houston art scene going back a few years, as only Betty can tell them.



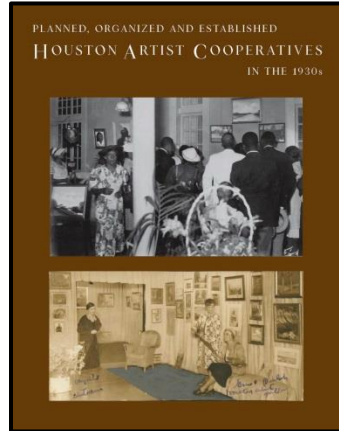
Michael Kennaugh *Beyond Delta* 2017 (l); Lucas Johnson *La Entrada* 1977 (r)



Jim Love *Ash Tray/Candle Holder* 1957

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**“Planned, Organized and Established: Houston Artist Cooperatives of the 1930s,”** like all good things (as the saying goes), has come to an end. It was an exhibition full of beautiful art made in Houston 80 plus years ago; and with a great story, of art segregated in its own day, brought together in the same gallery for the first time in our day. I hope you all got to see it. If you missed it, you can read the catalog at the [CASETA website](#). Many thanks to Houston Public Library, CASETA and the many donors and lenders for their support.

It’s impossible to know exactly how many Houstonians and Houston visitors saw this groundbreaking exhibition of art made right here in Houston in earlier days (that you can’t see anywhere else in the world!), but a look at the signatures and comments in the gallery guest book gives some idea of the reach of the show:

Visitors from almost 20 countries signed the book: Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Honduras, India, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Spain, United Kingdom, and Venezuela.

And from at least 20 states: Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

Here are a few of the things they said:

**“Black lives do matter. Black art too.” Houston**

**“Came from the UK and just happened to pop in. Great exhibition with fascinating history. A lovely unexpected event in our visit to Houston, Thank you!”**

**“Fascinating and great to see.” New Zealand**

**“Una exposicion muy original y sorprendente. Nos ha encantado. Por su diversidad y su colores. Gracias.” Spain**

**“We came all the way from San Antonio to see this wonderful exhibit. Thank you for a wonderful experience.” San Antonio**

**“Love to learn about our history.” Houston**

**“A great idea well executed.” Santa Cruz, CA**

**“Amazing!” “Simply wonderful!” “Inspiring” “So Beautiful” “Wonderful surprise”**

**And my favorite: “Great exhibition! I love the curators.” Houston**

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## Upcoming exhibitions:



Mildred Wood Dixon *Catacombs, Mexico* 1952

For a pair of exhibitions to be mounted in the fall of 2018 at The Heritage Society Museum and The Ideson Gallery of Houston Public Library, the curatorial teams are looking for images of Mexico by Houston artists and images of Houston by Houston artists, done before 1979. I know that many of you will have works in your collections that fit the criteria, and we would love to know about them. Please email us images including Artist/Title/Date/Medium/Dimensions to [tibbits@rice.edu](mailto:tibbits@rice.edu)

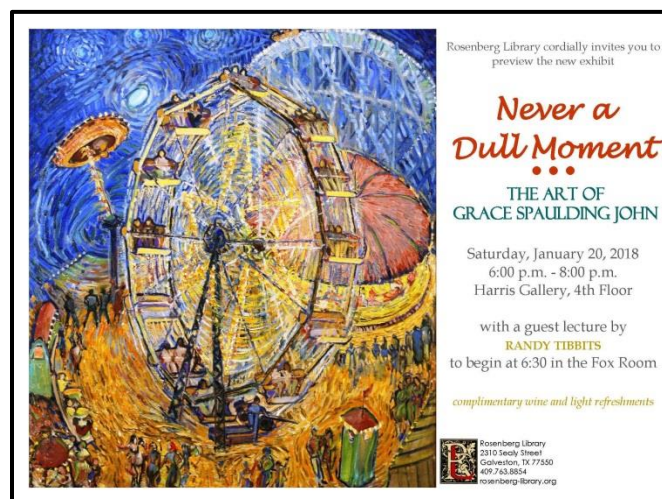
## Galveston, Rosenberg Library:

**"Never a Dull Moment: The Art of Grace Spaulding John"**  
January 20 – July 20, 2018

On Saturday, January 20, 2018, 6-8 pm

I will be giving a talk at the library in conjunction with the exhibition.

