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AT HOUSTON, TEXAS DATE MARCH 8, 1985

CONTENTS: MELVIN CHIN COLLECTION:
1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION / CLIPPINGS

CAMERA OPERATOR Josie NUMBER OF EXPOSURES _____

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MELVIN CHIN COLLECTION

Contents in order of filming:

1. Biographical information/clippings
2. Bryant Park Commission information, 1985
3. Photographs/sketches/misc.

MELVIN CHIN COLLECTION

Owned and filmed by the Archives of American
Art, Smithsonian Institution. Given by Mr.
Melvin Chin, Houston, Texas, February 1985.

1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION/CLIPPINGS

Mel Chin

Birth : 11-21-51 Houston , Texas

Residence :
New York , New York 10002

Education : George Peabody College
Nashville , Tennessee
Bachelor of Arts 71-75

PRESENTATION CONTENTS :

ART IN PUBLIC SPACES - Drawings, slides , and notes.

" THE EARTH WORKS... SEE SAW " 1976
Main Street Festival , Houston, Texas

" THE MANILA PALM " 1978
Main Street/ Contemporary Arts Museum
Houston , Texas

" KEEPING STILL - The Great Wheel of China " 1979
University of Houston Clear Lake City

ADDITIONAL WORKS - Slides , catalogues

STATEMENT

VITA

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name : Melvin Chin
Address : ██████████
Houston , Texas 77096
Telephone : ██████████
Date/Place of Birth : November 21, 1951 Houston, Texas
Sex : Male
Height : 5' 10''
Weight : 155 lbs.

EDUCATION

High School : Bellaire High School
Houston, Texas
Graduated - Spring 1971
College : George Peabody College for Teachers
Nashville, Tennessee
Graduated - Summer 1975 with B.A. in Art

SHOWS / EXHIBITION / AWARDS

- 1980 Film : The Passion and the Pity by Joe Dugan
Leading role : M. Chin
- 1979 Installation : The Waterwheel / Keeping Still
University of Houston Clear Lake City /
- 1979 Performance : Bill Steen's "Tea Ceremony"
- 1979 The Flying Show
Lawndale Art Annex University of Houston
Center for Contemporary Art , New Orleans
- 1979 The Miniature Show
Lawndale Art Annex
- 1979 The DOOR Show
The Houston Festival '79
The Waco Art Center
- 1979 " FIRE " Exhibition
Contemporary Arts Museum
- 1978 Young Americans in Clay and Glass
Tucson Museum of Art
Museum of Contemporary Crafts (ACC) New York
- 1978 THE MANILA PALM : Monumental Sculpture for
Main St. 78
Sculpture currently on loan to the Contemporary
Arts Museum, Houston, Texas.
- 1977 One Man Show : Installation : Sand / Water
Environment and works in Wax.
Robinson Galleries
- 1977 Contemporary Arts Museum Auction / Exhibition
(FLOOD RELIEF Program)
- 1977 Houston Area Exhibition
- 1976 Main Street 1976 (Kinetic Earthworks- See-Saw)
- 1976 One Man Show - Robinson Galleries

continued next page

SHOWS / EXHIBITIONS / AWARDS Cont'd.

- 1976 The Modern Icon : The Houston Museum of Modern Art
- 1976 The Suburban Cell : Impromptu Exhibition
(One-Man Show at 3511 Main , Houston)
- 1976 The Young Houston Artists Exhibition :
The Houston Museum of Modern Art
- 1975 Robinson Galleries 6th Annual Christmas Show
- 1975 Two Man Show : Stokes Mansion
(Nashville , Tennessee)
- 1975 SeniorShow : Reabody College (Nashville)
- 1975 Tennessee Arts and Crafts Fair (Gallery of Honor)
- 1974 One Man Show : Cheekwood Museum
Nashville ,
- 1974 ACORN Show (Artist/Craftsmen of the Region of Nashville)
- 1974 WDCN-TV Action Art Auction (Art Exhibition: Honorable
Mention)
- 1974 Memphis Jewish Community Center Art Fair (First Place)
- 1974 Tennessee Arts & Crafts Fair (Two Purchase Awards)
- 1974 Three Man Show: 302 Avondale Gallery
(Houston, Texas)
- 1973 Cheekwood Museum: Painting & Sculpture Biennial
(Nashville, Tennessee)
- 1973 American Contemporary Arts & Crafts Slide Library
(Honorable Mention)
- 1973 Potsdam National Drawing Competition
- 1973 One Man Show: Harris County Center for the
Retarded (Houston, Texas)
- 1971 National Scholastic College Scholarship

DEC 1983

SYNOPSIS

William Gage lives in an abandoned store front on the edge of town and works a menial desk job in the subterranean levels of Central Corporation, a company that has been involved with unspecified covert activities in underdeveloped countries. He joined the Central Corp. along with Katherine Hellinger, his former girlfriend in his politically active days, with hopes of altering this corrupt system from the inside. That has not happened. Now he is bored, unhappy, and sarcastic with his assimilation. To add to his problems he is suffering from what appears to be narcolepsy - and is plagued by dreams in the configurations of Goya etchings (selected from Los Caprichos by Francisco Goya y Lucientes.)

Katherine Hellinger does not appear to share his ordeal. She has scaled the corporate ladder and now is the cool and powerful head of Central Corporation.

Living next to Gage in the same storefront and on the streets among modern ruins is an apparent vagrant. He is, in fact, Kurt, a modern day Diogenes, equipped with a shopping cart. Kurt's actions echo the Greek philosopher of Sinope's zen-like performances.

The Chameleon simply appears and transforms throughout the film and after selecting William Gage as his role model; his actions become a catalyst for Gage's destiny.

