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Robert Wade: *Bicentennial Map of America*, 1976, Dallas, ca. 100 yards across. This view was shot in late May, with work still in progress. All the major geographical and topographical features, including snowcapped mountain ranges, are already in place, as well as the black-top visitors' road and a few state emblems. Photo Phil Foster; helicopter courtesy Bell Helicopter.

Twelve Days of Texas

Or, deep in the art of Texas, a state currently experiencing an upsurge in, among other things, cultural activity. What follows is an account and assessment of work being done in one of the nation's newest art centers.

BY ROBERTA SMITH

Over the past six years, Texas has ebbed and flowed across the New York art-world consciousness. In the early 1970s, it was eyed greedily as a promising market by New York dealers. It became known as the home of numerous glossy new museums, as well as the mythical Rothko Chapel. New York artists like to visit there, vacation there and show there, usually returning with fabulous cowboy boots. Texas art itself has frequently turned up at Whitney Annuals, combining various degrees of Surrealism, Funk and macho toughness, a generalization loosely corroborated in 1972 when *Newsweek* ran a photograph of the "Oak Cliff artists" (Robert Wade, George Green, Jim Roche and Jack Mims), who lived and worked in a Dallas suburb of that name. Roche and Green showed at Dave Hickey's gallery in Austin, A Clean, Well-Lighted Place, which dealt only in young Texas art and had a name you always remembered from the art-magazine ads. With these few images in mind, I went to Texas; I planned to stay one week, stayed almost two and came back knowing I'd seen a lot and undoubtedly missed even more.

My travels outlined a large triangle, in the eastern half of the state, almost the size of Michigan but only about one-sixth of

Texas—if Texas were on its own it would be the 14th-largest country in the world. I paid visits, ranging from one to five days each, to Fort Worth and Dallas (45 minutes apart in the north), Houston (500 miles south) and San Antonio (400 miles west of Houston). There were also brief side-trips to Tyler (two hours from Dallas) for an opening at the museum there, and to Galveston (45 minutes from Houston on the Gulf Coast), where a growing number of artists have large, inexpensive studios in old two-story warehouses near the water, a situation that's architecturally reminiscent of SoHo but is closer to Venice, Calif., in climate and sleepy dilapidation.

Hickey's gallery, which existed from 1967 to '71, and the "Oak Cliff artists" are just two of the latest flurries of contemporary-art activity in Texas, all of which are relatively recent. Jermaine MacAgy and her ex-husband Douglas overlapped briefly as directors of new museums in the early '60s—she at Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum, he at the now-defunct Dallas Museum of Contemporary Art (it merged with the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in late 1963); the two are generally credited with introducing contemporary art to the Texas public. Their operations were also a focus for what is now a somewhat older generation of Texas artists (David McManaway, Jim Love, Roy Fridge and Roger Winter), who worked on and sometimes were included in various

Author: Roberta Smith writes for various art journals.

MacAgy exhibitions. (Paul Harris, who worked for Douglas MacAgy and is now head of the Waco Art Center, hopes to do an exhibition which will document the MacAgy era.) In the mid-'60s, James Johnson Sweeney, then head of Houston's Museum of Fine Arts, gave important encouragement to artists and collectors, as did Henry Hopkins during his very recent tenure ('69-'74) as head of the Fort Worth Art Museum. All this has built to some kind of continuous energy and, although it's hard to say if this constitutes An Art Scene in any one city, there is an enormous amount of art to be seen in Texas, in all kinds of places.

During my visit, exhibitions alone (not to mention the extensive permanent collections in these three cities) included a definitive Art Nouveau show at Rice University in Houston, a survey of women's art at the McNay Art Institute in San Antonio, a large Munch exhibition at the University of Houston and a show documenting Dallas architecture at the Museum of Fine Arts there. Elsewhere, the art ranged from wall paintings transported from a 12th-century French chapel in the Frick-like (masterpieces-through-the-ages) Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, to Michael Tracy's series of collages using stills from Pasolini's last film and dealing with the Stations of the Cross, which I saw in his Galveston studio. On a more public level, there were Chicano artist Roberto Rios' two 17-foot-long murals, commemorating the development of flight, at Lackland Air Force Base (near San Antonio), and Robert Wade's enormous *Bicentennial Map of America*, located beside a Dallas thoroughway. And everywhere I turned there was painting and drawing, from Earl Staley's watercolors of skeletons and cactus to Phil Renteria's large abstract line paintings—both inspired, in part, by the same landscape.

