

HETAG: The Houston Earlier Texas Art Group



The Nancy and Rich Kinder Building, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

HETAG Newsletter No. 46, December 2020

The big art news in Houston these days is, of course, the opening of the Nancy and Rich Kinder Building at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The Kinder Building, capping a current phase of MFAH expansion, both in buildings and collections, is likely to be "transformational", as they say. It's hard to believe that it was a mere 96 years ago that MFAH opened its first building. In this issue of the HETAG Newsletter we'll take a look at the Kinder – and some of the Texas art included in the opening exhibition. And also at the transformative impact of that first MFAH building from its opening in 1924 until the beginning of World War II – specifically the way it sparked a boom in commercial art galleries in Houston. Included also is information on a new offering from Art League Houston on the History of art in our city from the 1890s to the 1950s. And, last but not least, some holiday greetings from a few Earlier Houston Artists.

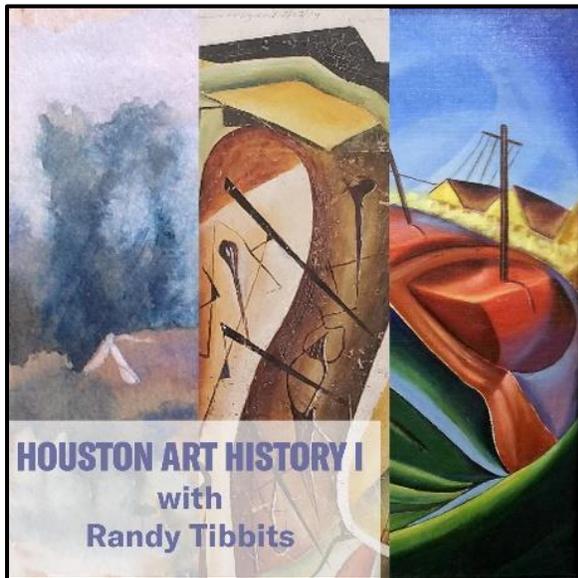


Chromatic tunnel by Carlos Cruz-Diez connected the Kinder and Law Buildings

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[ALH Art History](#)
[January 12 - February 2](#)



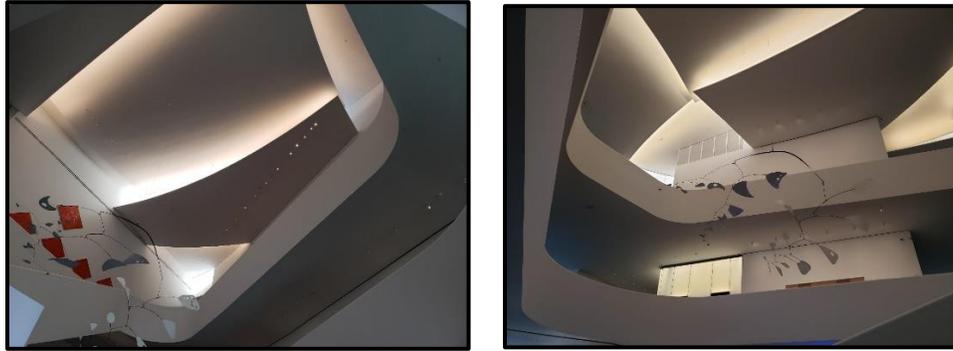
[Houston Art History I \(AH-1\) | ONLINE LECTURE](#)

Lecturer - Randy Tibbits
Tuesdays, 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM
January 12 - February 2
\$185 public / \$150 members

The course will explore aspects of Houston Art History from 1890-1960, through a series of four Zoom talks. [A list of suggested readings will be provided](#) and time for discussion will be allowed with each session. Topics will include: the germinal phase, focusing on the early career of Emma Richardson Cherry, Houston's first modern artist; the establishment of arts institutions, including early art training at Rice Institute, the founding of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Art League Houston and the Contemporary Arts Museum; the coming of Modernism to Houston, with particular emphasis on the queer-inflected "eccentric" modernism of the so-called Cherry-McNeill Group of young avant-garde Houston artists in the 1930s/40s; and the burgeoning of art in the rapidly growing Houston of the post-war 1940s and 1950s.