The interactions of these characters bring about a series of transformations - Hellinger from apparent, banal evil - to return to original purpose (actually never having straved.) The Chameleon in Gage's clothing, whose act of terrorism

is calculated to bring to light evidence necessary to undermine the corruption and misapplied power. It is finally revealed that he is in association with Katherine Hellinger.

Kurt and/or Diogenes, convinced that in Gage he has found his honest man, seeks Gage only as far as it takes to have Gage find him. Ironically, at the moment of realization, Diogenes dies.

Gage, throughout the film, is seeking a way of being; unplagued by dreams, disassociated from past ineptitudes, and finally, released from his internal struggle between thought and action.

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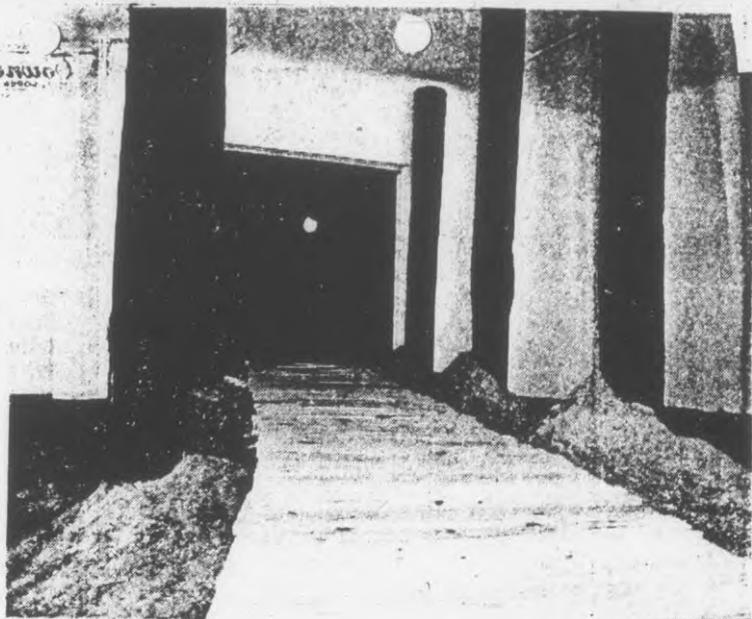
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Reviews

Gallery roundup



Mel Chin's environment at Robinson Galleries

By MIMI CROSSLEY
Post Art Writer

Mel Chin: *New Works and Installation*, Robinson Galleries, 1100 Bissonnet. Mel Chin is a young Houston artist who creates works with great delicacy, and then every now and then turns around and makes a giant environmental piece: for instance, his "earth seesaw" at the last Main Street Festival, where hidden hydraulic lifts were supposed to move the earth mysteriously up and down; or take, please, Chin's latest in the gallery here — 10 tons of sand in Ann Robinson's front room.

The sand is part of a Galveston beach and dock environment, with underlit boards and oversize poles leading a viewer (nearly hunched up next to the gallery ceiling) right into some moonlit, oil-slick looking water. The effect is remarkable, to say the least.

But interest in Chin's art really comes from his pressed-glass collages and new wax-works. In the past couple of years, Chin has borrowed a lot of interesting literary and visual material, from 19th century Japanese wood block prints to French Symbolist poets. In this show, Chin creates a free-hanging collage be-

tween two plates of glass with a Greek theme: Arachnea, who turns into a spider. Using a bit of wax in that work turned Chin on to pressing, incising and molding wax at different temperatures to create three fascinating landscapes that could be beachscapes, snowscapes or imaginary gardenscapes.

The artist blends and contrasts delicate lines with crude, ordinary materials; and delicate effects with materials in crude lines and forms. The wax flirts with many kinds of illusion — it is water, it is fog and ice with light shining through; it is collapsed space that somehow extends into air like projected film.

The idea of illusion is carried through into a standing screen Chin calls "Two Frozen Palms," that uses a lot of references to Japanese prints and Hollywood decor. On one glass panel, Chin painted a palm tree in a kind of crazy, cracked glaze, with the palm casting a shadow on another panel, made of white stucco set in on top with a view of the Hollywood Hills. The third panel uses real, pressed foliage in glaze and wax. Its beauty and crude/delicate balance carry it beyond parody.

Chin's last work in the show is the bridge between his smaller works and the environmental piece: it is a flattened

aquarium with a large-scale bamboo fishing pole sticking out into the gallery, using an old fool-the-eye cliché of catching fish in paintings. The gallery is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, and the show will be up through the holidays.

Nell Blaine: Paintings and Watercolors, Watson/De Nagy & Co., 1106 Berthea. In the 1950s, Nell Blaine's figure and landscape paintings were everywhere in New York. She studied with Hans Hofmann, was the youngest member of the American Abstract Artists group. She has had more than 70 group shows since 1940.

But in the early 1960s, Blaine was struck with polio while in Greece, and was airlifted out. Reference to her illness and incredible physical struggle to recover is made only to measure her human and artistic accomplishment: because Nell Blaine, though confined to a wheelchair, did recover and has proceeded to develop an important series of landscapes, still life pictures and interiors.

Of the 10 oil board paintings, six watercolors and one drawing exhibited here, Blaine shows strong, gay colors in easy-looking, but difficult compositions, where bright hues must be balanced in shallow

Report from Houston Texas Red Hots

BY LUCY R. LIPPARD

Last year, fired with enthusiasm (and, I suspect, burned up at the almost universal disdain ambitious regional art museums seem to have for local artists), Texas sculptor James Surls proposed to the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston that he organize an all-state show of 100 artists. Somewhere along the line the stage was set; the museum accepted the resignation of its director James Harithas (now an artist), and Surls himself was elected to the Board of Trustees of the prestigious Houston Museum of Fine Arts. (Painter Lynne Randolph was also nominated, but apparently one artist was deemed enough; even so, the Houston Museum is a rarity in the institutional world for its acknowledgment that artists just might know enough about art to help make policy.)