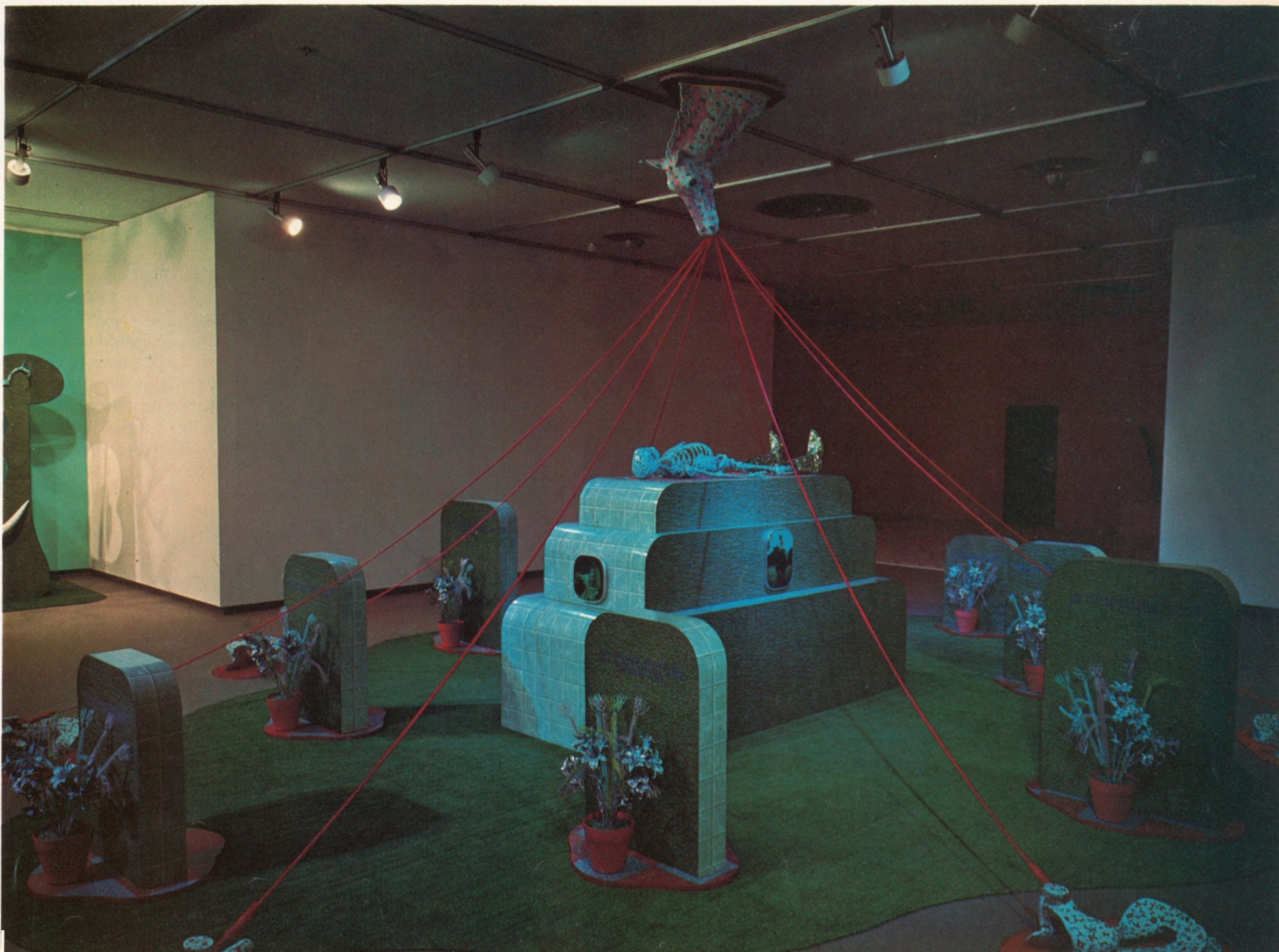
The immensity of Texas' horizontal space is especially awesome to one coming from New York's crowded verticality. There's always the sensation, particularly on Dallas' high hilly

plain, of infinite space in any direction. I began to feel that the earth was actually flat after all—and shaped like Texas; that shape was impressed on my mind like an emblem. Perhaps it's easy to succumb to the state's reputation; even the "Big Sky" cliché seemed true. Texas has always symbolized unlimited space and wealth; now it also stands for rapid, uncontrolled growth. Dallas and Houston, the state's two most cosmopolitan cities, seem bent on filling the vastness that surrounds them. Sometimes the only thing more impressive than the space is the rate at which it's being wasted; Houston gains hundreds of new residents each week and there still aren't any zoning laws. The present is a tangled combination of a mythically glorified and still very immediate past (of cowboys, ranches and oil) and an equally mythical future (of NASA, Spanish mansard housing developments and more oil, this time in multinational form). This growth gives people an amorphous kind of energy and optimism; everyone is waiting for something to happen, even if they're not sure what it is. The state is tottering on the brink, giddy and exultant.

The artists I encountered in Texas often shared the general mood of optimism. Over the past five years, moving to New York has become less of an issue for many artists, who are attracted by cheap work space, the vast and diversified landscape, the climate, the many teaching jobs and the sense of the state's bright future.

Everywhere I went there seemed to be a quickening of activity on many different levels, from the grass roots up. In Dallas, a number of co-op galleries have opened over the past year: one for women, one for photographers and one for any artist willing to pay a small rental fee. The last is First Saturday Art, a gallery that stages week-long exhibitions organized each month by abstract painters Richard Childers and Gilda Pervin in their 15,000-square-foot loft. This program is bringing an unprecedented

George Green: *Life Lust Cycle (Or Commercialization of the Cowboy and the Burial of the Cowboy)*, 1975, 11 by 25 by 30 feet. Photo R. Wharton.



