



Three Millennia of Art in West Texas  
**MUSEUM OF THE SOUTHWEST**

## EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

*“ Galleries and museums provide information but not a situation for comprehension. ”*

— Donald Judd

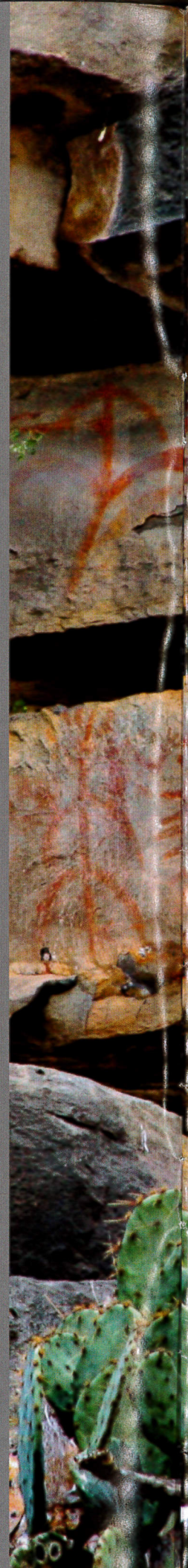
This exhibition presents three galleries of diverse artwork, created by artists living in or traveling through West Texas. The goal of this exhibition is to provide information, by bringing together some of the vastly different artistic traditions and visual cultures that have been present in this region for thousands of years. What this exhibition cannot do is give visitors full comprehension of the meaning and context of the art. To truly understand the art of West Texas, you must leave this gallery. Travel to some of the sites represented, and see rock art, post office murals or Minimalist installations in person, set against their original landscapes. Use the gallery guide provided for suggested road trips. These artists never stood still, always roaming for new subjects and places to situate their art, and the viewer should also be on the move.

The best way to approach and understand the works of art in this exhibition is also the best way to understand West Texas: to really consider it for what it is, and not compare it to what it is not. West Texas isn't a landscape filled with greenery and lakes, its cities are not major cosmopolitan centers. But it is a vast and open landscape filled with strong light and unbroken vistas. The flatness of the plains gives way to the mountainous regions in the Trans-Pecos; the land is isolated and wild, which gives it a timeless and almost mythical quality.

The art produced in West Texas is often made by people who are not from here, but are traveling through the landscape and responding to it, often in a profound way. Although some well-known figures in the art world have worked in this region, such as Alexandre Hogue and Donald Judd, it was never a major art center.

The three main visual cultures presented in this exhibition have a lot of common threads, but the earlier art did not necessarily influence what came later. Like the landscape itself, the artistic movements are isolated from each other, and in some ways from the wider art world.

This exhibition brings together a wide variety of art, from the Museum of the Southwest collection, the Judd Foundation, the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory at the University of Texas at Austin, the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, the Museum of the Big Bend and the El Paso Museum of Art. Supplemental photographs for several rock art sites were provided by regional photographers. This exhibition was made possible by Allen & Denna McGuire with support from the Ted and Nancy Paup Research Initiative Award through CASETA—Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art.



# Rock Art

This gallery represents some of the earliest art found in not only West Texas, but the entire country. Pictographs (images painted on rocks) and petroglyphs (images carved into rocks) are modes of representation that can be called “rock art” and are found throughout West Texas. Although this exhibition is titled *Three Millennia of Art in West Texas*, that date of three millennia, 3,000 or 1000 BC, is a very conservative date and many archaeologists have found evidence of rock art dating back to around 10,000 years ago.

Rock art is site-specific by design. Native populations traveling through this region for thousands of years most likely would have made other objects that modern people consider art, including painted pebbles and decorative items; but rock art is permanent and it cannot be separated from its context. The environment the rock art was created in and how it is physically viewed doesn't really change. This makes displaying rock art in a museum challenging. Inevitably, it must be shown as a reproduction.

