

**HETAG Newsletter No. 38, December 2019**



**Don Edelman *Untitled (Downtown Houston)* 1969**

These days Houston has become a hot (in more ways than one) travel destination. National, and even international, publications sing our praises. For instance:

[“36 Hours in Houston,”](#) by Andrew Ferren in *The New York Times*.

[“Houston Is a Food Lover’s Paradise,”](#) by Michael Andor Brodeou in *The Boston Globe*.

[“9 Great Reasons to Visit Houston in 2019,”](#) by Shivina Vora for CNN Travel.

[“A Day in Houston: 3 Meals, 3 Cultures, One City,”](#) by Sebastian Modak in *The New York Times*.

Much of the buzz focuses on food (YUM!), but our art environment also gets lots of attention – not surprising, given the opening in recent years of the Menil Drawing Institute and the Moody Center at Rice, the expansive public art program at University of Houston, the eagerly anticipated expansion of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and especially our vast and vivacious working artists and gallery scenes. Well-deserved and about time.

Yes, we have flaws. For one, there’s the temperature sense of that “hot” city designation, along with the humidity; and some may remember that in the 1890s James Perkins Richardson tried to discourage his sister, Emma Richardson Cherry, from leaving Denver to live in what he dubbed “a mud hole called Houston.” (Lucky for us, she came anyway.)

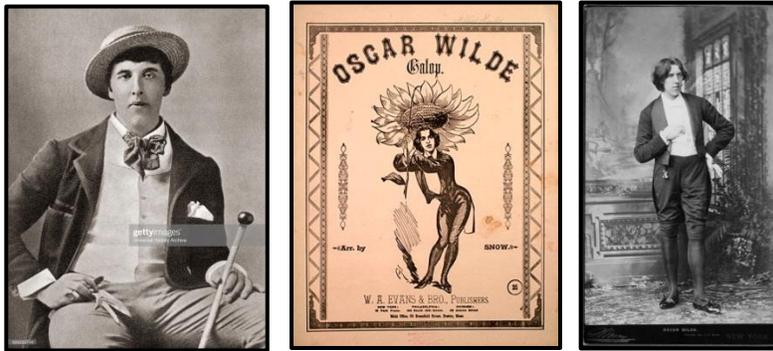
Even for all that, however, we still love Bayou/Space City, and its fabulous art. But even those of us in HETAG may be a little surprised and interested to learn that Houston has been a destination for some heavy hitters in the international art world for a long time. In this issue of the newsletter we look at just a few of those visitors from afar, and I can almost guarantee that some of them may surprise you.

## HOUSTON ART HISTORY NOTES: They Came to Houston!



David Adickes 1894 *Houston (Bird's Eye Map)* 1954. Mural originally painted for the Houston Club. The Heritage Society, Houston.

## Oscar Wilde 1882



In 1882, Oscar Wilde made quite a splash all across America with a tour that lasted the entire year. He lectured in large cities and small towns, spreading his philosophy of art for art's sake, turning himself into a flamboyant celebrity and aesthete, making himself famous a decade and more before he would become infamous later on.

On June 23, 1882, as part of his swing through Texas, he spoke in Houston at Gray's Opera House on the subject of "Decorative Arts." His audience was small, his style was "drawling," and he didn't catch on "very effectively."

HOUSTON, June 23.-

Oscar Wilde lectured here to-night to a small audience. The subject-matter is good, but his style is exceedingly drawling and affected. He has not caught on here very effectively.

*The Dallas Weekly Herald, June 29, 1882*

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But even so, at least one member of the audience hoped his views would be taken to heart by the Houstonians who heard him:

*The Houston Daily Post*, June 25, 1882

We think Mr. Wilde's manner, dress and delivery very unfortunate, but must confess that we cordially wish that his noble and blissful sentiments in respect to the ordering of a true and happy life would sink deep into the hearts of this people.

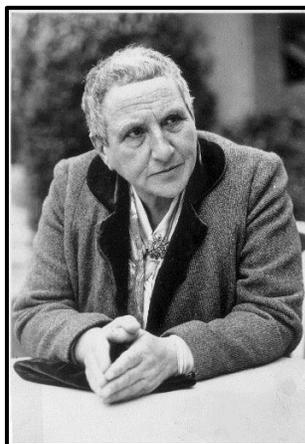
His assessment of Houston is not recorded, though he seems to have greatly liked San Antonio, where he lectured on June 21, and Galveston, on June 19, before an “immense audience,” though many found him “flat and insipid” and “left disgusted before the talk concluded.”