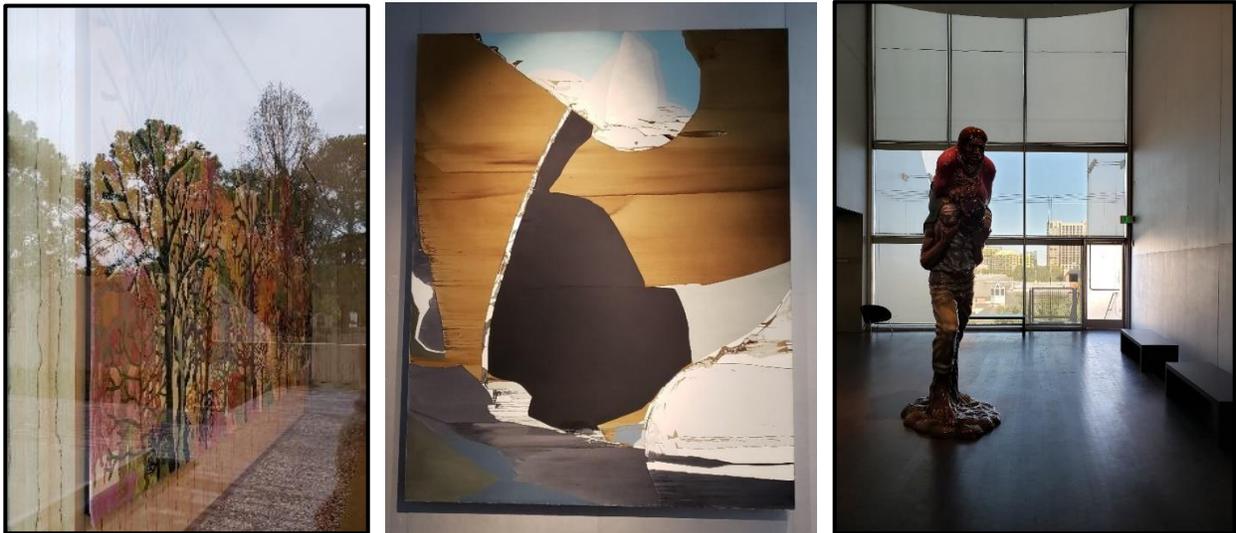
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The Nancy and Rich Kinder Building Museum of Fine Arts, Houston



Two views of the soaring central court of the Kinder Building

By now you may have heard that the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, has opened the Nancy and Rich Kinder Building, capping a decade-long campus expansion. If you've visited already, you know what a spectacular addition it is. If you haven't been able to get there yet, prepare to be blown away when you do.



Trenton Doyle Hancock *Color Flash for Chat and Chew, Paris Texas in Seventy-Two* tapestry 2020, through the window of the new restaurant (l); Dorothy Hood *Haiti* 1969 (c); Luis Jiménez *Border Crossing (Cruzando el Rio Bravo)* 1989 (r)

One of the gratifying aspects of the opening exhibition is the large number of works on show by Houston and other Texas artists. There really are too many to count on a full set of fingers and toes. Since MFAH and the new Kinder Building are located in Houston, and since more than 90% of all MFAH visitors are from Houston, this is fitting. To be sure, the works are appropriately exhibited in the context of the other art from around the world, most without any

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indication that they are Houston artists, so you have to already know they're our own artists to pick them out of the crowd. And further to be sure, there are none of those earlier 20th Century artists those of us in HETAG love so much. Even so, how great to see so many "local" artists showing throughout the installations that Houston local stands up against anybody's global.

The works included here are just a few of the ones in the galleries. Each HETAGer can make it a quest to spot many more.



Photo-collage by David Lackey and photo by Earlie Hudnall, Jr., in a grouping with others (l);
Jesse Lott's *Basketball Players* 1987 (c);
John Biggers *Mother and Child* (sculpture), c1951, and *The Cradle* (drawing) 1950 (r)

When you finish your visit to the Kinder, take the tunnels over to the Beck Building for a look at the memorial exhibition *The Marzio Years: Transforming the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1982-2010*, where you'll see even more Houston art, added to the MFAH collection during the tenure of legendary director, Peter Marzio, who grew the collection from 14,000 to 62,000 objects! Closing January 10, 2021.