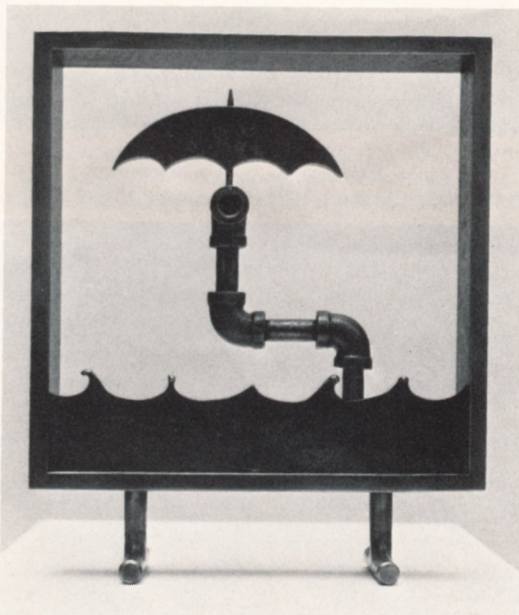
amount of work out of artists' studios, giving it a chance to be seen and to develop. Also in Dallas, Delahunty, a gallery with a long commitment to Texas art (it was started six years ago by partner Murray Smither as Smither Gallery), has recently moved to spacious new quarters. In Houston, which boasts a larger number of commercial galleries, Texas artists are showing in them with greater frequency than before. And the relatively young museums in Waco and Tyler, and, more recently, the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, have given many solo shows to area artists. At the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, curator Robert M. Murdock has started a series of one-artist "Projects" exhibitions, which has so far presented the work of David McManaway, Bruce Cunningham and Raffaele Martini.

At the Fort Worth Art Museum, director Richard Koshalek and his staff recently organized a local spectacular, "The Great American Rodeo," inviting 11 artists, from Texas and both coasts, to execute works using the rodeo as a theme. This resulted in (among other things) large installations by Dallas artist George Green and by Terry Allen (formerly of Texas, now of California), and in paintings by Robert Rauschenberg and Joe Zucker. (Zucker made an important shift in his scale and content, while Rauschenberg's may be the best painting he's done in years.) And last fall, at the Witte Memorial Museum in San Antonio, director Jack MacGregor organized the "Texas Tough" show. (From what I saw, the Witte and Fort Worth museums

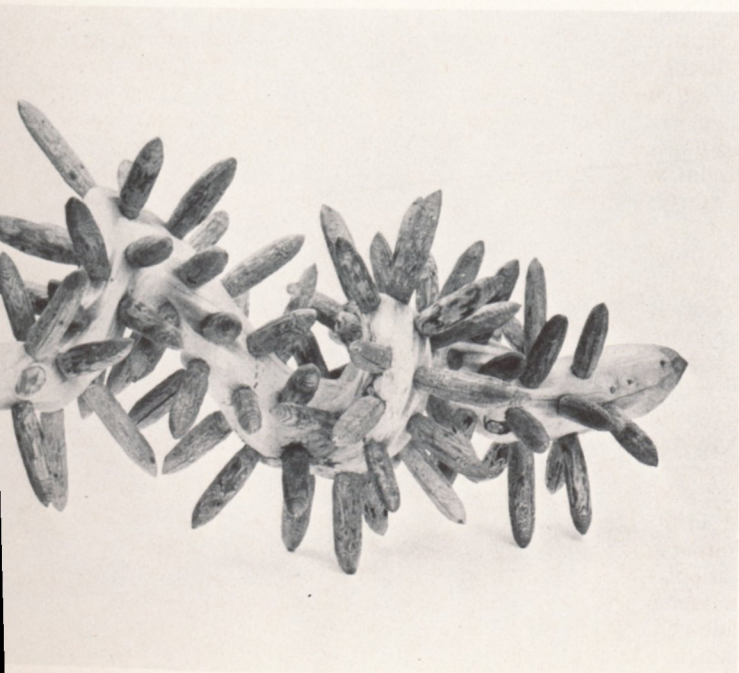
showed the greatest commitment to buying Texas artists.) The Witte, going against the state's mania for new museums, hopes by 1978 to split its art collection off from its natural-history and science holdings, and to move it into the yellow-brick Lone Star Brewery, a 1903 complex, currently being remodeled (interior only), which will be renamed the San Antonio Art Museum.