He didn't hold that against them, however. He noted that, "It was worth the trip from England to Galveston to see a magnolia tree."

He was also quite impressed that in Texas he was not treated like a stranger. “I was never once addressed as Stranger. When I went to Texas, I was called Captain.” “I was dubbed Colonel in Galveston and was fully invested with the title by the time I got to Houston. I shall write home to my friends of this new rank and promotion.”

Find out more about Wilde's 1882 visit to Houston, and his whole American tour, at the [OSCAR WILDE IN AMERICA](#) website.

### Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, 1935



Gertrude Stein, accompanied by her “secretary” Alice B. Toklas, arrived in Houston at 6:30, on March 23, 1935. Their stop here was part of Stein's own American lecture tour, following up on her recent elevation into the ranks of the famous after the publication of a bestselling book – *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* – and the production of the avant-garde opera on which she collaborated with composer Virgil Thomson – *Four Saints in Three Acts* (which actually had a dozen saints and four acts!).

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By 8:30 that evening, “Garrulous Gertie,” as one report in the newspaper dubbed her, was at the Junior League, delivering her lecture on “How Writing Is Written,” before an audience of 300. It seems that not everyone (anyone?) in the crowd found her compelling. In fact, some apparently thought her “nuts.” Not so, according to *Houston Chronicle* arts reporter Ina Gillespie Grotte. As proof, Grotte observed that, “Any woman who can get a crowd of 300 out to hear her expound these theories at \$1 a head and can turn around and sell thousands of people books along the same line, is more than sane, say I! But how about those of us who buy the books and pay the dollar? You answer that one.”

What Miss Stein thought of Houston is not recorded. Miss Toklas thought that, “The gardens are very pretty in Houston.” You can read more about their visit [HERE](#).

### Marcel Duchamp, 1957



Center: Marcel Duchamp in Houston, 1957, flanked by Houston artists Lowell Collins and Paul Maxwell; Left: Duchamp shown in the 1920s along with other members of the ultra-avant-garde *Société Anonyme, Inc.*, including Emma Richardson Cherry; Right: In June 1934 Cherry made a *Nude Descending a Staircase* costume for a party at her home, in a nod to Duchamp's famous painting.

Marcel Duchamp came to Houston in April 1957 in conjunction with the convention of the American Federation of the Arts in the city that year. This may have been his only visit to Houston, though as a by-then world-famous artist, he was already well known by art-interested Houstonians, and had been for decades, in part because of the avant-garde art-world connections of our own Emma Richardson Cherry.

What Duchamp thought of Houston, if anything, is not recorded, but the influential lecture he gave here, titled “The Creative Act,” is. You can listen to it [HERE](#) and read it [HERE](#).

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### Tamara de Lempicka, 1963-1974



Perhaps one of the most improbable of famous visitors to Houston was the painter of iconic Art Deco images, Tamara de Lempicka, shown here in her 1929 Autoportrait (Self-Portrait in a Green Bugatti) – improbable because she didn't just stop her on the way to somewhere else, she lived here for a 11 years, for a while at the Warwick Hotel (now the ZaZa).

It was the oil business rather than oil painting that prompted Lempicka's move to Houston, to be near her daughter Kizette, whose geologist husband worked for Dow Chemical. The fit between the notorious painter and Houston was not always easy – as when she badgered her son-in-law into painting purple stripes on his River Oaks house:

*"Cars slowed down as they passed the site, suddenly so incongruous among the neighborhood's stately houses and classical architecture. Finally Tamara was satisfied, but when Kizette returned, she forced her mother to abort the project. The stripes, however, remained for weeks, and 3235 Reba Drive became a kind of local tourist attraction."*

Eventually she moved on to Cuernavaca, Mexico. You can read more about Lempicka in Houston [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).

### **THE HERITAGE SOCIETY at Sam Houston Park needs our help!**

THS has received a 2-for-1 challenge from the Faith P. and Charles L. Bybee Foundation – raise \$25,000 by December 31, 2019, and receive \$50,000 from the foundation. Please help our friends at THS if you can, by donating via their Annual Fund Page [HERE](#).