Two views of art by Houston and other Texas artists on view in the exhibition
The Marzio Years: Transforming the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 1982-2010

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HOUSTON ART HISTORY NOTES: ART GALLERIES 1924-1942

"Houston is fast becoming a center of art ..." *Houston Chronicle*, 1926

The opening of the Kinder Building is an appropriate time to remember that a mere 96 years ago, in 1924, MFAH opened its first building, designed by William Ward Watkin, now part of the Caroline Weiss Law Building, housing the collections of Asian art. The opening of that first building sparked a burst of art activity in the city, extending far beyond the museum itself. Only time will tell what the Kinder will spark as, once again, "Houston is fast becoming a center of art."



The original William Ward Watkin designed building of MFAH opened April 1924

One of the impacts of that earlier museum opening was the birth of a new phenomenon for Houston – the commercial art gallery. There had been opportunities to buy art in Houston before 1924, limited though they may have been, but there had not been places specifically designed for the exhibition and sale of art. The history of galleries in Houston is yet to be written, but these are some of the galleries active in our city from that first one until the beginning of World War II. Along with the new museum (said to be the first art museum in Texas), these galleries made an important contribution to the expanding art culture of the city. Most even showed and sold the work of Houston's own artists!

The **James Bute** Paint Company Art Gallery, 1924-1960s

The James Bute Paint Company, founded in Houston in 1867, long supplemented its primary paint and wallpaper business by offering a range of artist supplies – and even, from time to time, by selling the paintings those artists made. But it was big news when Bute opened "Houston's First Commercial Art Gallery" in 1924, at their existing downtown location on Texas Avenue. And it was even bigger news, in 1929, when the growing James Bute Co. moved to a new building at

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Caroline and McKinney, with a posh new gallery - styled on the "art rooms in the Museum of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Flood lights are arranged to throw just the right amount of light on the paintings [and there is a] floating ceiling[!]" Art in Houston was hitting the big time! Bute's influence continued to expand over the next several decades, greatly expanding as a gallery of Houston-made art when Ben DuBose took charge of the art department in the later 1940s – a position he held until he opened his own gallery in 1966.

HOUSTON'S FIRST COMMERCIAL ART GALLERY IS BEING OPENED THIS WEEK BY JAMES BUTE CO.

Houston's first commercial art gallery is to be opened by the James Bute Company, which takes the first step in that direction this week when several canvases will be placed on view in the small gallery at the rear of their store at Texas and Fannin. The store is to be remodeled in the near future to provide space for more adequate showing of the canvases and to accommodate a larger collection.

The pictures now showing are by George Inness, Alfred Kappes, A. N. A. Robert Minor, Eugene Fichel, Vincenzo Palmiaroli and Orfei.

George Inness is considered one of America's foremost landscape painters, and Minor is another American, who has attained distinction in the same field. Minor is represented by a strong canvas called "Sunset," "Orchard" is the title of an Inness, bought from the painter's daughter, Mrs. Helen Inness Hartley, and representative of his later work. "Genzano," "Italy," an Italian monastery situated on a promontory, and painted in his earlier days, is also at Bute's. This picture has been authenticated by Elliott Dainserfeld, who said:

"This is a very beautiful George Inness, in perfect preservation. Painted in the early fifties." It was bought by Oden Hargarty from Mr. Inness and sold by the estate of Mr. Hargarty's daughter, Mrs. James W. Craig, of Boston.

"Buckwheat Cakes," by Kappes, is a picture full of human interest, especially for Southerners. It depicts a negro man pouring molasses over his cakes while his spouse looks on approvingly. Through the kitchen door "Mamma" may be seen slipping her morning coffee. The pic-

ture took the first Hallgarten prize in 1867 at the National Academy of Design.

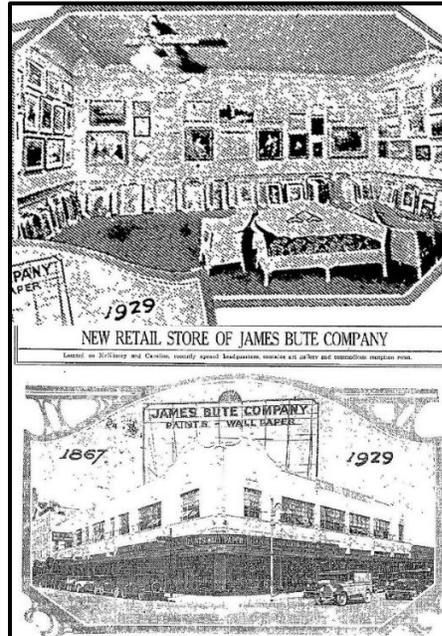
Eugene Fichel, whose "Court of the Palace" is shown, was born in Paris in 1826. He was of the French school, a pupil of P. Delacroix, and painted carefully and skillfully, somewhat in the style of Meissonier. He won medals at the Paris salon in 1857, 1861 and 1869. His works are in noted collections and in public galleries and museums.