More details will follow, but in the meantime, make your plans to see the show and Have a look at some of the works that may be included, via the Rosenberg's online catalog: [Grace Spaulding John Paintings in the Rosenberg Library Collection](#)



Rosenberg Library cordially invites you to preview the new exhibit

**Never a Dull Moment**

THE ART OF GRACE SPAULDING JOHN

Saturday, January 20, 2018  
6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.  
Harris Gallery, 4th Floor

with a guest lecture by  
**RANDY TIBBITS**  
to begin at 6:30 in the Fox Room

*complimentary wine and light refreshments*

Rosenberg Library  
2310 Seely Street  
Galveston, TX 77550  
409.743.8854  
[rosenberg-library.org](http://rosenberg-library.org)

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*16th Annual CASETA Symposium  
April 27 - 29, 2018  
Witte Museum  
San Antonio, TX*

**Mark your calendar now for the CASETA Symposium  
At the Witte Museum in San Antonio  
April 27-29, 2018**

**The program is still being planned but  
We already know that our keynote speaker will be  
Eleanor Jones Harvey, Senior Curator at the Smithsonian American Art Museum,  
And formerly Curator of American Art at the Dallas Museum of Art**

**Check the [CASETA](#) Website for Symposium updates and other ETA news.**

**The mission of HETAG is to illuminate Houston's art history by providing viewing opportunities for art, by supporting and doing research on the artists and art communities working in Houston through the years, and by spreading the word.**

**Randy Tibbits, coordinator  
HETAG: The Houston Earlier  
Texas Art Group  
[tibbits@rice.edu](mailto:tibbits@rice.edu)**



**Dick Rembrandt [*Houston Skyline*] c.1970s**

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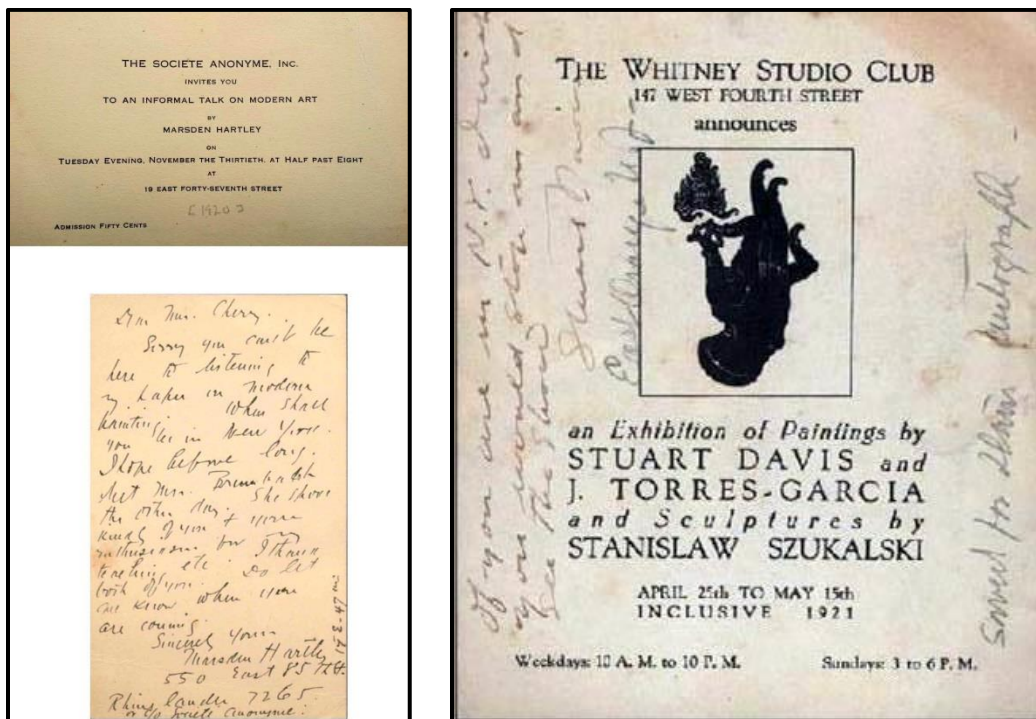
## Earlier Houston Art History Notes: Mrs. Cherry's "Modernist Group"

"I wanted *more* modern help," wrote Emma Richardson Cherry (1859-1954) from Gloucester, MA, in September, 1920. "So the other day I asked Mr. [Marsden] Hartley if he would come & look at my summer's work & see if he thought I had any inclinations that suggested I could break loose and really do modern stuff."