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## EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS, CURRENT AND FUTURE:

### [Foltz Fine Art](#)

#### [Modernist Visions of the Southwest](#)

until December 21, 2019

Including works by Houston Modernists Jack Boynton, Herb Mears, Earl Staley, Richard Stout, and Dick Wray.

### [McClain Gallery](#)

#### [Dorothy Hood: Illuminated Earth](#)

until December 21, 2019

A career-spanning exhibition of the work of Dorothy Hood (1918-2000), who was and is one of the giants of Houston art.

Press coverage of the show: [Belated Acclaim for Dorothy Hood's Surreal Abstractions](#), by Lydia Payne *Hyperallergic* November 5, 2019.

### **Tyler Museum of Art**

#### [Bold Lines: Works By Joseph Glasco](#)

until February 16, 2020

**Taken from the TMA website:** *Bold Lines* surveys the vast body of work by Glasco (1925-1996), an artist born in Oklahoma but raised in Tyler. His artistic eye developed early as he grew up in East Texas, moving on to study art at the University of Texas at Austin before being drafted for military service in World War II.

After the war, Glasco lived in Dallas and drew advertisements for Dreyfuss Department Store before continuing his study of painting in Los Angeles and Mexico. His 1949 move to New York led to a friendship with collector Alphonso Ossorio, who introduced Glasco to several major artists of the era including Jackson Pollock and Jean Dubuffet. That same year, he became the youngest artist at the time to be included in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection when the institution acquired one of his drawings.

His career took off dramatically as a result of his inclusion in the groundbreaking 1952 MoMA exhibition *Fifteen Americans*, which also featured the work of luminaries such as Pollock, William Baziotes and Mark Rothko. Glasco's work eventually made its way into the permanent collections of some of the most prominent museums in the U.S. including the Guggenheim Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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***Bold Lines*** offers a glimpse at how Glasco's work evolved over the years from stylized representational forms to heavily patterned, geometric approaches to figures and eventually into the abstract collage painting and sculpture from his final years in Galveston, for which he is best known. The exhibition features four of Glasco's works held in the TMA's Permanent Collection in addition to pieces on loan from collections throughout Texas as well as the artist's estate.

### [The Grace Museum, Abilene](#)

#### [Up Close and Personal: Portraits from the Reaves Collection of Texas Art](#)

**September 7, 2019 – January 18, 2020**

This exhibition features a selection of artworks from the private collection of HETAGers, Bill and Linda Reaves, focusing on the human figure by well-known artists such as Kathleen Blackshear, Dixon Reeder, Stella Sullivan, Donald Vogel, Flora Reeder, Harold Bugbee, Cecil Casebier, Henry Gadbois, Edmund Kinzinger, Florence McClung, Leila McConnell, Kermit Oliver, and others.

### [El Paso Museum of Art](#)

#### [Tom Lea and World War II](#)

**until January 5, 2020**

From 1941 to 1946, El Paso native **Tom Lea** (1907-2001) served as a World War II eyewitness artist correspondent for Life magazine, becoming the only artist to provide American audiences with vividly painted accounts from the war's frontlines. Central to the exhibition are Lea's nine eyewitness paintings from the infamous 1944 **Battle of Peleliu**, which are presented in the exhibition alongside over twenty other war illustrations by Lea, as well as mural studies and ink-wash illustrations from the El Paso Museum of Art's significant collection of the artist's work.

### **The Bryan Museum, Galveston**

#### [Michael Grauer: En Plein Air in the Mountains of New Mexico](#)

**December 7, 4-6 pm (RSVP required)**

Join **McCasland Chair Of Cowboy Culture/Curator Of Cowboy Collections and Western Art at the National Cowboy Museum, Michael Grauer** as he describes the irresistible allure of Taos and Santa Fe for artists at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Drawn by the native inhabitants and the local landscape, artists drew inspiration from the bright colors and intense light of New Mexico. Following the lecture, Grauer will lead a tour of the Visions of New Mexico exhibition closing December 30, offering his personal insights about the artists and their works. (Note: We are told that Michael will also be signing copies of his new book [Making a Hand: The Art of Harold Bugbee](#), Texas A&M University Press, 2019.)