Bob Wade is one artist who is explicitly involved with "Texas tough" and with the myths, mystique and natural and man-made products of his state, past and future. Wade's paintings consist of blown-up photo-emulsions on canvas of images from Texas life (men with their guns, dead game, livestock, Lee Harvey Oswald on the autopsy table). In 1973 Wade did his first large topographical installation, a map of Texas, which incorporated items symbolizing the state's various regions. But Wade has momentarily broadened his vision beyond his home state, and right now he's rushing to complete his most extravagant installation, the *Bicentennial Map of America*, which is about the size of a football field. The public will be able to tour this mini-nation on sidewalk-sized highways which pass scaled-down versions of the Rockies,

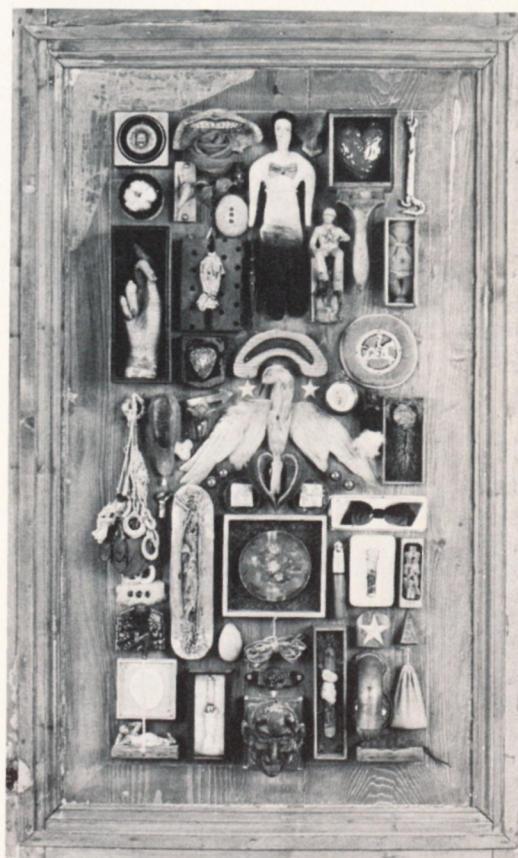
Right Jim Love: *Looking for Santa Claus and the Naked Lady*, 1976, steel, 8 by 9½ by 1½ inches. Photo Janie C. Lee Gallery, Houston.



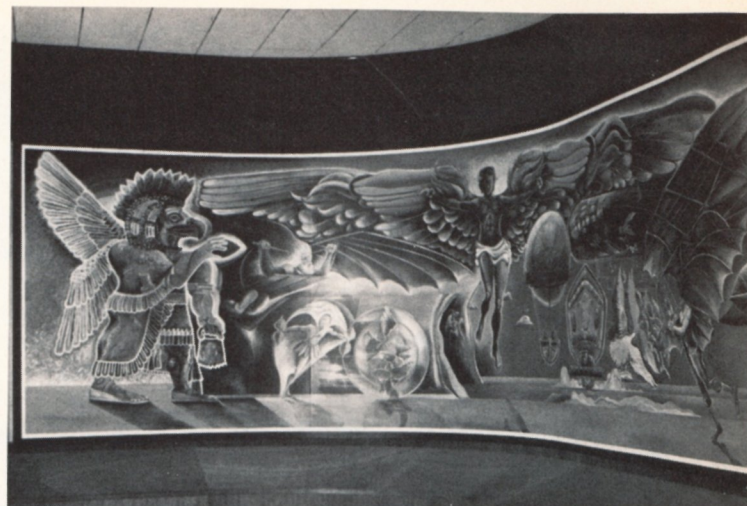
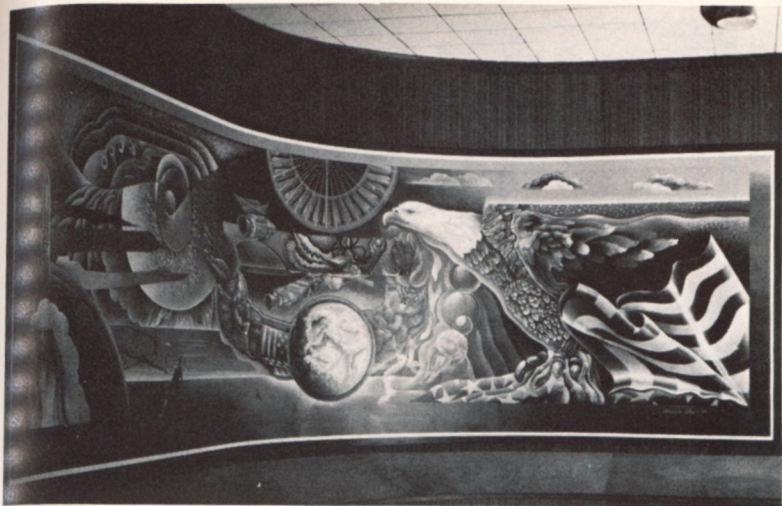
Below James Surls: *Dragon Lady*, 1975, ponderosa pine, 55 by 108 by 48 inches. Delahunty.



Above Terry Allen: *The Paradise* (detail of a large motel tableau), mixed mediums, life size.



Left David McManaway: *Lesser Jomo Board*, 1970, mixed mediums, 53 by 33 inches. Private collection; photo Janie C. Lee Gallery.