"Well he came & was quite interested ... said 'well, if you can draw like that you can go any length you wish.' You can imagine I was pretty happy."

Turning to a canvas-in-progress that she had just brought into the studio from an *en-plein-air* painting excursion – and with her enthusiastic permission – Hartley even "started in on my wet paint & I can tell you it's far & away a mighty interesting thing he is doing, with my puddling around in it, pretending to help." (For a full transcription of the letter see the HETAG Newsletter for June 2017.)

Modernism was in the air among serious American artists by 1920, and Hartley, who as Cherry noted, "paints very modern pictures," was one of its foremost practitioners. She could hardly have picked a better instructor in the Modern – though she did also make the acquaintance of a young Stuart Davis on the same Gloucester visit.



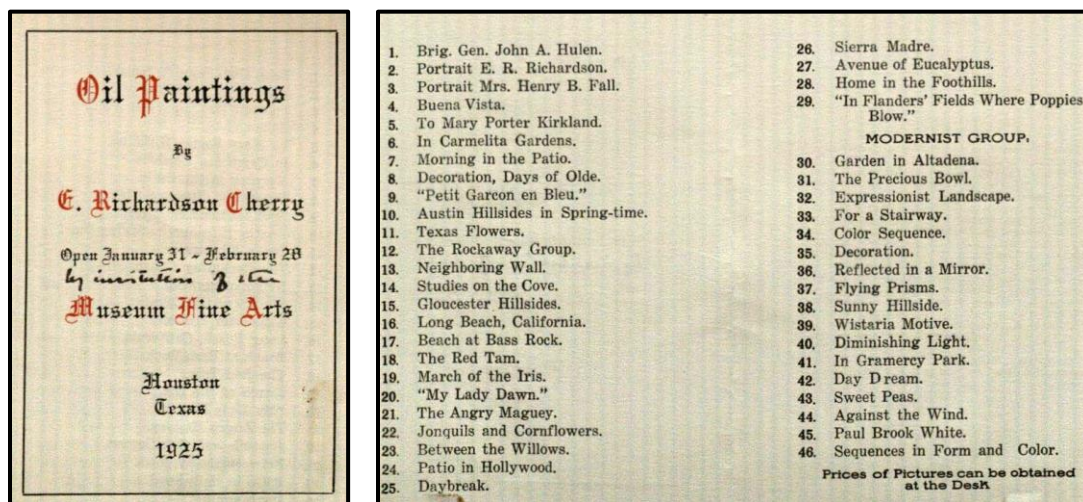
Cards from Marsden Hartley (l) and Stuart Davis (r) to Cherry inviting her to their lectures and exhibitions in New York City, 1920.

Over the next five years she consciously reshaped herself into a Modern painter. Though she continued to paint portraits and the more traditional flowers and landscapes for which there were

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paying customers in Houston, at the same time she explored the tenets of Modernism and employed them to create a group of paintings which she defined as “Modernist.”

By 1925, Cherry had enough such works that she gathered them together as a “Modernist Group” for her one-woman exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston in January. In April, when the show traveled to Denver, where Cherry had lived in the early 1890’s and where she still had strong ties, her “Modernist Group” was still a separate grouping. And so it was as well in December, 1926, when a major exhibition of her work opened at the Witte Museum in San Antonio, though for that show she added some works done during her intervening months of study in Europe from June, 1925, to October, 1926.



To our eyes, ninety years on, the paintings Cherry included in the group may not look particularly modern. Even Cherry herself, writing to Katherine Dreier, founder, along with Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, of the ultramodern Société Anonyme, Inc in New York (which Cherry joined in 1920, probably at the suggestion of Hartley), observed that her *Reflected In a Mirror*, which Dreier had seen in Cherry’s studio in New York, was “not advanced enough to interest you, of course.”