This gallery features videos of rock art sites, enlarged photographs and watercolors created by an artist documenting some of these same sites in the 1930s. Only a handful of the hundreds of rock art sites are represented in this exhibition. These include Hueco Tanks, Seminole Canyon and Panther Cave, which are state parks open to the public. Other sites include Paint Rock and Rattlesnake Canyon, which are on private property and available to visit via guided tour. There are thousands, most likely hundreds of thousands, of individual pictographs and petroglyphs throughout hundreds of sites in this region. Scholars know some of the tribal groups that created rock art in this area include Pecos River peoples, Jornada Mogollon peoples, Casas Grandes and other cultures mostly in modern-day Mexico, Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas, Jumanos and many other groups whose artistic style cannot be firmly identified or whose history has not been passed on.

Many scholars disagree on whether pictographs and petroglyphs created thousands of years ago should be considered art. Most of the native populations did not have a conception of art similar to our modern view, but it was created intentionally and skillfully, leaving a huge record as part of the visual culture of West Texas. The interpretation and meaning behind rock art, as a whole and in individual designs, is not well understood and requires further research on the part of scholars. Rock art is probably best considered as a combination of the art, values and history of the people who created it. However, visitors in this gallery can appreciate the art presented here even without the wider context.

Photograph of pictographs at Paint Rock, taken by Bill Yeates. 2016.

## Private and public lands

Most rock art in Texas and throughout the country is located on private ranches, which are sometimes made accessible to the public through limited tours, or sometimes completely closed off to visitors and scholars like archaeologists, anthropologists and even the American Indian groups whose ancestors might have created the rock art. However, it is often the case that having these pictographs and petroglyphs on private property means they remain in much better condition than if they were open to the public. Rock art on public property such as state parks is more readily available, but often faces more wear and tear with frequent visitors hiking through and sometimes even defacing these sites. While rock art and geoglyphs – land art, which includes sites like Serpent Mound in Ohio – are found throughout North America, there is a larger number in the American Southwest. West Texas's dry climate and isolation means this art can survive much longer and is in better condition compared to other areas. Rock art may also have been created in a higher volume in West Texas due to the transient nature of its inhabitants.

## Why it was created

Throughout history, people have not stayed in the West Texas region for an extended period; they have always been on the move searching for water, food and other natural resources. The rock art that remains today was created with a limited amount of supplies and time by very different groups and likely for a variety of reasons. To venture to some of the locations of major sites would have required a great deal of time and shared knowledge, and making the works of art themselves is complex and time-consuming. Finding the stones necessary to chisel in a petroglyph, and finding the natural dyes and fixants – usually using materials like crushed hematite and animal fat – necessary to create lasting rock art would have been a major undertaking. It is hard to know for sure the reasons that an Apache or Comanche artist would have spent the time and resources to paint or carve on a wall.

There are a variety of recognizable images within rock art found across the continent, including animals like deer, reptiles, snakes and great cats, as well as some identifiable human figures. However, there are numerous images – of animals, plants, humans, geographic locations and abstract forms – that cannot be easily identified, and scholars and modern tribal members will always disagree about their meaning.