Roberto Rios: *Evolution of Flight*, 1975, acrylic on masonite mural, 2 panels, each 17 feet long. Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio.

the Grand Canyon and Mt. Rushmore, and to cross the Mississippi River, a ditch of water some four feet wide. The terrain is being landscaped to echo the country's various flora; mini-billboards and other things will advertise products and attractions of each state (from skyscrapers to McDonald's arches). The map will be visible in its entirety from a 40-foot tower, itself a miniature off-shore drilling rig located in the "Gulf" (blue-painted dirt). Wade started the project on a grant from the N.E.A.'s "Works of Art in Public Places" program, is counting on additional funds from renting advertising space on the map and has received, from private industry, donations of money, materials, equipment (the oil-rig tower), services and, of course, the loan of the prize piece of Dallas real estate on which the map is located. At the helm of this complex organizational undertaking, Wade seems more like an entrepreneur—a coordinator of Americana—than an artist.

While in Dallas I saw Ken Harrison's film *Jakelope* (titled after a mythical Texas animal which is part rabbit, part antelope), which is about several Texas artists. The screening was part of the second New Arts Festival in Dallas (a two-week schedule of performances, concerts and exhibitions, throughout the city, organized by Pat O'Bannon and Bob Tremble). The film was enjoyable, but it told me more about Texas than it did about the art it featured. Wade's carefully orchestrated section in particular documents the bizarreness of Texas life as he leads the camera crew through some beautiful Texas countryside (C&W on the car radio), into a shop where cowboy hats are being made, into a taxidermist's shop, to a fair where fried rattlesnake-meat was discussed and sampled, and, most dramatically, to a field where a number of men were practicing with machine guns on an old car. All these scenes make Texas look as nuts and unreal as New York, and you can believe that it's a place rich enough in weirdness and fantasy to produce heavy art. Texas is rife with this kind of stuff, but presenting it as is, in no way significantly transformed, does not amount to an "indigenous esthetic" (a phrase from Wade's press release)—it amounts to little or no esthetic. Wade's work is momentarily fun and informative (at least to tourists) and very well presented (although this is not true of his tackier imitators). My main quarrel with it and with other work that exploits "Texasana" is that it's very limited; it will not really grow, but it will probably last as long as the paraphernalia of Texas life continues to be somewhat exotic.

Texas artists have a lot of different ideas about the notion of a "Texas sensibility," and about the idea of regional art in general. There are a number of theories about Texas art vs. making art in Texas that are bandied about in conversation, exhibition catalogues and newspaper articles. There were artists who felt that abstract art is not authentic or not indigenous to the area, that working abstractly would be aping New York or L.A. (Accompanying this was a particularly monolithic view of New York, expressed in frequent references to the "New York School" which, given the diversity of the New York scene right now, is fairly inaccurate, although it probably reflects the hold that Greenberg-oriented galleries still have on the nation's mu-



Jesse Treviño: *Mi Vida*, 1972, acrylic on plaster. Mural in the artist's home.

seums—the Texans call it "franchised art.") Other artists wanted to make sure I wasn't going to do an article about Texas funk, insisted that *Jakelope* wasn't representative and complained that a regional look was popular and was being pushed. Two vaguely opposing theories were the Texas-at-the-Crossroads-of-Civilization theory ("We know more about both coasts than they know about each other") vs. the Texas-is-Free-of-Outside-Influence theory (a tangent of which is the comfortable misconception that art doesn't need other art). All in all, the subject of regional sensibility was touched on in a variety of complex ways, and usually gingerly; people didn't quite know if they wanted it around or not.

I found myself alternately agreeing and totally disagreeing with most of this, simply because it's a difficult situation to theorize about. There is certainly a lot of information, historical and contemporary, available to artists in the state's museums and galleries. In addition to the collections and exhibitions already mentioned, certain Houston galleries provide a constant sampling of art from outside Texas. The Texas Gallery concentrates on younger East- and West-Coast artists, mostly painters (Marden, Novros, Benglis, Shields, Bengston, Arnoldi, Stephan, Le Va), and Janie C. Lee presents a predominance of New York artists. (Each of these galleries shows several Texas artists too.) The Barbara Cusack Gallery is exclusively committed to the work of various American and European artists of a more or less Conceptual leaning, which makes it unique not just in Texas but on this side of the Atlantic. Since opening three years ago, Cusack has shown, often more than once, the work of Andre, LeWitt, Dar-



Danny Williams: *Untitled*, 1976, acrylic on paper, 33 by 37 inches.



Jan McComas: *Born from the Belly of these Hills*, 1973, acrylic on canvas, 2½ by 3½ feet. Delahunty.



Earl Staley: *Untitled*, 1975-76, watercolor, 22 by 30 inches. Texas Gallery, Houston.



Mel Casas: *Humanscape 67*, 1972, acrylic on canvas, 6 by 8 feet.

boven, Tuttle, Buren, Weiner, Huebler, Barry and Fulton. Countering all this imported information is a spirited aggressiveness among Texas artists, which, as I've indicated, is pushing galleries and museums to show more Texas work.