The show Surls selected, with the intentionally transformative and explosive title "Fire!," filled the huge, mostly open space of the museum's main exhibition floor and did so with great gusto, demonstrating a marvelous disregard for the niceties of most curatorial installations. It was crowded and heterogeneous. Striped paintings were not hung next to other striped paintings or even color field paintings. Themes were not confined to single *salles*. Women and Chicanos were not in ghettos. The exhibition was a great, sprawling (surely Texan) conglomeration, ranging in style from desert landscapes and fishing boats not quite in the sunset to traditional Chicano lacy paper cut-outs to abstract video and other avant-garde manifestations of very mixed mediums.

This was a regional show par excellence. It was selected by Surls himself on a far from systematic basis, which of course has not left everybody happy. (As a critic and sometime curator, I have always enjoyed seeing artists experience the difficulties of dealing with artists from a curatorial standpoint.) First he chose work he already knew and liked, and then that recommended to him by people he knew. He did not go look at everything available, although the geographical distribution seemed broad (from Houston to Dallas and San Antonio; from Splendor to Grapevine). Of the 100 artists about one third were women, about one seventh had Hispanic names, and many would not be shown at the "better" New York galleries—which is not necessarily a value judgment. I didn't like all the work or even the installation of the show so much as I liked its spirit, its unabashed rough edges, the risks it took, the choices it left up to the

"Fire," an exhibition of works by 100 contemporary Texas artists, bypassed the niceties of most curatorial installations and was exceptional for its spirit, heterogeneity, unabashed rough edges and active engagement of the viewer.

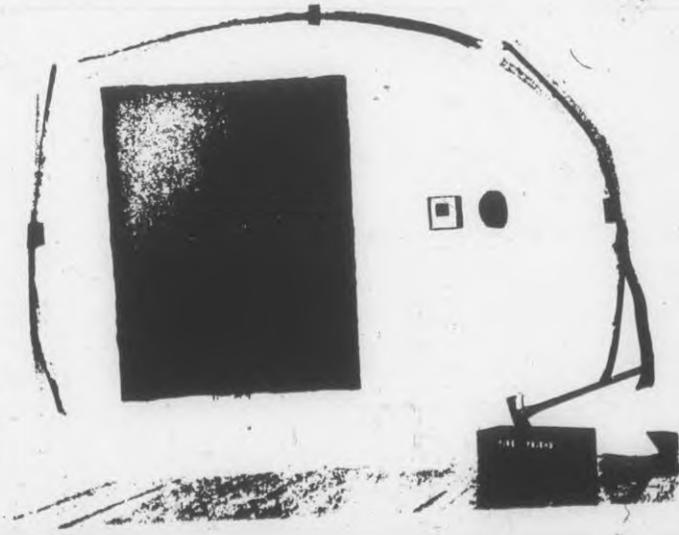
viewer. (Having artists choose the Whitney Biennial would at least counteract the numbing institutionalism which has overtaken that show among so many others.)

Because "Fire!" was more about local vitality than about "quality" (though the two are not mutually exclusive), it was the kind of show that made a lot of work look better than it probably was and evened out the odds against the rougher diamonds. Abstract painting that demands a good deal of

white space, reverence and kindred company does not fare well in this kind of situation. Sculpture does better, for the most part, since it usually commands its own territory. Photography manages too, as do strange, private works that you have to really pay attention to to see at all. So here are some of the things I liked—a breathy list that reflects my rapid transit (until I'd seen the whole show I had had no intention of writing about it, and I didn't have time to go through it again). Any other viewer would have had a different list. There was something for everybody but the purist.

Several artists took on the show's inflammatory theme, as Lynn Lennon did in her photo self-portrait in a burning house (she also had a show downstairs—extraordinary portraits of people in the quasi-Appalachian "Big Thicket" region of Texas, accompanied by tapes of their storytellers). Andy Mann piled five TV sets in a pyramid, each one with a different and formally fascinating image of fire in black and white, and the top one combining all five. Mel Chin's *Jamaica*, a room-like landscape environment, referred to a (perhaps fictional) incident in which adobe bee-

James Hill, *Fire Statement-Friend Statement*, 1979, nails, paint, glass, photograph, twine and axe, 10 feet high.





gallery view with Gertrude Barnstone's *Dos Tres*, *Quatro Equis*, left foreground; Manuel Mauricio's untitled table with broken brown glass; Roy Fridge's sailing *Canoe*; Jessie Lott's *Zoroastera*, the standing figure; Frank McGuire's untitled tripod in steel; James Malone's *Heart of Texas*, suspended from the ceiling; and Charles Pebworth's carved mahogany piece, right foreground. Below: Charmaine Locke's *The Powers*.

ive huts were burned in a snowy landscape, recalling some past racial persecution.

Roy Fridge showed a full-scale sailing canoe and Frank McGuire an indestructible viewing platform made for surveying city streets. I liked Linnea Glatt's three-part titillation rock bristling with volcanic tufts, and Charmaine Locke's over-life-size dancing couple totally bound in cloth the floor of the earth, the woman holding a basket under one arm. I liked Jeanne Mason's three-panel abstraction, Linda Edgway Taylor's delicate *Trappist* sculpture, Carmen Garza's and Xavier Gorena's over-mentioned doily-like cutouts, Otis Szier's almost tourist painting of *Black Mesa*, James Hill's huge installation piece which the "statement" is a broken mirror, Joe B. Rodriguez' small watercolor fantasy, Earl Staley's big expression-painting of *Hell*, Velox Ward's near-mimic oil of oxen and covered wagon, and Surls's spiky woven landscape, Rick