But at the time in Houston, San Antonio and even Denver, the concept of Modernist paintings, as distinct from paintings in general, would have been somewhat novel. And a distinct group of such works exhibited in the context of wide-ranging works by the same artist would have provided a clear visual encounter with Modernism that few in the local viewing public, including local artists, would have the opportunity to see otherwise. These exhibitions would have gone a long way toward establishing an awareness of Modernism in cities far away from avant-garde art centers in the East and in Europe.

Cherry showed 21 different paintings in the “Modernist Groups” of the three exhibitions. Thirteen paintings appeared in all three cities. In order to give modern readers a sense of the “Modern” works contemporary viewers saw when they visited the shows, images of those that

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can be identified are included here, presented in chronological order by date of creation. Some titles are ambiguous, so that it is not possible in all cases to be certain a painting with the same, or a similar, title/subject was the one listed. Such ambiguous inclusions are indicated. Also, a few paintings that were not listed, but that are directly relevant to the discussion are included here and are so indicated.

Though ER Cherry may not be considered a leading Modernist in a global sense, through her art, her teaching and her exhibitions she brought the concept of Modernism in art to Houston almost singlehandedly in the years 1920-1926.



*Flying Prisms* (study and final painting) c.1919 (shown in Hou, Den, SA)

“Now these modernists teach that painting is scientific from its very elements, and taking the prism as an instrument they study what they call the sequence of color and the relation of color to the landscape and nature especially under out of door conditions.” Interview with Emma Richardson Cherry, *Houston Post* January 4, 1920.

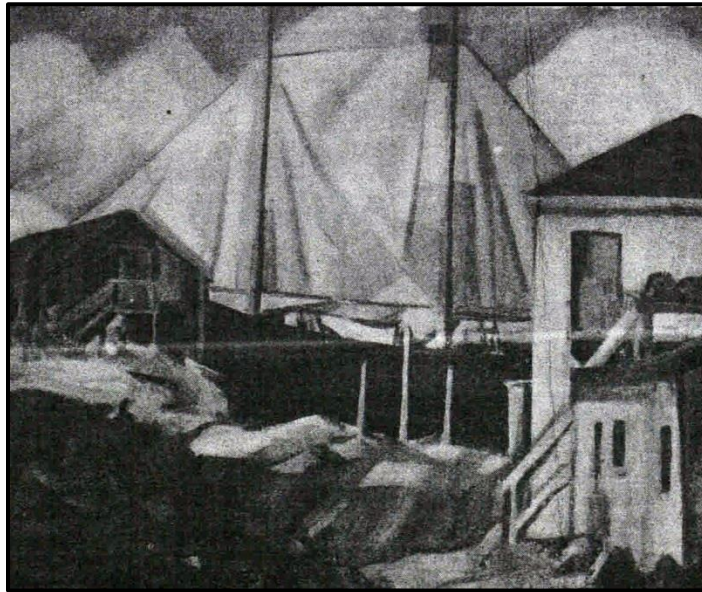
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*Decoration* c.1920 (shown in Hou, Den, SA; likely, but not certainly the painting listed)

“Then I showed [Marsden Hartley] my modern flower one & he was very enthusiastic.” Letter from Cherry to her daughter, Dorothy, September 28, 1920.



*[Sequences in Form and Color]* c.1920 (shown in Hou, Den, SA)

“[Hartley] started in on my wet paint & I can tell you it’s far & away a mighty interesting thing he is doing.” Letter from Cherry to her daughter, Dorothy, September 28, 1920. Current research suggests that this painting, now lost, is the one Hartley worked on.