Vincenzo Palmiaroli has incorporated much human interest in his painting, "The Apothecary." Spanish in style, color and subject matter, Palmiaroli was born in Madrid in 1818. He was a genre painter, a pupil of Madrazo. He won Paris medals in 1867 and Madrid medals in 1871. His paintings are in noted collections, public and private, in Europe and America.

"Palace Interior," by Pristo of Paris, is painted with the nice precision of the old-time miniature artist. It is a highly decorative work, with the ornate paneling and furniture of the period faithfully reproduced, and the figures painted with minute accuracy.

Orfei, a well-known painter of Florence, Italy, is represented by a small canvas called "Umbrella Maker," a humorous picture of an old man mending a big rose-colored umbrella.

Each picture is especially lighted and since all of them are painted in a style that does not require much distance from the picture, the small gallery is found to be well suited to their exhibition. As soon as the larger gallery is provided a more varied collection of canvases will be installed.



(L) *Houston Chronicle*, May 11, 1924; (R) *Houston Post* December 30, 1929 (top) and July 15, 1929 (bottom)

Yunt Gallery, 1924–c.1940s

In the Gallery of Women Painters

Among one of the interesting exhibits in the gallery is a portrait of the late Mrs. C. A. ... The portrait is a study in the use of color and light, and is a fine example of the artist's skill. The artist, Beulah Ayars, is a native of Houston and has spent much of her life in the city. Her work is characterized by a strong sense of form and a delicate touch. The portrait is a study in the use of color and light, and is a fine example of the artist's skill. The artist, Beulah Ayars, is a native of Houston and has spent much of her life in the city. Her work is characterized by a strong sense of form and a delicate touch.

SAM M. YUNT

still life and the landscape below it are by Beulah Ayars, Houston artist, whose works are being featured by the Samuel Yunt Galleries until March 12.

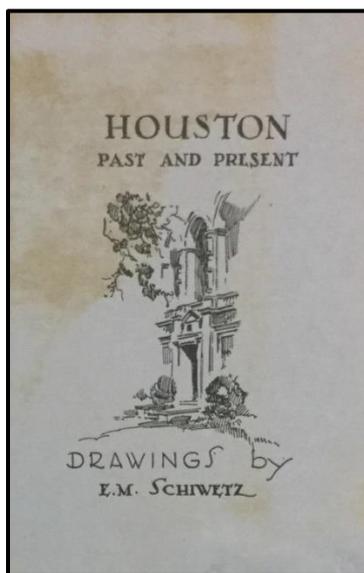
Yunt Galleries exhibition of Women Artists in Houston, 1924 (l); Samuel M. Yunt, 1934 (c); Beulah Schiller Ayars at Yunt Gallery, 1938 (r)

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Yunt Gallery, owned by the brother and sister team of Samuel McClellan Yunt (1884?-1943) and Katherine (sometimes spelled Catherine) Yunt (1879 or 1881-1954), were already established art dealers with operations in Oklahoma City and Kansas City, when they began doing business in Houston in 1924. At first they brought a seasonal exhibition of paintings that traveled to Dallas as well as Houston. In later years Samuel took up residence in Houston, and in April, 1937, he opened what was flamboyantly, but mistakenly, billed as Houston's "first permanent picture gallery," at 3911 Main Street, in the Isabella Court Building – still a popular venue for art galleries in Houston. The previous year, in June, 1936, Yunt had opened a gallery in Dallas, in the Highland Park Shopping Village. By 1940 he moved his gallery to the Warwick (now ZaZa) Hotel. He often showed the work of Houston artists, holding one-woman shows for Beulah Schiller Ayars, Ruth Pershing Uhler and Grace Spaulding John in 1937/38 (he also took the latter two shows to Dallas). Yunt married in 1934 (though perhaps only briefly, since there are archival records indicating that his bride may have still been married to a previous husband) and in 1937 Katherine moved to Los Angeles, California, and left the art business, so their partnership broke up. But for over 20 years they exerted a significant force in art sales in Houston and the region.