Maxwell's sexy earthy oil, Juan Vela's angry painting of cops beating up Chicano men, Carol Simms's ceramic *Shrine*, and Lynne Randolph's disturbing and provocative calendar-like painting of an Indian boy worshipping at a spring (though I liked other works of hers, seen elsewhere, better—which would clearly have gone for many of these artists, had I been in Texas-longer). And I liked the wooden cart containing eggs and nests and horns by Surls himself, whose straightforwardly idealistic text in the brochure says: "There is no reason to create an image just for the sake of creating an image. One of the principal components of art is message. Art with no message is not art. We must have rhymes, rhythms and patterns, for they give us order. In them we find the structure of our societies." He also asks a question being pondered all over these days: "Where are our visionaries?" To which I'll add my own: "Does the hope for rebirth of communication in the visual arts lie in *The Regions*?" □



ART AND MONEY IN THE

B Y P E T E R S C H J E L D A H I

CAN CIVILIZATION BE BOUGHT? THE HOUSTON FEELING SEEMS TO BE: WHY NOT?

Introduction

Like any northerner I brought stereotypes along on this, my first visit to Texas and Houston. Experience has wiped out or altered most of them, but one has firmed up into a moral conviction: Houston is moneyland, where the money goes. Culture? Money, full of promises, practically is the culture here—as if the city's ballooning wealth were a giant escrow account for untold future splendors. Can civilization be bought? The Houston feeling seems to be: Why not? In New York the answer would be: Of course not. But then New York *has* to think that way. It may possess most of the nation's cultural brains and treasure, but like a dowager queen in a decaying palace its emotions are divided between ancestral pride and the daily hysteria of crumbling tablecloths and broken plumbing. All the money in the world could not, indeed, buy a civilization like New York's. But at this point perhaps all the money in the world wouldn't want to.

It's hard to find anyone in this city who isn't some kind of visionary. The ordinary citizen, the man-in-the-freeway, is a compulsive seer, peeking around cloud corners at the future, which he pronounces terrific. This ought to be scary somehow, pride going before a fall—just asking for it. But the economic logic, at least, seems impeccable. (Gimme an O, gimme an I, gimme an L.) The big trouble with such future-think is that it entails a present negligence—as if today's realities, being subject to change, are scarcely worth bothering about. This really is asking for it, I think. There is a hint of trauma in such mindlessness, of anxiety in the face of

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breakneck growth—a small trembling of the hand on the throttle. Things seem never very far, in Houston, from being completely out of control. This is exciting and frightening.

I spent almost four months of 1979, from June to October, in Houston. (Summering in Houston, wintering in New York—it's been that kind of year for me.) Most of the last month was spent nosing around the art world, testing two hypotheses: (1) there is one, and (2) it's worth writing about. Both checked out from the start: Houston has an art world, and one intensely conscious of itself as Houstonian. The incredibility of the city is mirrored in the incredulity of its art people, dizzied by the precariousness of their position and the possible vastness of their prospects. Art being the last thing most humans think of, the need that takes them by surprise when their other needs are met, the rate of baser satisfaction here would seem to promise a delay-fuse art boom like—well, like nothing ever before in America. Still, the fact is that *only* a true boom will do to make Houston's art world nationally substantial. It remains essentially provincial, spotty, flimsy, with patches of luxuriance separated by large stretches where nothing grows. And if any time soon the unthinkable happened and there were an economic downturn here, the art scene would go out like a candle in a tropical depression. Its continued growth will require more than luck, but it will require luck, too.

It may be testimony, nonetheless, to the already robust size of Houston's art world that in two and a half weeks of investigation I didn't get to anywhere near all of it. I saw maybe a couple of dozen artists and a dozen dealers, plus museum people, educators, consultants, and collectors, but I missed plenty. Actually this is also testimony to Houston's character as a car town. My dominant memory of those days is of sitting in my Avis waiting for green lights, the air conditioner recirculating my rancid cigarette smoke, the street map falling to shreds in my hands. Often enough the car would just turn around and take me home. I decided my research was over when I lost a bundle of notes containing all my lists of names and phone numbers—left, I believe, atop a pay phone outside a U-Tote-M on Westheimer. That seemed a sign I'd be rash to ignore. Anyway, I feel badly toward the people I didn't get to meet, and for the distortions their absence will cause here. The reader will please keep in mind that what follows is a partial as well as an outsider's view.

A Lot of Us Would Like to See It Happen From Texas

Betty Moody said that to me, in her bustling little gallery at the River Oaks shopping complex. Betty's is the most pure "regional" of the serious contemporary galleries in Houston, featuring artists with strong local reputations such as Bol Camblin, Lucas Johnson, Don Shaw, and Jack Boynton, plus artists from Arkansas and Louisiana. Her operation is neither the most frugal nor the most extravagant in town. She didn't say by what margin she is clearing the break-even hurdle these days, but the implication was: by a lot. Her success may not be typical of all Houston galleries but it is starting to be of perhaps most of them. What is emphatically typical is her commitment to the growth and acceptance of art here; scarcely one or two of the dealers I talked to did not mention "education" as among their functions. And any number of people gave me some version of Betty Moody's hope.