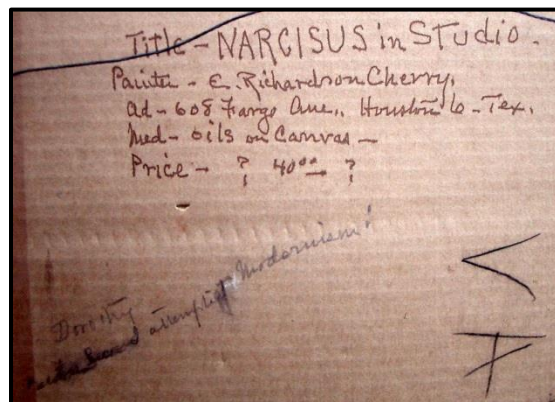
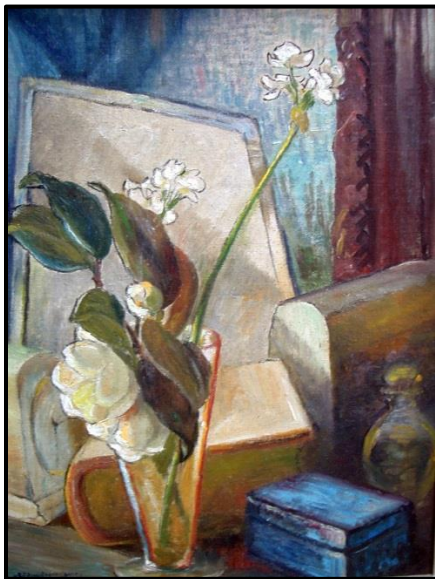
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*Houses of Gloucester* c.1920 (not listed in any of the cities, but mentioned in a review of the exhibition in Denver)

“... a compact block culminating in the spired church against the hills of Gloucester in carefully studied arrangement and color.”



*Narcissus [sic] in Studio* c.Early 1920s (not listed by this title in any of the cities)

The notation on the back of the painting, in Cherry's hand, reads, “... second attempt at Modernism!”

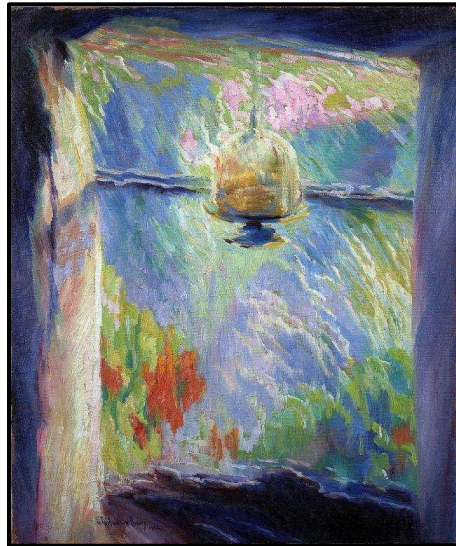
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*Garden in Altadena* c.1922 (shown in Hou, Den, SA)

Cherry made this sumptuous painting during an extended visit with her brother and his family in Los Angeles.

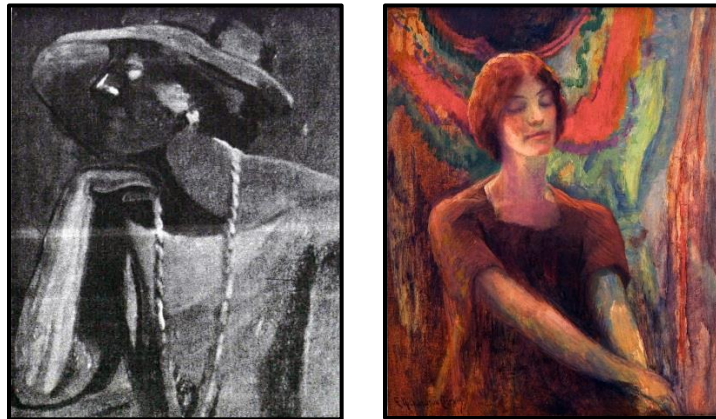


*Reflected in a Mirror* 1922 (shown in Hou, Den, SA; and also exhibited in New York in 1923)