The Little Gallery, 1926-1931

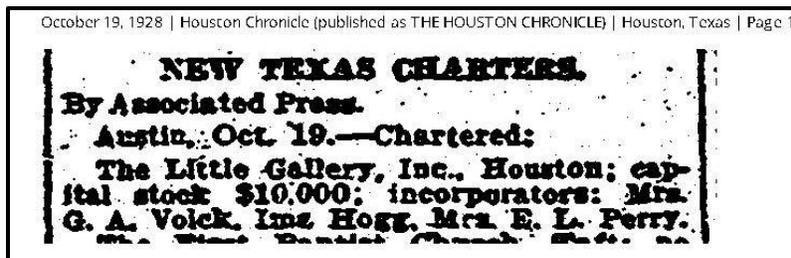
Fannie W. Volck (Mrs. George A., c1875-1964) and artist, Emily Langham (1894-1983) opened The Little Gallery at 3313 Main Street in November, 1926. Both had connections to Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans, and they showed Newcomb ceramics and jewelry, along with fine and decorative arts from Houston and around the country. An early exhibition featured all the paintings by recently deceased San Antonio bluebonnet painter, Julian Onderdonck, that were still in the possession of his widow. Over the years The Little Gallery also showed the work of Houston artists including Emma Richardson Cherry, James Chillman, Jr., Margaret Brisbine and Galvestonian, Percy Holt. But they also brought art to the city, including the watercolors of Texas scenes by Charles W. Hawthorn.



Margaret Brisbine; *Houston Past and Present* by Buck Schwitz; Emily Langham, 1929

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In 1928, just in time for the Democratic National Convention, held in Houston that June, The Little Gallery published a portfolio of prints of Houston scenes, old and new, by Buck Schiwetz.



Also in 1928, The Little Gallery, Inc., with capital stock of \$10,000, received a charter from the State of Texas, issued to Volck, Ima Hogg and Mrs. E.L. Perry. When the Junior League opened in a new building at 500 Stuart Street (now Brennan's Restaurant), The Little Gallery relocated there, marking the move with an exhibition of American art brought from the MacBeth Gallery, New York, including works by Childe Hassam and Charles F. Ryder, among many others.

Fannie Volck had been a founder of the Houston Public School Art League (precursor of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston) in 1900. From 1924 to 1942 she taught in the Houston Schools, all but two of those years at San Jacinto High School, where one of her students was a young Eugene Ralph (better known as Gene Charlton), with whom she worked on set designs for the school musical play, *In The Garden of the Shah*. While at San Jacinto, Volck also taught Dorothy Hood. Even before Volck opened The Little Gallery in 1926, she had exhibited art for sale in her home – particularly the work of her New Orleans friends, Will Stevens and Ellsworth Woodward.



Designs by Gene Charlton, as Eugene Ralph, 1926 (l); and Eugene Charlton, 1927 (r)

Emily Langham began a career as instructor in the children's classes of the Museum School in 1929. By 1931, The Little Gallery seems to have ceased operation.

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Herzog Gallery, 1926-1972?

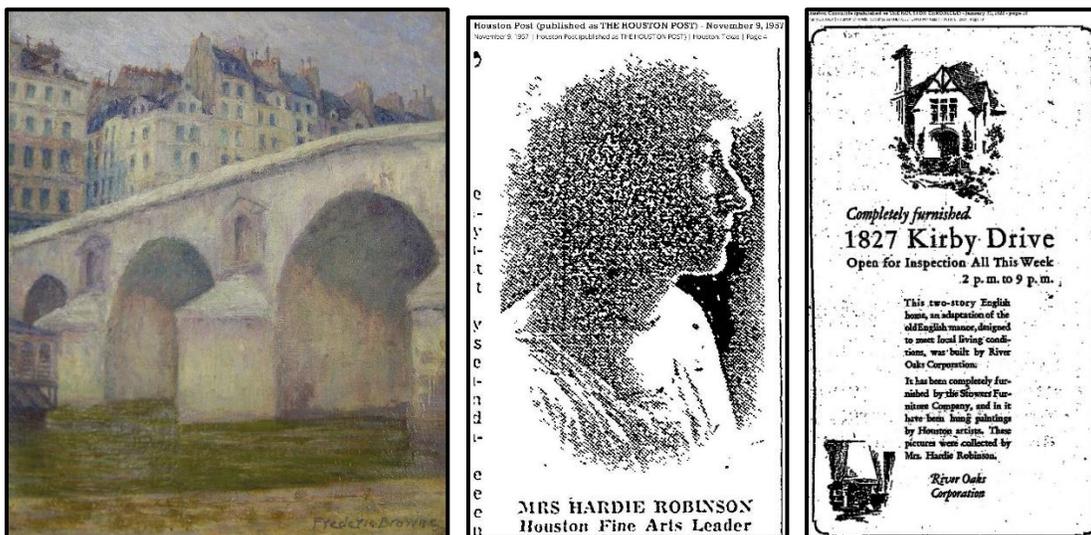
Mr. and Mrs. Walter Herzog opened their gallery at 3619 Main, in "the old Prince House" which they remodeled in a manner "fitting to the proper spirit in which beauty should be enjoyed." Primarily, they featured "period rooms, hand wrought metals, hand woven decorative fabrics, bronzes, porcelains" etc. – but they also showed art, sometimes even including the work of Houston artists. Herzog operated, under the management of various family members, into the 1970s.

