



SIGNET ART

## Heard-Craig Hosts Texas Regional Art Symposium

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Pictured

left to right: Symposium Coordinator Annie Royer with speakers Victoria Cummins, Lonny Taylor, and Light Cummins

### *Heard-Craig Center for the Arts Hosts First Annual Texas Regional Art Symposium*

**Heard-Craig Center for the Arts**  
205 West Hunt Street, McKinney, TX  
[www.heardcraig.org](http://www.heardcraig.org)

When Kathryn Heard-Craig left her family's beautiful late Victorian home to the people of McKinney she desired to leave a place for women's clubs to meet and cultural events to take place. Mrs. Heard-Craig, who was a long-time member of the McKinney Art Club, a collector of local art and amateur artist herself, would have been quite proud of the symposium that was held there recently. The Heard-Craig Center for the Arts held its first annual Texas Regional Art Symposium on Saturday, October 10th. Executive Director Barbara Johnson and symposium coordinator Annie Royer had spent 1 ½ years in planning and brought together a great group of speakers on historic Texas art.

Since the late 1970's, interest in art from Texas as its own unique region has expanded exponentially. Several factors contributed to this increased fascination with and connoisseurship of Texas art. In the early 1980's Dallas' own David Dike opened his gallery and became a well-known dealer in early Texas art. His yearly auctions have become the not-to-miss event of each fall. The John and Deborah Powers encyclopedia of early Texas artists was published in 2000, greatly expanding the historic knowledge of artists working in Texas. And just about that time, CASETA-the Center for the Advancement

and Study of Early Texas Art, was formed and began having yearly symposiums on Texas Art.

The Heard-Craig's interest in regional Texas art is driven by its own collection. Kathryn left most of her own art collection to the museum. Since she was personally acquainted with many of the artists working in Dallas and McKinney in the 1920-50's, it is only natural that the collection contains pieces by Frank Klepper, Edward Eisenlohr, Jerry Bywaters, Reveau Bassett and many others. Frank Klepper was a McKinney native and long-time friend of Mrs. Heard-Craig. Thus, the museum has a strong collection of his pieces. Executive Director Barbara Johnson has had a goal to expand the reach and impact of the Heard-Craig Museum beyond its original role and make it into a strong cultural force in McKinney and the north Texas region. The recent addition of a versatile meeting space just across the street from the historic home has allowed Heard-Craig to host much larger functions. This new facility was the setting for one of the best symposiums on Texas Art that I have had the privilege to attend.



Executive Director Barbara Johnson pictured next to a portrait of Kathryn Heard-Craig done by Kay Polk.

The morning began with polished speakers and avid historians. Dr. Lonn Taylor spoke on the Index of American Design project, a WPA-era project the goal of which was to gather first-hand historic information and original watercolor renderings of pre-1900 American decorative art objects. A branch of this federally funded project worked in Texas from 1939-42. During that time, over 1,000 renderings of Texas furniture and decorative arts were completed. When WWII brought an end to the funding, the renderings were

sent to Washington D.C. and eventually became part of the national archives of the Smithsonian Institution. The national project produced over 18,000 original renderings of American decorative arts with accompanying data sheets. It was originally conceived as a project that would result in a comprehensive book on American decorative art. While there have been a few books about the project itself, that comprehensive volume was never produced.

Dr. Light Cummins, who was recently appointed to the position of official state historian by the Governor of Texas, gave a talk on the sculpture of Allie Tennant (Dallas, 1898-1971). Never heard of Allie Tennant? That might be because her work rarely comes up for auction. Tennant grew up in Dallas and studied at the Art Students' League-New York City. She returned to Dallas and began a career as a sculptor. Most of her figural sculptures were commissioned portraits of local dignitaries and garden sculptures with children and beautiful women. However, one of her best known pieces is the monumental gilt bronze sculpture entitled "Tejas Warrior" that still stands, bow drawn, at the entrance of the Hall of State in Fair Park. (see inset photo). This piece was commissioned as Dallas readied to host the 1936 Texas Centennial exhibition. Tennant also designed the bas relief sculptures that grace the outside of a few other buildings at Fair Park.



"Tejas Warrior" by Allie Tennant. Commissioned for the entrance of the Hall of State, Texas Centennial Exposition-1936.

Dr. Victoria Cummins rounded out the morning with a talk on McKinney's own Frank Klepper. Klepper was an active member of the McKinney Art Club for

many years and a much loved private-lesson teacher of art in McKinney and Dallas. Dr. Cummins traced his early life, his service in WWI as a painter of camouflage and his participation in formal art lessons along with a few members of his battalion who were stationed just outside Paris at the end of the war. She told of the mural projects that he did as part of the federally funded Public Works of Art Project and of his life as an artist and teacher. Part of the Heard-Craig's collection was put to good use at the back of the room to create a small shrine to Klepper, including some of his art, some personal correspondence and an Allie Tennant bronze portrait head of the artist.