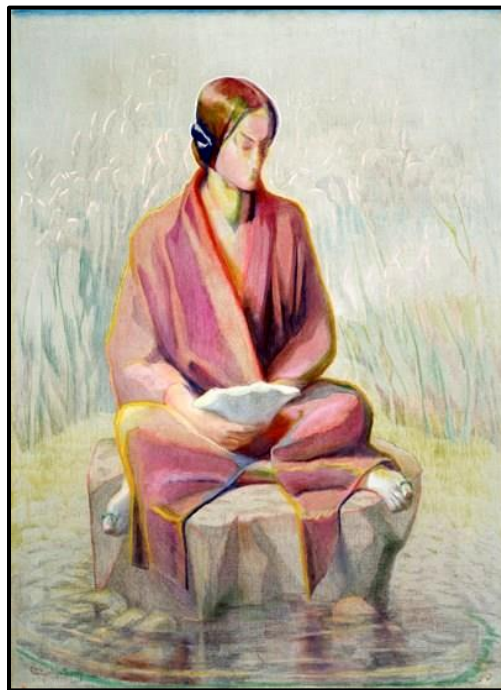
This is the painting which even Cherry admitted was “not advanced enough to interest” Katherine Dreier.

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*Color Sequence* c.1923 (l) (shown in Den, SA; and also in New York City in 1923; current location unknown); and *Daydream* c.1923 (r) (shown in Hou, Den, SA; and pictured in *Revue Du Vrai et Du Beau*, Paris 1925)

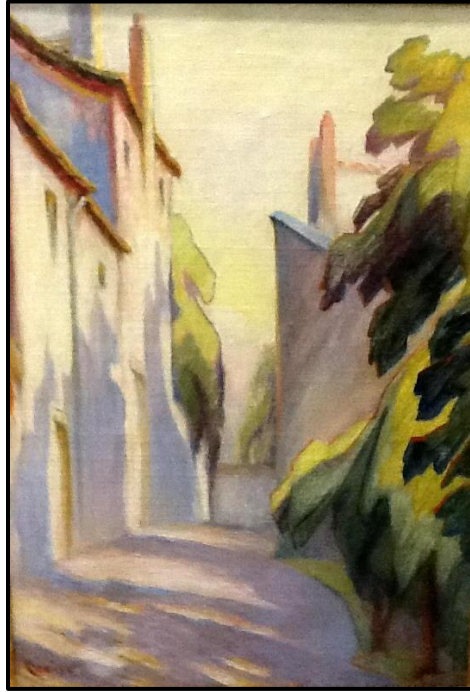


*The Precious Bowl* c.1925 (shown in Hou, Den, SA) Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Gift of Mrs. William Chilton Maverick.

“Mrs. Cherry painted it ‘only because she wanted to paint something that interested her.’ ... The center of interest, as conceived by the artist, is the bowl, and the composition is designed to lead the eye to the bowl from every approach to the picture. It suggests pure idea, and is not intended to be symbolical.” *Houston Chronicle*, February 1, 1925.

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*Shadow Patterns* 1925 (shown in SA)

Cherry painted this and the following three works in Brittany during the summer of 1925. Her travelling companion for the trip, also an artist, was probably referring to this work when she wrote in a letter dated August 7, 1925: “Cherry has torn loose and made her first modernistic picture, since our arrival – she’s as pleased as punch.”



*Bourg de Batz* 1925 (shown in SA)

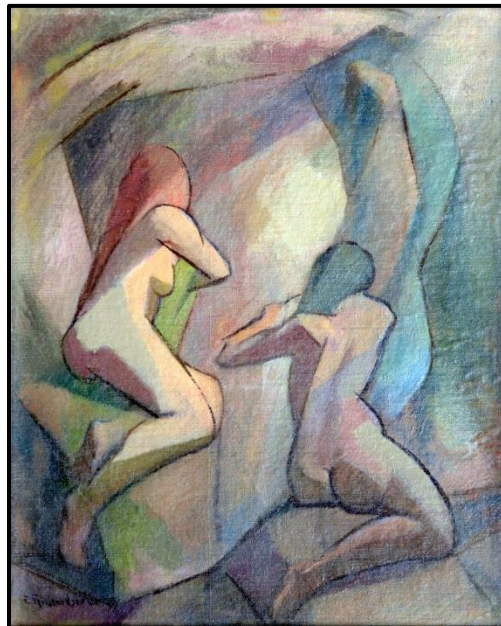
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*Padre's Walk* [may be *Maison du Cure*] 1925 (1); *Untitled* [may be *Pontevin*] 1925 (both shown in SA)