"A lot of us would like to see it happen from Texas." To my ear, that sentence has real Texas rhythm; you don't hear phrasing quite like that anywhere else in the country. It sprawls. It has lots of words and a kind of additive syntax, like a freight train being pulled—or pushed, rather—jostling along: "a lot of us" being the locomotive inexorably shoving the front car, "Texas," toward the top of the grade. But I'm really intrigued by Betty Moody's sentence because the most important word in it—"it"—is also the most indefinite. What is this "it" that should "happen from Texas"? A prosperous little art market? A splashy art "scene"? A "cultural Mecca"? A renaissance? I often get the feeling with Texans that they hate to wish too specifically, lest by setting their sights too low they miss out on bigger rewards. So Betty Moody's "it" may be just whatever can be gotten, whatever of the material and the ineffable comes within widest reach, the sky's the limit. *Go for it.*

If money is the culture in Houston, this kind of conjugal hopping is money's scout and advance party. Here, it keeps saying, *this way water, green valley*. Greed has something but far from everything to do with it, unless we can talk also of a spiritual greed, a hungering after immaterial capital of which material riches are just an outward sign. (As opposed to California, say, where the material positively is it.) And what's better at symbolizing this middle-class mysticism than

straight dealing—so far with Tracy, Dick Wray, and Suzanne Manns. His pro-Houstonism is a matter of settled conviction. "We're making it here. Houston is a new frontier. This is new ground where *anything* can come up—including weeds, of course, but you have to work through the weeds to get to the flowers."

Fredericka Hunter of Galveston, educated at Wellesley and in the New York art world, came to Houston in the early Seventies and got involved in a print business that became her present **Texas Gallery**, run with partner Ian Glennie. It is probably the most avant-garde (by Texas standards) in the city. She has wanted "to bring in a balance of East and West Coast art," with "a predilection for the use of new materials in the abstract painting tradition." Her initial audience was "about zero. New York artists would come down for their openings, and maybe three or four people would show up." Now "contemporary art is a more acceptable subject of conversation," but collecting the stuff is still widely regarded as "too New Yorkish"; and

"a studied anti-intellectualism in Texans" continues to make social acceptance of difficult art rough sledding. "My father still wishes I'd get a job!" The gallery's style is low key. "The art itself is shocking enough; you have to present it in a very straightforward manner."

Fredericka Hunter: 'New York artists would come down for their openings, and maybe three or four people would show up.'

Watson/de Nagy, by the sheer number of artists it handles, somewhat resembles Meredith Long, only with a more firmly contemporary flavor. Run by **Marvin Watson** and **Clint Willour**, it shares in the stable of the **Tibor de Nagy Gallery** of New York,

which means lots of sophisticated landscape painting and latter-day color field, "Greenbergian" abstraction (e.g., **Walter Darby Bannard**). Its local painters include **Robin Utterback**, **Dee Wolfe**, and color-fielder **Basilios Poulos**. A second space, the **Watson/Willour Gallery**, has been opened in River Oaks to show more work by the **Watson/de Nagy** artists. (I saw some beautiful paintings there by a Galveston artist, **Jane Allensworth**.) There is a definite air of prosperity, and Willour confirms it. Sales have been particularly good, he said, to a new class of "young collectors," mostly professionals in the 30-to-45 age group. Plus a former pride of Texas collectors in saying "I bought it in New York" is giving way to pride in saying "I bought it here," according to Willour.

Other galleries that represent Houston artists and show some interesting imported work include **DuBose, Hooks-Epstein, Harris, Little Egypt Enterprises, T. V. Robinson**, and **Fredericka Hunter's** new youth-oriented **Texas Gallery Annex**. **Betty Moody** is talked about elsewhere in these pages.

interesting ones I didn't get to at all. So what follows is no all-star team (though it may look like one), but just a sampler of a scene increasingly rich and varied. For the most part I've passed over more established names in favor of artists in early or mid-career who seem to me to occupy distinct positions.

Mel Chin grew up in Houston, went away to school, and came back. He is Chinese-American, 27, and a dissenter from what he sees as the values of his city. He was a favorite of **Jim Harithas**, and a mammoth Chin sculpture—a palm tree thrusting up out of a pyramid—is parked in the backyard of

the CAM. It's typical of his work in being at once grandiose and hermetic, attention-grabbing and secretive in meaning. He seems to enjoy such contradictions. He told me he likes the "antagonism" he perceives between art and society in Houston, between the independent creator and "this strange power,

James Surls



Gael Stack



Lynn Randolph



Robin Utterback

money." Chin's is a heady, difficult position, further complicated by the expensiveness of his projects, which require patronage for both fabrication and siting. But he is transparently sincere, and unless and until he is ambushed by public acceptance his paradox-ridden stance will maintain a certain power.

Roberta Harris' "studio" is typical of a city in which unused loft or other industrial space—standard nesting ground for artists elsewhere—is just about nonexistent; almost everything in Houston happens in houses. Harris' bungalow, innocent-looking without, is largely consumed inside by dervish art-making. The imagery of her semiabstract drawing and sculpture might be described as sunstruck Surrealism—chipper stylizations of birds, face parts, stars, half moons, hearts, fish. She refers to some works, in which brightly painted cut-out shapes are slotted and stacked, as her "doodly totems." This is not a very demanding art, but it's zippy, poised, and pleasurable. Harris attributes its insouciance partly to the sensuous ambience of Southeast Texas: "The sun shines here."

Suzanne Manns sounds like any Houstonian new-minted in the aerospace or petrochemical industry: "If you have anything to offer, any proficiency, you're in demand here." After stints at Carnegie Tech and the Rhode Island School of Design, Manns immigrated six years ago with her proficiency, which is printmaking. She now heads the

well-equipped graphics department of the MFA's Glassell School. Her own works—portmanteaus of technique, including etching, lithography, Xerox, and direct drawing, and of content, including Houston cityscape and autobiographical reference—have begun catching on with local collectors. Judging from the few pieces I saw, Manns' work is not free of the rather diffuse, unconcentrated quality that often goes with such eclecticism—and, can it be, with the lack of local competition? But she is terrifically gifted and skilled, and I'm inclined to expect a lot from her.

Suzanne Manns on immigrating to Houston: 'If you have anything to offer, any proficiency, you're in demand here.'