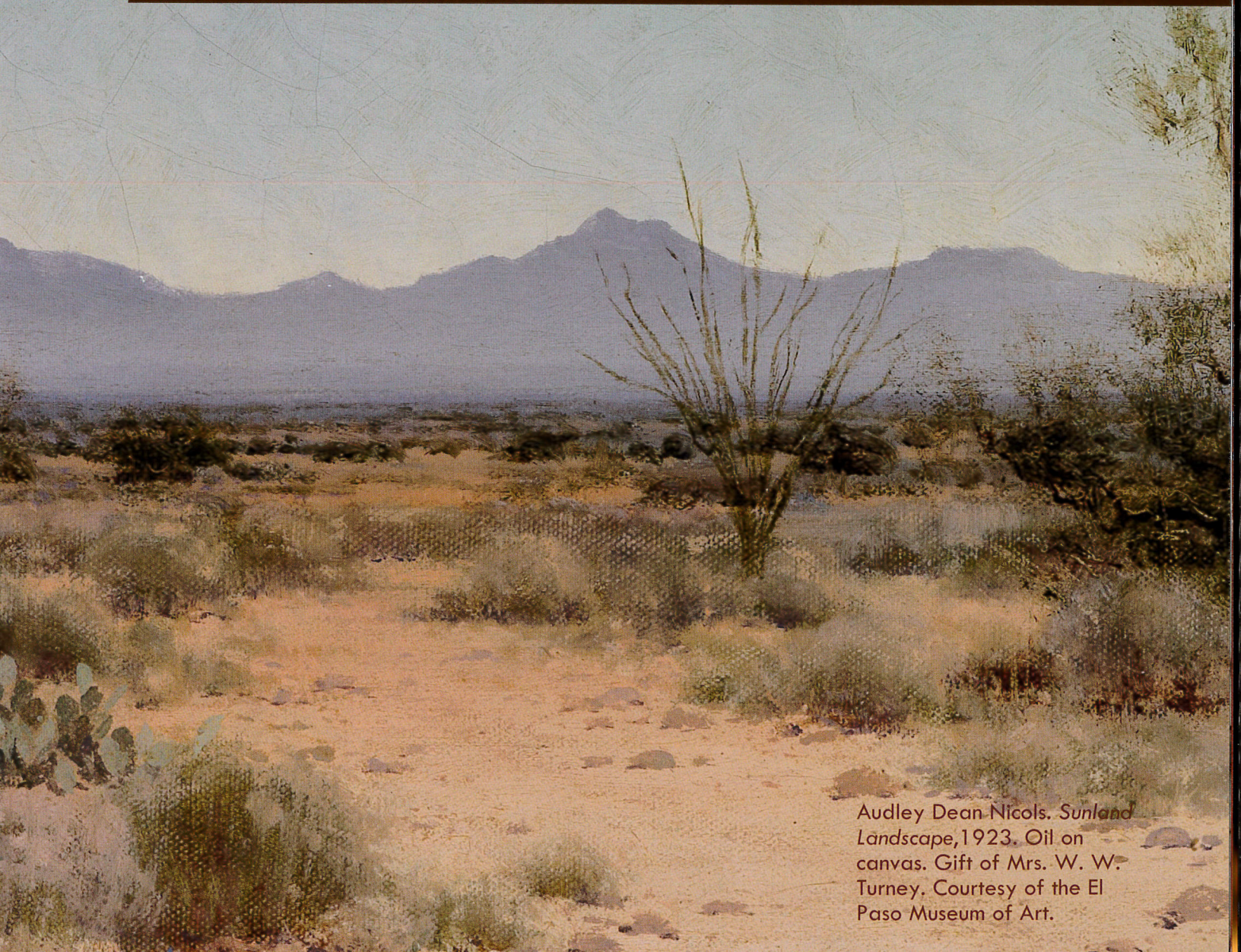
When looking at an individual pictograph or petroglyph, perhaps a small abstract design standing by itself on an isolated rock wall, it may be easy to say that it's not art. After all, the maker perhaps made it in an afternoon, and certainly would not have had our modern conceptions of abstract art. But can the same be said for a cave featuring a huge mural, painted figures interacting with one another, in a cohesive design that was clearly created with great care? There will always be a fundamental disagreement as to whether pictographs and petroglyphs can be classified as true art, but this exhibition posits that they are indeed art, and part of the greater tradition of visual culture throughout the history of human habitation of West Texas.