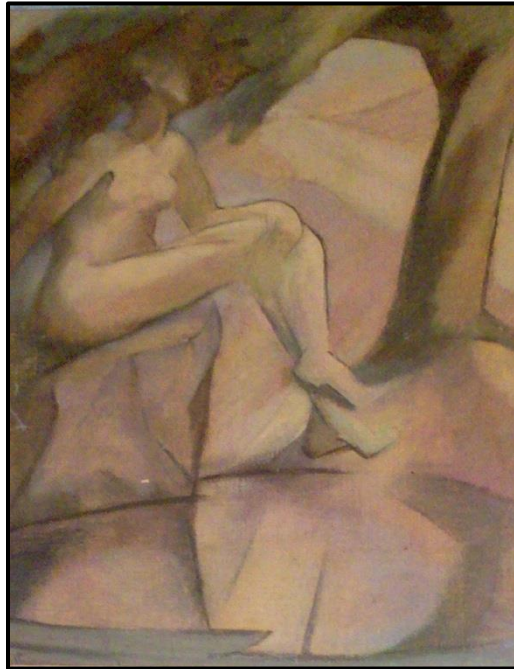
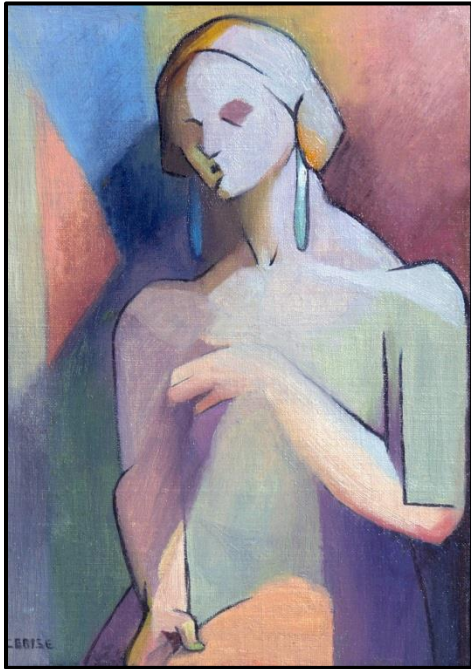
Cherry completed the four works that follow in Paris in 1925/26, while studying Cubism in the atelier of Andre Lhote and Dynamic Symmetry at Parsons Paris. Though the works are clearly Modernist in spirit, she did not include any of them in her "Modernist Group" exhibitions. They were, however, available for Houston colleagues and students to see (a mid-1930s photograph of her parlor shows *Pan's Pool* on prominent display). They seem to be the first Cubist paintings by a Texas artist and relate directly to her Modernist experimentation.



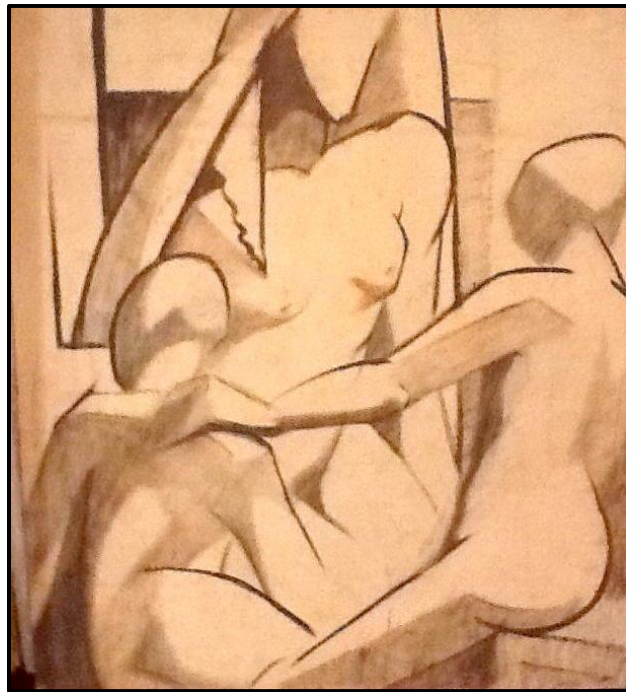
*Lhote Arrangement* c.1925.

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*Study in Compositional Spaces* c.1925 (l); *Pan's Pool* c.1925 (r).



Untitled [*Cubist Study*] c.1925.