Manual is the *nom d'art* of a husband-and-wife team of photographer-artists, Suzanne Bloom and Ed Hill. They arrived in Houston from Smith College in Massachusetts not quite four years ago to teach at UH. Their work is strongly "conceptual,"

combining photos, writing, and collage in ways that allude to philosophy and other art. It's challenging and often very appealing stuff, and no brief description can convey its wit, variety, and flair. Hill and Bloom's aesthetic mode puts them in a distinct minority—practically all by themselves, in fact—in Houston. Still, they have become active and well-liked participants in the community here, and they seem to derive a lot of energy from the place. They showed me an album made while they were moving: photos, on facing pages, of Northhampton, Massachusetts, and of Houston. The New England shots were rather elegiac, peplless; the Houston shots were sensational.

Gael Stack's life has taken her from Chicago to Wisconsin to Los Angeles to Houston; she has been here six years now, "and I can't hardly believe it." But her drawing and painting have prospered, developing in some recent "diary" paintings—suave, ambiguous fields of layered, smeared, scrubbed-down oil paint, alive with fugitive hues and stuttering, childlike notations—a formidable magic. They are like emulsions of frivolity and mystery, the poles of a typical Stackism: "I liked art better when you wore it or prayed to it." She likes the absence of pressure in Houston, as opposed to New York: "Art is so *serious* there," she says. "I run in low gear." But she worries about it a little, too: "I can imagine just sort of *resting* here." So far, so good.

Mel Chin



Earl Staley



Ben Woitena



Suzanne Manns

THE
HOUSTON FESTIVAL

A CELEBRATION OF THE CITY AND THE ARTS MARCH 18-28, 1982



A CIVILIZED FACE

by EVA ARCHER-SMITH

If as lovers of the arts argue, a nation or city's cultural life is the civilized face of its society, then support for the arts is valuable, indeed necessary, for its own sake.

The Visual Arts Committee of The Houston Festival, composed of distinguished Houston artists and art historians, has become one of the single most important forces encouraging the creation of new, serious art in Houston.

Already, since its establishment four years ago, it has been responsible for the commissioning of over 50 new works of art. Some of these pieces have become permanent additions to the Houston landscape. Others have gone on the road, or spawned more new work. Roberta Harris' "Southern Venus" sculpture, for example, is on loan to Houston's Jewish Community Center.

Members of the Committee are appointed to serve a one-year term. Serving as members of this year's Committee are: Marti Mayo, chair, curator, Contemporary Arts Museum; Roberta Harris, artist and instructor at the Museum of Fine Art Glassell School of Art; Fletcher Mackey, artist; Bill Robinson, director, Sarah Campbell, Blaffer Gallery; Anne Tucker, curator of photography, Museum of Fine Arts; and Ben Woitena, sculptor, member, Municipal Arts Commission.

For the 1982 Festival, the Committee has commissioned works of art from three Houston artists: Mel Chin, Charmaine Locke and Jesse Lott.

Each is to receive a \$5000 grant to create a work for display at The Houston Festival 1982.

• JESSE LOTT •

In the grand tradition of the Southwest, the Houston Festival will climax with a lively piñata party... courtesy of artist Jess Lott.

Jesse, a "native-as-you-can-be" Houstonian, has been commissioned to create two works for the 1982 Festival. The first, "A Typical Texas Scene," is a four-piece ("single piece in multiple units") piñata. The free-standing, 15-foot structures are constructed from corrugated paper which has been laminated (put together in layers.)

The "Scene" employs what Jesse calls "recognizable Texas clichés" like the jackalope, longhorn, cowboy and armadillo. "It'll be fun... a gag for the people," he says.



The materials for the piñatas have been donated by Anne Harithas, an avid Arts and Houston Festival supporter. The piñatas will be filled with prizes and, on the last day of the Festival, according to Jesse, "Everyone can just grab a stick and we'll have a piñata party... the idea is group participation."

"A Tower of Light," Jesse's second piece for the 1982 Festival, is a presentation of "stained glass phenomenon." The three-dimensional, free-standing figure is 20 feet tall and is made from various transparent, colored materials... such as unleaded stained glass, cellophane, plastic and mirrors. Lit by natural light, its purpose is to display the "simple phenomenon of visual stimuli."

Jesse's message? Just enjoy. "Here it is" is always the message, he says... "and whatever the people see, they see."

• MEL CHIN •

Mel Chin is an intense young artist in search of his soul. His art, he says, is simply a way to express this search, one that is common to all humankind. "I'd like to dispel any elitist concept of the artist. We all need to look deep inside ourselves to find who we are... artists simply express what they find in a certain way. I think setting artists apart has contributed to the separation of art from culture."

It's impossible to say when an idea is born. But for Mel, the idea for his Houston Festival painting "came four or five years ago and then lingered on."



The scene that caught Mel's eye — and imagination — originated in a Houston cemetery. The result is a moving scene of two large palm trees flanking a distant stucco tower. A split moon and sinkhole add to the drama of the "allegorical landscape." The 11-by-13 foot scene is painted on two separate canvasses, joined in the middle.

Art, of course, Mel emphasizes is the process, not the product. The process for this piece has taken months of sketching, resketching, stretching canvas across the solid platforms and then beginning the painting process. The process used on this piece is encaustic (meaning "to burn in"), an ancient Greek and Roman technique of melting beeswax, coloring it with natural pigments, such as metal oxides and ground earth pigments, and applying it to canvas. Once the wax is applied, it is remelted and manipulated to simulate certain textures.

All in all, over 100 pounds of beeswax have been applied to the canvas. Mel used a small brush for most of the painting and a shaving brush for the "broad" strokes. The painting will be on display at the First International Bank lobby during the Festival, in an enclosed environment built by the artist.

Mel has participated in the Houston Festival for several years and supports the "Festival's purpose of bringing art to the people." In 1978, he constructed a palm tree for the Festival which is now on permanent display behind the Contemporary Arts Museum. He has exhibited in Houston and New York City, but is not showing anywhere now. "I've made a conscious decision not to go the gallery route," he says. "I'm doing things I want to do. Things I think need to be done."