"Fishing Boats-Galveston" by Frank Klepper. Courtesy of Heard-Craig Museum.

Even the lunch break was full of opportunities to enjoy art. The Heard-Craig had invited currently working artists to produce pieces inspired by works of art within its collection and organized the Patricia B. Avery Regional Art Exhibit. Each new piece was exhibited beside the early work that had been its inspiration—a great juxtaposition of historic and current. Two pastel artists, Pernie Fallon and Ed Travis, worked at their easels and chatted with guests about the Frank Reaugh inspired pastel pieces they were producing. And across the street, Johnson hosted those who wished to tour the Heard-Craig house itself.

The focus of the afternoon shifted from the history of art to personal encounters with historic art and artists. Bob Reitz, a noted writer on Frank Reaugh, told of his adventures tracing the same paths that Reaugh and his students took on his many teaching expeditions into the Big Bend area.

He shared the stage with Dr. Sam Ratcliffe, head of Bywaters Special Collections in SMU's Hamon Arts Library, who told of the 1989 rediscovery of a seven-foot tall portrait of Sam Houston executed in 1902 by one of the most important painters of monumental action scenes from Texas history, Henry A. McArdle (1836-1908). Dr. Mike Hazel, the editor of *Legacies*, a magazine published by the Dallas Historical Society and the Dallas County Heritage Society, had contacted Dr. Ratcliffe due to the latter's interest in the careers of McArdle and James DeShields (1861-1948). Dr. Hazel was aware that a painting signed by McArdle and personalized to DeShields had frequently

been exhibited at the Fair Park Hall of State but was temporarily in storage. DeShields was a Texas historian and collector of Texana who wrote several articles and a few books on various subjects of Texas history and also patronized Texas artists. Hazel knew that Ratcliffe had studied two of the monumental McArdle paintings at the State Capitol, "Dawn at the Alamo" and "The Battle of San Jacinto," and that he would surely be interested in seeing this large portrait. When the two men got a look at the painting in 1989 it was in bad shape. It had a long tear on the left side and was in great need of conservation. But no one remembered how it had come to be located at the Hall of State. Hazel began to research the ownership of the piece and discovered that it was actually owned by SMU, which had received it in the 1920s as part of the A. V. Lane Collection. It had been loaned to the Dallas Historical Society for an exhibition in the late 1940's but the paperwork that would have ensured its return to SMU had been neglected and the piece had remained at the Hall of State ever since. The painting was returned to SMU and, thanks to the subsequent efforts of Dorothy and Matt Garland, supporters of Texas art, and Jim McMillin, Associate Director of the Bridwell Library, funds were raised to get the painting its much needed conservation. It now hangs in the Texana Room at the DeGolyer Library. (see inset picture).



Dr. Sam Ratcliffe pictured in the Texana Room at the Degolyer Library–SMU  
With the 1902 Portrait of Sam Houston by Henry McArdle.

Continuing the theme of personal encounters with art, Dr. Francine Carraro, Director of the Grace Museum in Abilene gave an engaging talk on what it takes to go from an “accidental” collector of art and to become a serious connoisseur. Her talk included an amusing categorization of art buyers into such groups as the “treasurer hunter” or the “bird watcher,” a category that buys and checks off important artists in a “been-there-got-that-one” kind of approach. She went on to give helpful clues to young collectors on how to focus their collections and choose new pieces based on their own collection’s focus. And she ended with charging collectors of art with the task of keeping good records so that the historic information of the pieces they own are not lost to future generations.

The last group on the platform was a panel of five long-time collectors of Texas regional art who had each been asked to bring one of the favorite pieces from their own collection and share the story of how they came to the piece and what it meant to them. What a marvelous way to end a symposium on Texas art—by asking those who have been deeply involved in collecting pieces to do a show-and-tell! The stories of this group were as diverse and personal as the art represented. And this group gave a clue to why interest in Texas art has ballooned in the last 30 years—because Texas is a big state and the art produced here since the 19th C. has lots of stories to tell.

Those of you who have read the articles I post in the “Art Scene” section of my website will note that this article is an exception to my normal practice of posting reviews of shows that are still up for view. One of the purposes of the “Art Scene” section is to encourage participation in and attendance at good exhibits, to give press to those that are exciting. Although you have already missed this one-day event, plans are already underway for next year’s event. So, mark your calendars now! On October 9, 2010 the Heard-Craig will host its 2nd annual Texas Regional Art Symposium. The focus will be women artists of Texas. I wish Ms. Johnson and Ms. Royer all the best in their efforts to put together an incredible event for next year. .

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