As in regions all over the country where serious art-making is starting to take hold, contemporary art in Texas has its beginnings in found-object assemblage and junk sculpture, with a tight, Surrealist, narrative drawing style running a close second. David McManaway, one of the group of artists who gathered around MacAgy at the DMCA, is known for his wonderfully complicated, dense accumulations of objects and material. In Houston, D.E. Shaw's constructions are more involved with the isolation of a few found items. Shaw's and McManaway's work belongs to a generalized sensibility—it has the anonymous, vague charm of the work pictured in William Seitz's 1961 *The Art of Assemblage*, most of which, without its captions, looks as if it could have been made by the same person. (Shaw and McManaway seem a bit like William Wiley in that their personal intelligence and presence exceeds that of their work and has been an important support to the other artists around them.) Both artists paint intermittently, and Shaw is involved with video, so maybe both will find other outlets for their obvious talents. A third assemblagist, Roy Fridge, has some reputation for making films, and one hopes they're better than the pleasant little boxes, using driftwood and small animal skulls, he seems to manufacture. In

Houston Bob Camblin and Jack Boynton are involved with very refined Surrealist-type drawing: Camblin, in the Wileyesque tradition of landscapes teeming with dots, dashes, words and animals; Boynton, with words and shapes built up of myriad small images.

Earl Staley's brand of Surrealist drawing is more his own. Staley lives in Houston where he produces art at a frightening rate in several mediums: painting, watercolor, ceramic, shells, leather belts. There's something maniacal about the rate at which Staley works, just as there's something maniacal about his images and the way he draws them. His best works so far are large scary watercolors, complete with skulls, skeletons, and cactus which often look like apparitions in the desert. These visions are conveyed through skitterish little strokes against looser areas of wash, all in rich dark colors. Sometimes his tensed-up drawing has a primitive quality to it, which might suggest the Indian pictographs to be found in West Texas and New Mexico.

Two other artists involved with diverse drawing sources are Dick Wray and Phil Renteria [see pp. 82-83]. Wray is in his 40s; born in Texas, he spent a couple of years in Europe in the late '50s and a few years in L.A. in the mid-'60s; he painted competent second-generation Abstract-Expressionist pictures for several years and then moved into a form of painting related to the grid, with careful dotting and striping of colors. After the boost which a recent one-man show at the Contemporary Arts Museum

in Houston gave him, his work has developed rapidly. Inspired by what he calls "outsider art," and at the same time by the realization that "after all these years, I really know how to paint," Wray has started overlaying mixes of bright scumbled color with tubed lines of pure color which sometimes form a crude grid, scribbled graffiti, or an image (such as a house). The interplay of these two layers of paint-handling, spontaneous and yet carefully knitted together, is very fresh. It's not really Abstract-Expressionist in feeling, nor is it opulently decorative like second-generation Abstract Expressionism—it's too fast and spiky for either.

Phil Renteria's paintings involve a large-scale form of drawing. His colored lines of paint are wide and dense—they're free-hand but their span and evenness dissociate them from gesture or speed; it's clear that they result from Renteria's slow, concentrated movement across the paper, a movement that is beyond the wrist and arm in its reach. The arrangements are loosely symmetrical but not rigidly ordered, and each line remains autonomous, very distinct from the other lines; even when they cross, their colors stay separate. Renteria's work is indebted to several diverse sources: Morris Louis, Mondrian, Klee, cave painting, Oriental calligraphy. The scale and physical reality he gives the lines in his paintings seem somewhat unprecedented.

Michael Tracy at 32 has moved away from abstract painting toward private ritual, and the result is a cross between performance, document and expressionist drawing. For several years Tracy's paintings were large and monochromatic, very physical and process-oriented. One painting using a lot of gold reminded me of Yves Klein in its heavy sensuousness; not unlike Klein, Tracy began to think of his paintings as environments for private rituals. Photographs of these look indulgent and melodramatic, and there's enough of that in Tracy's work, but they lead to something more resolved, if still decidedly mannerist. Last year, for example, he completed a series of photofetishes (dedicated to Caravaggio) in which photographs of himself and another man, entwined, struggling, nude except for a great many nylon stockings on their faces and bodies, are collaged onto earth-colored Mexican board and painted with blood and paint. The images vary; sometimes they are erotic, sometimes they look like murder, sometimes they are totally unclear, a jumble of limbs and fabric. But they're very powerful; the gestures of Tracy's paint-

ing reaffirm the gestures in the photographs, obscure them as events and intensify them as images.