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### Houston Art Keeps Turning Up!

We often lament that Earlier Houston Art we know about from exhibition lists or newspaper photos is now nowhere to be found. Such is the case with this view of Florence, by our perennial favorite, Gene Charlton. He made the painting after his first trip to Europe where he toured through France and Italy in the fall of 1937 with his partner, Carden Bailey, and their teacher, Ola McNeill Davidson – all three shown here as they waited in Corpus Christi to board the steamer they made the crossing on. The painting is missing – probably in someone’s closet or attic, because who would throw a beauty like that away? – But at least we have the photo from the *Houston Chronicle* in 1940.



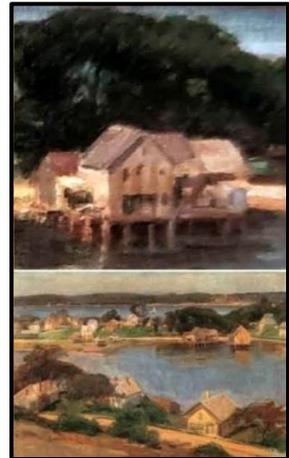
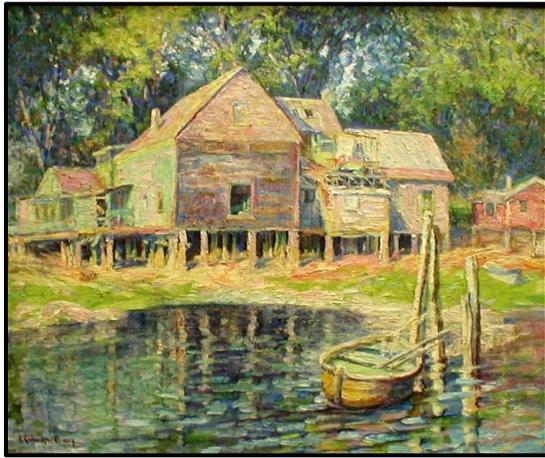
But sometimes we’re lucky and lost, or even unknown, art comes back to us. When that happens, it’s reason to celebrate. Here, in roughly chronological order of when they were made, are a few fabulous works of Earlier Houston Art that have come back to us over the last few months – along with a little information about what them especially important.

**John Clark Tidden, 1889-1957**, came to Houston in 1915 to teach drawing and painting in the newly founded Architecture Department at Rice Institute. He was popular at the school, establishing many campus traditions, including the Archi-Art Ball. He also became an integral part of the art and theater communities of the city. This piece was the study for an illustration introducing the “Classes” section of the 1916 Rice yearbook. It has been stashed away in the vault of the Woodson Research Center, Rice University, for years. The photo of Tidden is from 1920.



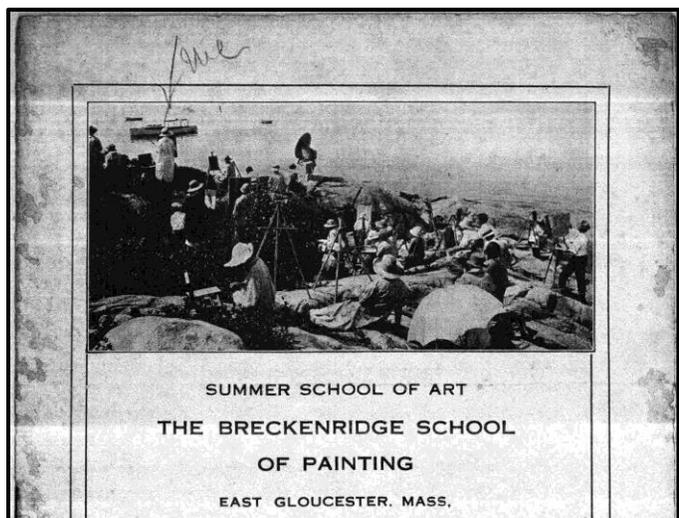
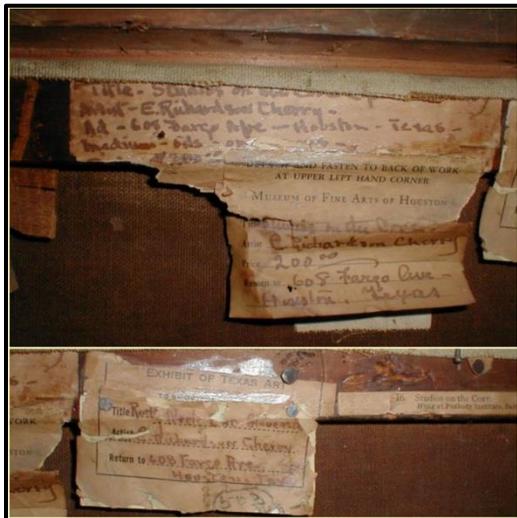
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*Studios on the Cove* c1920 (l); Cherry in the 1920s (c); and the same studios painted by Frank Duveneck c1905.