• CHARMAINE LOCKE •

What does our urban environment tell us about ourselves? Sculptor Charmaine Locke explores this question in the figure housed in a dome which she has constructed for The Houston Festival. These two forms have become the hallmark of this young Houston artist... forms, she says, which have innate appeal, humanize contemporary arts and make a conscious and concerned statement about people and their surroundings.

"My concern in my sculpture is people and the psychological ramifications of the buildings we live among," she explains.

The underlying tenet of Charmaine's philosophy and work is that people are intimately and powerfully influenced by their surroundings and the more we can see ourselves reflected in our environment, the more comfort we experience.



The disturbing trend of twentieth century urban life is that we have built huge boxes into the sky. These rectangle edifices, though efficient, are unnatural, inhuman shapes and induce, she says, a sense of panic, fear and alienation.

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ARTPLAY

Artplay is always one of the most successful facets of The Houston Festival, and this year will be no exception. Sara Norton, Director of the Sherwood Forest Montessori School, is heading the Artplay Committee, and is ensuring that Artplay projects for 1982 will invite and encourage people of all ages to participate. This year's list of fanciful events include canvas painting, wood construction and collage projects, face painting, danceplenade, and many other participatory projects including a special sculpture to be constructed by the people of Houston during The Houston Festival under the direction of Jim Bernier. Artplay centers in Tranquility Parks I and II from 10:30-6 PM on weekends and 10:30 - 3 PM on weekdays.

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HOURLY SHOW

AND THE ENDLESS CHECKLIST

by ANNE FELTUS

The 37-Hour Show and the Endless Checklist. It's a novel approach to art exhibition in Houston. It's a wide-open, no-strings-attached event in which any artist can participate, any art medium can be displayed. And it will be presented March 20-28 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Alfred C. Glassell, Jr. School of Art, as one of the Houston Festival's visual arts events.

It works like this: Houston artists interested in participating can bring their work to the school, 5101 Montrose, during the 37 hours from 8 a.m. March 19 to 9:00 p.m. March 20. The only restrictions are that the work not exceed 36 inches at any point and that it be ready to mount on the wall. At 1:00 p.m. March 21, the show goes on public view, providing festival visitors a glimpse of the wide range of talents found in Houston's art community.

Organizing an exhibition of this kind — that breaks many of the traditional guidelines of art display — was no easy task. The job fell to the festival's Visual Arts Committee, a group of Houston artists and art historians well-established in their respective fields: two museum curators; Anne Tucker of The Museum of Fine Arts, and committee chairperson Marti Mayo of the Contemporary Arts Museum; three artists: Municipal Arts Council member Ben Woitena; Roberta Harris, a former festival

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MEDIA ARTS

Media Arts in the 1982 Houston Festival will again be presented in association with the Southwest Alternate Media Project (SWAMP), a non-profit media center funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Texas Commission on the Arts, and the Cultural Arts Council of Houston.

The film and video that will be shown at The Houston Festival is produced by independent media artists working in the Southwest, principally in Texas. All events will be held at the Rice Media Center, located on the Rice University campus, University Boulevard at Stockton Street.

High-School Film and Video Competition

Saturday, March 20

1-4 pm Special Effects in Film

featuring JOHN FISCHNER

1-3 pm History and Myth in Film

featuring BRIAN HUBERMAN

2-5 pm Special Effects in Video

featuring JEFFREY FOLEY

3-5 pm Television Production — day to day

featuring BETTI MALDONADO

7:30 pm Best of Festival Screenings

and awards for the best film and video

TEXPO Film and Video Festival

Saturday, March 27

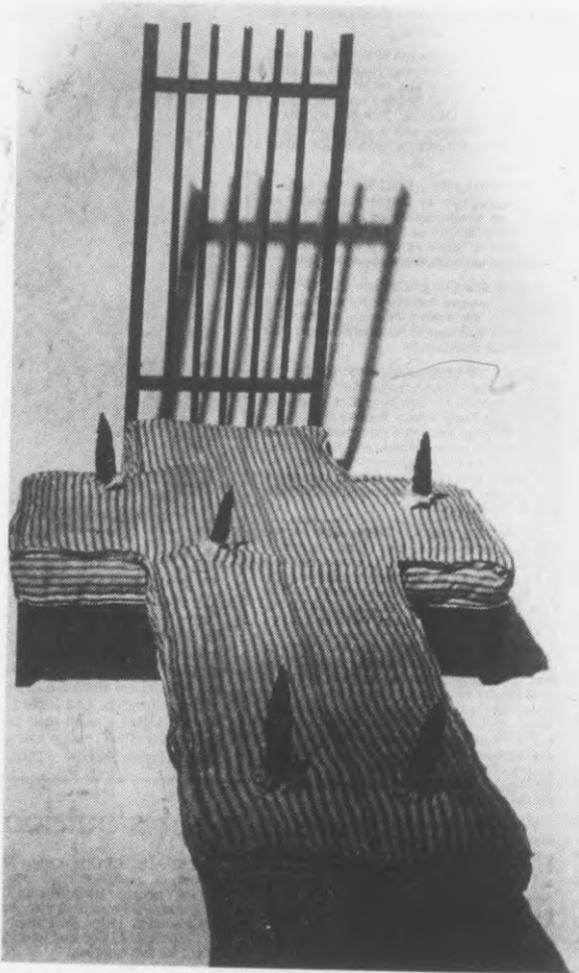
The eighth annual presentation of film and video from Texas and the Southwest.