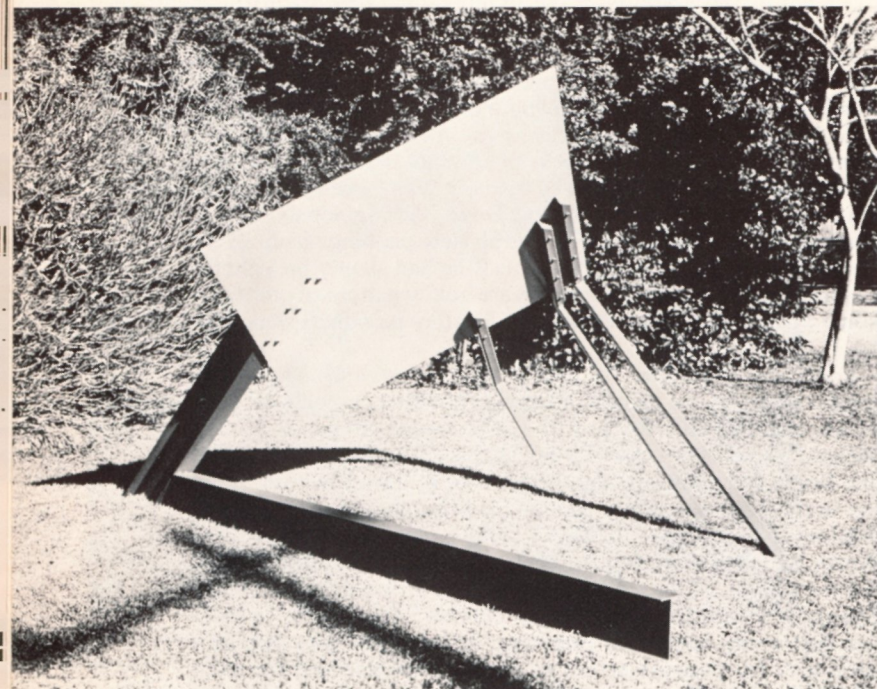
Jan McComas and Danny Williams of Dallas are two young painters going through crucial periods of development right now. McComas has been working away from a delightful, highly colored, pseudo-naive style, involving flat, floating images and patterns, toward a more painterly semi-abstract style. Like her, Williams is also somewhat inspired by early-20th-century American painting, particularly Hartley and Dove. He previously painted comical animals and monsters, but his new paintings have an expansive scale and paint-handling, as if he had simply brought the backgrounds forward. The results are boldly patterned, very personal abstractions—somewhat like Hartley painting Frank Stellas.

I was also impressed by Jeanne Koch's luminous, slightly irregular grids, by the abstract paintings of Sam Gummelt, Vernon Fisher and Pat Colville, and by the drawings of Gail Stack and Richard Stout. The paintings by Michael Sarchet, Yee Jan Bao and Bruce Cunningham, and the drawing by Dan Rizzie all stood out in the Tarrant County Annual. This exhibition, a sprawling, Whitney-Annual-type melange of 138 artists held at the Fort Worth Art Museum, was the first indication of the diversity, if not the quality, of the work I subsequently encountered in Texas. The show is selected and juried by outside "dignitaries," a practice that seems somewhat primitive. Juried exhibitions may be a good way for younger artists to receive exposure and for more mature ones to win money prizes, but a better idea is a biannual exhibition, with fewer artists, selected by resident curators who should know the best work in the area and should risk the commitment of pointing it out.

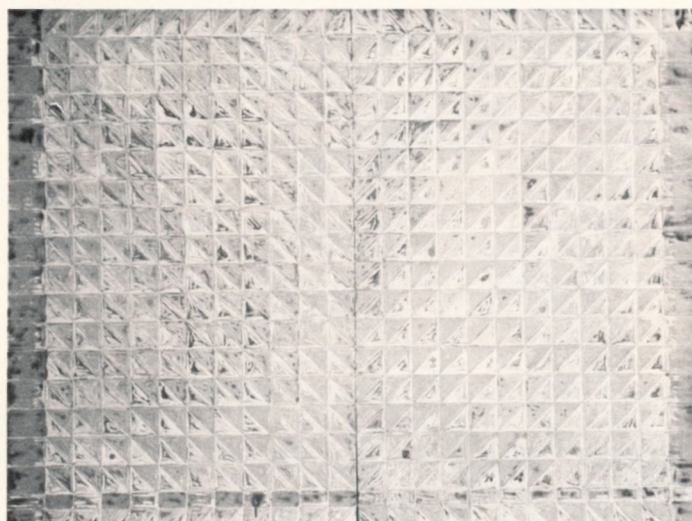
As in the rest of the country, there is less interesting sculpture than painting in Texas. In Houston, Jim Love, who also worked for the MacAgys, continues to weld small scenes and animals, often utilizing simple silhouetted forms with a Magrittean sense of humor. The work of Mac Whitney and Raffaele Martini of Dallas and Ben Woitena of Houston has possibilities, although from the small amount of it I saw, it seems that, so far, they operate within areas somewhat pre-empted by di Suvero, Morris and Caro, respectively. (Woitena's indebtedness to Caro is lessened by his clearer, more symmetrical structure; his elements tend to be per-

Michael Tracy:
Photo Fetish #33,
from *Caravaggio*
Notations, 1975,
photograph, blood,
acrylic and
pencil on paper,
19 by 27 inches.
Delahunty.





Ben Woitena: *Jack of Diamonds*, 1975, painted welded steel, 76 by 120 by 85 inches. Watson-de Nagy, Houston.