Boulevard Gallery, 1927

2623 Main – dealing "only with paintings that have been imported from Europe and offer[ing] no American art in any form." (Enough said about them!)

Mrs. Hardie Robinson, 1928

Edith Greene Robinson (?-1957), really knew how to give people a sense of the way art would look in their homes – since she invited them to see how it looked in her own home – at 2326 Travis, Apartment 3 – where, through the first half of 1928, she organized a series of exhibitions for Houston artists, displaying the work through the public rooms of her spacious, new apartment. She had started her career as a gallerist of Houston art by organizing a Christmas Picture Market, in the Lamar Hotel in Downtown Houston, in 1927. That venture proved so successful, and so exhilarated her, that she took everything home with her – at least to show. The Houston artists she exhibited (and sold) during her brief gallery venture, included Emma Richardson Cherry, Frederic Browne, photographer Vera Presilova Scott, James Chillman, Jr., Ruth Pershing Uhler, Ola McNeill Davidson, Margaret Brisbine, Grace Spaulding John, Hattie Virginia Palmer and Bertha Louise Hellman. Thanks to Mrs. Robinson, Houston artists had a real friend with a posh gallery showing and selling their work – for a little while, anyway.



Frederic Browne *Pont Marie, Paris* (l); Mrs. Hardie Robinson (c)

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Houston Artists Gallery, 1930-1939



The Houston Artists Gallery, 1931, (l to r) Myrtle Stedman, Grace Spaulding John and Beulah Schiller Ayars

Grace Spaulding John, drawing inspiration from encounters she'd had with artists from around the world in Mexico City during several visits there in the 1920s, inspired other Houston artists to join her in founding the Houston Artists Gallery, in the basement of the Beaconsfield Apartments at 1700 Main Street, as a cooperative venture where the work of member artists would be exhibited and sold. The member artists also managed, staffed and even renovated the gallery. But the rent proved hard to pay out of sales commissions, so after a couple of years, HAG embarked on a peripatetic journey that saw it briefly at the Junior League Building (replacing The Little Gallery), The Cottage Gallery and the Browse About Shop, before finally dissolving in 1939 after a remarkable run of almost 9 years. (Find more about Houston Artists Gallery in the catalog for the 2017 exhibition [*Planned, Organized and Established: Houston Artist Cooperatives in the 1930s.*](#))

La Vieille France Gallery, 1931

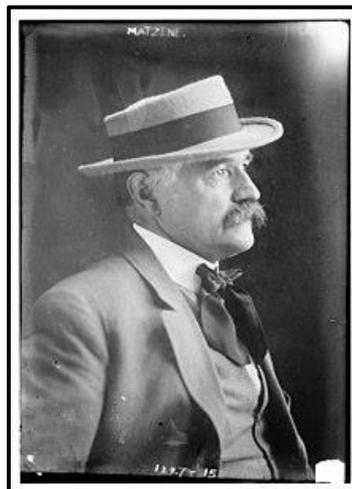
When La Vieille France Gallery opened in April, 1931, at 102 Welch Street, founder and manager, Parker Edwards, announced that “the main gallery is to be devoted to Houston and Texas artists’ work in monthly exhibitions through the season.” Fittingly, for the first exhibition, Emma Richardson Cherry showed paintings and decorative panels – at the same time that MFAH was showing an invitational exhibition of her paintings. The gallery seems to have been short-lived, but later on Mrs. Parker Edwards, who was French, offered lessons in her native language at the same address.