**Emma Richardson Cherry, 1859-1954, painted her *Studios on the Cove* in 1920, at Gloucester, Massachusetts, while studying in the summer art school of Hugh Breckenridge. That summer was one of the high spots of her career as an artist. “I wanted more modern help,” she said in a letter home to her daughter, Dorothy, and she got it – not just from Breckenridge himself, but also from such luminaries of American Modernism as Marsden Hartley and Stuart Davis, both of whom she encountered in Gloucester. The painting was one of her most important to that point, and for a few years she exhibited it often, in Gloucester, Baltimore, Houston, Denver, San Antonio. The back is covered in exhibition stickers. And then it disappeared from view for almost a hundred years – until it came up for bids at a small auction house north of Seattle. Now it’s safely back in Texas once again.**



**Cherry points to herself in a photo illustrating the Breckenridge School brochure.**

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**Gene Charlton, 1909-1979**, shown in a self-portrait pencil sketch on the right, was one of the most inventive and influential members of the Houston art colony from the mid-1930s, when he emerged as a fully mature artist, until well into the 1950s, when he moved to Italy for the last 20 years of his life. His origins, however, have been somewhat obscure. Thanks to an initiative of the Rice University Library, the early years of the *Houston Post* and *Houston Chronicle* are now available in electronic format, making the wealth of information on Houston art history that they contain readily available – including the drawing on the left, by the 17 year old Eugene Ralph, who, it turns out was our own Gene Charlton in earlier times! So far, this is Charlton's earliest known work of art. We were able to discover Master Ralph by following a trail of information breadcrumbs back through those newspapers – a trail that would have been impossible to tread any other way than online. Thank you, Rice University Library.



**Ruth Pershing Uhler, 1895-1967**, stopped painting when she accepted a full-time position at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. She stayed at MFAH for the rest of her career, where she had an immense impact on the transformation of the museum into a major cultural force. But before she stopped, she painted prolifically throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The locations of relatively few of her paintings are now known, but one more was added to the list when her *Trees* c.1928 recently came out of a closet in a River Oaks home. The painting had a hard life in that closet, but conservation brought it back to life, as shown by the before (r) and after (l) images flanking Miss Uhler in a 1927 photo.

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## The 2020 CASETA Symposium and Texas Art Fair

The Doubletree by Hilton Greenway Plaza in Houston, TX  
Friday, April 24 - Sunday, April 26, 2020

Make your plans now to attend the 2020 CASETA Symposium in Houston in April. You'll be hearing much more about this once-a-year, Early Texas Art extravaganza over the next few months, and you can follow the news at the CASETA website, but I can tell you now that the program is shaping up to be one of the best ever, with already confirmed talks on Houston's own Frank Freed (by Carmen Champion, Professor of Art at San Jacinto College), Everett Spruce (by Shirley Reece-Hughes, Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Amon Carter Museum), early women abstractionists in Texas (by Amy Von Lintel, Associate Professor of Art History, Texas A&M University, Canyon), early Galveston art (by Eleanor Barton, Museum Curator at Rosenberg Library), Texas Modernism(s): Houston/Dallas in the 1930s (by yours truly), Texas photographer, Keith Carter of Beaumont, and long-time Houston gallerist, Betty Moody, in conversation with Sarah Beth Wilson McKeel. As usual there will also be special events, including a one-time-only visit to The Menil Drawing Institute for a look at drawings by Texas artists. See you all there!

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  
Now including issues 1-31, March 2016 – March 2019  
<https://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/hetag>

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