Jeanne Koch: *Untitled*, 1976-VI, oil and glass beads, 6 by 8 feet. Contemporary Fine Arts, Dallas.

pendicular or parallel, a little like Lichtenstein's—an interesting combination.) Another sculptor is George Green of Dallas, whose objects and installations often memorialize various fantasies of American life: the nightclub, the car, Buddy Holly. I say "memorialize" because Green's sleek forms and reliefs of faceless people, usually covered with ersatz materials (green or pink linoleum imitating bathroom tile is frequent), are sinister and silent, like tombstones. Green's contribution to the "Rodeo" show at Fort Worth was, appropriately, a grave commemorating the death and commercialization of the American cowboy, but my favorite works are the tile-covered Art-Deco "fountains" from his "Urinal" series.

Of the sculpture I saw, James Surls's and Luis Jimenez's was the most distinctive. Surls's carved-wood objects are often large and bristling, suggesting latter-day totem poles or mythical animals, creatures to be both feared and worshipped. His titles reveal that his work is explicitly, if zanily, descriptive, but Surls's descriptive humor is not as important as his forms and carving: the way he imposes a simple geometry on the wood, the way smooth single forms are complicated by spiky or yarn-wrapped protuberances, the way all this is done with rough, expedient carving which results in varied and assertive surfaces—these keep the work loose, unfussed-over and spirited.

Luis Jimenez's shiny, curvaceous figures [see Cover], cast of fiberglass, brightly painted and sometimes lighted, look as if they belong in a very fancy gas station. Jimenez, like Green, views

American life with a certain amount of cynicism, but, at this point, he is formally more inventive than Green. Jimenez portrays a blond woman screwing a Volkswagen, the Statue of Liberty as a blazing libertine, an Indian chief slumped on his pony over a lighted sunset (this has been shown at the Whitney). His surfaces are glamorized and artificial, with exaggerated forms that obliterate the difference between sensuousness and violence. Like certain advertising symbols and Art-Deco motifs, his figures seem to be speeding by and melting into liquid at the same time. Sometimes Jimenez's people can seem like melodramatic caricatures in their cheapness and speed, but their extreme states are more complicated than that: in a peculiar way they are desperate and exposed, yet haughtily proud.

Mel Casas' neatly painted surfaces are more stringent, but his subject matter is often just as potent as Jimenez's. His paintings touch on the problems afflicting various sectors of American life, often Mexican and Indian. Like Jimenez, Casas is Chicano. Casas' messages are partly spelled out at the bottom of his paintings and set off a double-entendre with the images above. The images themselves are also visually double; larger figures appear above and behind smaller ones (like a screen-image within the image), protecting, contradicting or elaborating them and creating jarring shifts in space and scale. Although I think Casas uses it a little too rigidly, this format gives his paintings an immediate visual impact in keeping with his subject matter.

During my brief visit to San Antonio, I met a number of other Chicano artists and glimpsed just the tip of the immense iceberg which is the Chicano artists' movement, centered there and highly organized throughout West Texas and New Mexico. These artists are involved with various kinds of representation (realist, symbolist, expressionist, surrealist) and usually deal with themes of importance to the Chicano community: its heroes, political problems, social and religious traditions. The range of the work was broad: Jesse Treviño's loosely Photo-Realist depiction of Chicano kids posing nonchalantly against a parked car; Cesar Martinez's meticulous woodcuts illustrating folkloric and religious myths. Others, in line with Casas' militancy, deal with political and social problems; I was particularly moved by a large mural executed on a wall in Treviño's home concerning his experiences in Vietnam; he's currently at work on a mural at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio dealing with the Chicano struggle. While none of these artists is yet as formally distinctive as either Casas or Jimenez (or as old, either), their work is extremely professional.

The assemblage and Surrealist-drawing aspects of Texas art are the aspects of art on nascent scenes just about anywhere in America. They're important because to some extent they free people to be artists by giving them access to a certain amount of sophistication. But neither approach is involved in a very distinctive or profound way with materials, nor does either seem to yield a highly individualized style or imagery which holds the potential for growth and complexity. The Surrealist drawing seems primarily involved with telling stories—repressing materiality for the sake of smooth, highly detailed surfaces. It may free the imagination but it doesn't free the artist's hand. Assemblage mainly appropriates unaltered chunks of the real world. This is what Wade is involved with on a grand scale: nonetheless, his work—although it's Texas at its most undigested, with little Art added—brings attention to the idea of making grandiosely ambitious art there that uses Texas. Between these two extremes of gentility and brashness (and perhaps learning from both) are artists like Staley, Renteria, Wray, Surls, and Jimenez, who are above all genuinely involved with a personalized use of their chosen styles and materials—transforming rather than just appropriating—and with assimilating into their work, to varying degrees and in complex ways, what they see around them, in both nature and art.

As I said in the beginning, I still don't know if any of this constitutes an art scene in any one city. There's definitely a lot to be desired: more galleries committed, at a high professional level, to the art made around them; more exhibitions along the line of the "Rodeo" show that place Texas art alongside art from the rest of the country; above all, regular locally selected surveys, with several works each by the best artists in the area (which New York could also use). Basically, the place needs more people who work in museums and galleries and more collectors who trust their own eyes, because there is a lot of art worth looking at and there's more on the way. □