Cottage Gallery, 1934–1937

Artist Angela MacDonnell, now best remembered for her three murals on Spanish themes in the Ideson Building of Houston Public Library, opened her Cottage Gallery, at 903 Stuart in 1934,

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with a clear vision: "I have in mind for the Cottage Gallery, a place where artists may exhibit or just leave their pictures for sale purposes and where people interested in art may come to chat. It is to be an intimate place rather on the order of a club for art-minded persons but with no membership dues."



Cottage Gallery/Studio, 1937 (l); Angela MacDonnell (c); Richard Gordon Matzene (r)

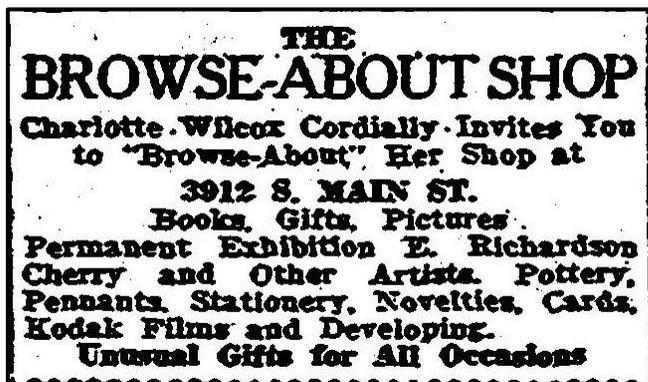
Matzene Galleries, 1935–1936

Matzene Galleries operated briefly at 2615 Fannin in 1935/36. Photographer, collector and widely known Oriental traveler, Richard Gordon Matzene (born Jens Rudolf Matzene, c1875-1950) seems to have opened his Houston gallery in December, 1935, at about the same time that MFAH opened an exhibition of Chinese paintings from his personal collection. In January 1936, discussions began for a "proposed show of 'Houston Scenes' painted by Houston artists." That show didn't happen, and by February, 1936, Matzene advertised a closing auction of the contents of his gallery.

Browse-About Shop, 1936-1938?

Charlotte Wilcox operated her Browse-About Shop at 3912 S. Main, offering a wide range of gifts, stationary and other items, but including on "Permanent exhibition E. Richardson Cherry and other artists." In 1937, Wilcox and Ola McNeill Davidson planned an exhibition of non-objective art by Houston artists – a plan that had to be put on hold when Davidson decided to use a small legacy to finance her first (and only) trip to Europe. She traveled to France, Italy and other countries through the fall of 1937, accompanied by her teen-age son and her students, Gene Charlton and Carden Bailey. After their return to Houston, the exhibition planned for Browse-About gave way to a completely new venture when Davidson and her group founded 520 (Our Little Gallery).

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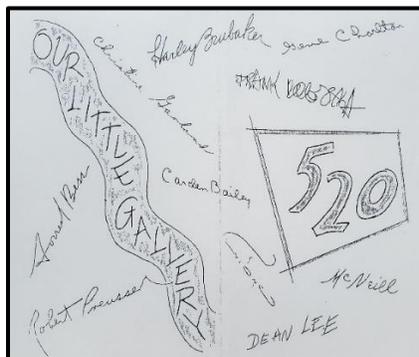
Forrest Bess in his stable Gallery, 1938 (1)

Forrest Bess Gallery, 1938/39

Forrest Bess came to Houston in 1938, fresh from study in Mexico City and Taxco. In Houston he fell in with a group of like-minded younger artists, including Gene Charlton, Carden Bailey, Russell Davis and others, all eager to be part of the latest art movements. In Mexico he had encountered equally forward looking artists from around the world. He struck on the idea of bringing the art of the two groups together in an International Gallery in the converted stable he found for his studio, at 2602 Main. He intended to show the work of his Houston colleagues – and his own work, of course – in rotation with that of the diverse group he'd met in Mexico. He even had hopes of mounting an exhibition of work by Diego Rivera.

520 (Our Little Gallery), 1938-1939

Our Little Gallery (of abstract art), briefly operated in 1938—possibly extending into early 1939—by artist, Ola McNeill Davidson, and a group of her students, including Carden Bailey, Harley Brubaker, Nione Carlson, Gene Charlton, Frank Dolejska, Dean Lee, and Robert Preusser, and also showing the work of Forrest Bess and Christine Garland, was somewhat similar in intent to the Houston Artists Gallery, but was much more informal and shorter lived. (More on Our Little Gallery in the [HETAG Newsletter No 20, February 2018](#).)