WILLIAM STEEN PERFORMANCE "TIMES"

Sunday, March 28

"Matrix of recorded and live music, video, film, and projected slide images. Several performers and musicians, including two William Steens." Running time: 30 minutes to 3 hours. William Steen has exhibited and performed in Texas, New York, and Europe.





Mel Chin's mixed media Prisoner of Conscience piece entitled *Jilava Hospital Bed for Father Gheorghii Calciu — Dumitreasa*.

Art for the disappeared

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA Group 23 and 21 Houston artists are presenting a very special art exhibition entitled *Prisoners of Conscience*. The public opening reception will be Friday from 6 to 9 p.m. at Studio One, 1511 Congress.

Amnesty International is a worldwide human rights movement that works impartially for the release of prisoners of conscience, men and women detained anywhere for their beliefs, color, ethnic origin, sex, religion or language, provided they have neither used nor advocated violence.

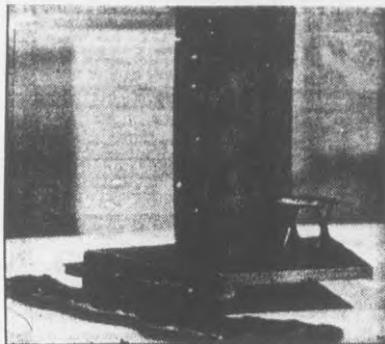
Over the summer, each artist was "assigned" the case of one prisoner of conscience as the subject for his or her work. These are people who are in prison or who have "disappeared" in countries all over the world, from Ar-

gentina to the Philippines, Zaire to Taiwan to Czechoslovakia to El Salvador.

Among the 21 artists are Derek Boshier, Mel Chin, David Crossley, Dorothy Hood, Frank McGuire, William Steen and Robin Utterback. All the art work will be for sale in silent auction during Friday's reception and the first week of the exhibit. All proceeds benefit Amnesty International.

The exhibition will continue at Studio One through Oct. 15, be on display at the Houston Public Library (500 McKinney) Dec. 6-31, then travel to New Orleans for the month of January. For additional information contact Linny Goldstein, group leader of Amnesty International USA Group 23 at 522-0886 days, 529-1892 evenings.

— PATRICIA C. JOHNSON.



Frank McGuire's steel sculpture, *Splendor a Stars*.

'Seen, Unseen' worth a visit

BY PATRICIA C. JOHNSON
Chronicle Staff

The new exhibit at Diverse Works Inc. is an exciting show. As its title implies, *Seen and Unseen* brings together 11 artists who are or are not visible in the community. They range from those who are well-known and respected but all-too-seldom exhibited — Mel Chin and Frank McGuire, especially — to a few who have not been shown before — like Marci Debock-Conner and Jayne Kinney — and those who have shows with some degree of regularity — Viveka Barnett, David Caton and Benito Huerta.

It is worth a visit if only to see the works of Chin and McGuire. Mel Chin's *Delta Wheel* is a project for a self-generating/illuminating waterwheel. The moquette and the drawing in the show are crafted with the reticent care that is Chin's. The waterwheel is set on the surface of the water and is framed by a walkway on four sides. The action of the water's current turns the wheel, creating ripples and visual excitement, and simultaneously generates enough electricity to illuminate itself. The fluorescent lights are attached under the wooden walkways; they are reflected on the surface, and slivers of light stab through the boards to create a meditative environment.

McGuire, like Chin, is seldom exhibited in Houston, although his resume is full of shows held around the country, notably as one of eight members of ConStruct, a Chicago-based group of sculptors that organizes exhibitions of its members' works. McGuire works with steel and in the current exhibit presents three small works that are conceived as monumental public sculptures. The artist incorporates elements of the functional, a bench or a candleholder, for example, with architectural and sculptural components. Beautifully crafted, these objects possess both lyrical and intellectual properties that satisfy all the senses.

Viveka Barnett is one of the most imaginative young artists in the city. She employs unconventional materials to make free-standing or wall-dependent works that are whimsical in nature without forsaking the formal. In the current show, she presents two works made of plastic utensils that hang on the wall. They are tongue-in-cheek (no pun intended), relief-like pieces in which plastic spoons and plastic forks are collaged into feathery illusions. Can junk be art? It is not a new question, but Barnett supplies some rather fanciful responses.

The clay sculptures of Carter Ernst are made of stoneware and take full advantage of the material's earthiness. The free-form objects retain their organic properties, albeit the manipulation of the material and sporadic glazing. The pieces resemble ritual objects or decaying nature and consequently possess a kind of primitive aura that is nonetheless highly modern.

Marci Debock-Conner is heir to the magical surrealism of Joseph Cornell and makes no pretense at being otherwise. Her mixed medias — especially the assemblages — borrow freely from both his physical material and philosophical concerns. Debock-Conner is perhaps too young to have developed a language of her own, but in time, she may find solutions to her ideas that are less dependent on history.

Benito Huerta, guest curator of the exhibit, has included examples of his work, as well. The works on canvas or paper are structured around a grid pattern, wherein each area contains a separate image.

Others in the exhibit are David Caton, Don Cowan, Lynn Howland, Steve Murphy and Jayne Kinney. The show will remain on view through Oct. 28, 214 Travis, 223-8346. Hours are 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

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ENTERTAINMENT



Patricia C. Johnson / Chronicle

Houston artist hits N.Y. mark

Workers, above, install *Myrrha P.I.A.*, by Houston native Mel Chin, that was unveiled in New York City's Bryant Park this week. Chin, selected as the 1984 Bryant Park artist-in-residence, made the monumental steel and mixed media piece, at right, over a period of six months. The artist-in-residence program, begun in 1980, is co-sponsored by the Bryant Park Restoration Corp. and the city's Public Art Fund Inc. The sculpture will remain on location in the park at 42nd Street and the Avenue of the Americas through May 31.



United Press International

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By CARL Waco Trib

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