The opening exhibition of 520 (Our Little Gallery), May 13, 1938;
Frank Dolejska *Revel [sic]-Self Portrait*, 1938, included in the exhibition

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McMillen Gallery, 1940-1942

McMillen, Inc, of New York, opened in February, 1940, at 2503 Westheimer, a Houston branch of the New York City interior decoration firm founded in 1924 by Eleanor Brown, who came to town for the opening. The Houston branch was managed by two returning Texans, Grace Fakes and Mrs. Arthur B. Duel. Originally, the paintings on show were borrowed from Wildenstein Galleries (NY) and Bignou Galleries (Paris and NY), with a heavy slant toward French artists, But from time to time McMillen did show Texas artists, as with their 1941 exhibition of watercolors by four Texans – Angela MacDonnell, Buck Schiwetz, William Lester and Mary Aubrey Keating. McMillen closed in January, 1942, "for the duration of the war."



McMillen Gallery AD and Jack Pagan *Montrose Boulevard* 1942, at Meinhard Galleries

Meinhard-Taylor Gallery (later, Meinhard Galleries), 1940-1957

Carlos H. Meinhard, native of Venezuela but long-time Houston resident, and John A. Taylor opened their gallery in October 1940, at 5013 Fannin. Both had past connections to the Howard Young Galleries in New York, and most of their stock consisted of European paintings. But occasionally a Houston artist graced the gallery walls, as happened in 1942 when Jack Pagan showed his watercolors of Houston scenes. Taylor left the venture fairly quickly, but Meinhard continued in business until his death, in 1957.

Associated Artists of Houston, 1940-c1954

Almost 10 years to the month after the founding of the Houston Artists Gallery, Houston artists got together again, in December, 1940, to found another cooperative gallery where they could show and sell their art. This followed on a successful sale of local art organized for National Art Week in November, 1940. That sale, lasting for a week in a space at 1111 Main Street, reminded the artists that they wanted and needed more opportunities to sell their work. In December, they decided to organize, naming themselves the Associated Artists of Houston. Sam Johnson, of Johnson Pottery Garden, who had managed the November sale, agreed to erect a gallery building

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just for them, which he would manage, on the grounds of his business at 6519 Main, near the current Texas Medical Center. That gallery opened in April, 1941, and almost immediately moved – building and all – when Johnson relocated to 6615 Main in May of the same year. Associated Artists Gallery remained at that location until 1946, when it began a nomadic life, meeting and exhibiting in various locations around the city (as had its predecessor, Houston Artists Gallery). By about 1954 Associated Artists had run its course and seems to have disbanded.



Laura Hill Gallery, 1941

Laura Hill, "well known Houstonian for 15 years," opened her gallery in March, 1941, at 3916 Main, the same space that had been operated by Herzog Gallery. A former school teacher, with connections to Galveston as well as Houston, Hill expressly intended to focus on Texas artists, especially those from Houston/Galveston. Her extensive list included such well-known artists as Robert Preusser, Chester Snowden, Buck Schiwetz and Paul Schumann, among many others. Laura Hill Gallery seems to have survived less than a year.

With the entry of the United States into World War II, the dynamic Houston gallery scene of the 1920s and 1930s took a breather. Many of the younger male artists left the city, at least temporarily, for military service, and Houstonians in general focused on the war effort. When the war ended, and energies once again returned to growing the Houston art culture, new organizations emerged, among them The Art League of Houston (now Art League Houston, ALH) and Contemporary Arts Association (now Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, CAMH), both founded in 1948. A few of the galleries discussed here continued into the post-war era, though most did not. But as Houston boomed in those post-war decades, galleries by the score came (and often went, in fairly short order) to replace them. MFAH, CAMH and ALH have thrived and the art scene has grown exponentially. And yet, it seems worth remembering that even in those far-off times of the early 20th Century, there were already Houstonians working hard to show the world (and fellow Houstonians) that, "Houston is fast becoming a center of art."

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Genevieve Filson's Holiday drawing for Edward Mayo

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.

Back issues of the HETAG Newsletter are available via the [University of Houston Libraries Digital Library](#)

and

[The Portal to Texas History](#)

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Holiday prints by Carden Bailey, Forrest Bess and Gene Charlton, 1938