## Suggested road trips

The easiest way to view rock art sites in West Texas is to visit the public park system. There are four state parks within a day's drive that provide access to sites with pictographs and petroglyphs. Devil's River and Seminole Canyon State Parks are located southeast of the Permian Basin, outside of the towns of Del Rio and Comstock respectively and showcase the artistic traditions of the Lower Pecos style. Big Bend Ranch is southwest of the Permian Basin, outside of the town of Presidio with rock art from several different cultures. Hueco Tanks, west of the Permian Basin and just outside of El Paso, has at least 10,000 years of human history and features sites with art from the Jornada Mogollon, Pueblo, Kiowa, Apache and Comanche peoples. Other public sites include Big Bend National Park and Amistad National Recreation Center.

Nonetheless, the vast majority of pictographs and petroglyphs in West Texas are located on private lands. Some of the landowners and stewards offer guided tours, which can be arranged in advance. An important site of the Lower Pecos style is outside of Comstock and open for tours through the Rock Art Foundation White Shaman Preserve, organized through the Witte Museum. Paint Rock is a private ranch in the town of the same name, located outside of San Angelo, and open for tours.



Audley Dean Nicols. *Sunland Landscape*, 1923. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mrs. W. W. Turney. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art.

# Regionalism

While American Indian artists created pictographs and petroglyphs well into the 19th century, the white and Hispanic artists who started creating art in West Texas were not particularly influenced by them. Instead they traveled into this area with their own artistic visions and goals. Although some of these artists were from the region, all of them were on the move in one way or another. They traveled into and across this landscape, whether that was searching for new scenes and subjects to capture, or traveling for commissions or jobs.

From the late 19th century to the late 20th century, there were numerous artists working in or depicting West Texas. There were many different artistic styles and methods they worked in, but the most prevalent style is the umbrella of Regionalism. Regionalism, or American scene painting, started in the early 20th century and was championed nationally by artists like Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton. This style was a reaction against modernism and abstraction, and focuses on local people and places rendered in a realistic and earthy mode in painting, printmaking and sculpture. Many artists in this exhibition were part of the Texas Regionalists, an unofficial but tightly-knit group of artists working in the Dallas area starting in the 1920s. Although based in Dallas, the members of this group, including Jerry Bywaters, Alexandre Hogue, Otis Dozier and Merritt Mauzey, took frequent painting and drawing trips across West Texas. The Big Bend region was a favorite locale, inspiring many different road trips, found in the works in this exhibition by Bywaters and Hogue. Along with Big Bend, there are several other specific landscapes echoed across this exhibition, including Mitre Peak near Fort Davis, the Red River and Palo Duro Canyon, located at the limits of West Texas and the Panhandle.

Artists working in the Regionalist style created mostly portable works like paintings, prints and sculptures, and they also created site-specific works of art in the form of large scale federal building artwork painted during the Great Depression. Most of these were in post offices, but some were in courthouses and other governmental structures. The paintings and murals created under President Franklin Roosevelt's various New Deal programs resulted in the creation of 106 works of art for 69 federal buildings and post offices in Texas, as well as numerous others around the country. Although not specifically a West Texas phenomenon, the importance of post offices in this isolated region became an important component of the legacy of visual culture. In the early 20th century post offices were a vital part of rural life, serving as a reliable social center where people could meet, and they were one of the few outposts of the federal government available to the average citizen. These paintings and murals are monumental and site-specific. The artists who created them had to travel long distances to undertake these projects, and so must the visitors who want to get a more complete picture. For the people who live near these buildings, they are a permanent fixture and part of the historical record. In this way, the Regionalists echo the monumental art sites created in pictographs and petroglyphs centuries beforehand, and the minimalist installations in Marfa decades afterward.



## Suggested road trips

Although some are in disrepair and some are now situated in more private offices, many of the paintings and murals created in government buildings during the New Deal are still viewable by the general public. Many artists in this exhibition created large-scale works of art that are worthy of road trips. These include Julius Woeltz's works in Amarillo and Elgin; Dozier's works in Arlington, Fredericksburg and Giddings; Bywaters' works in Farmersville, Houston, Quanah and Trinity; Hogue's works in Graham and Houston; Alice Reynolds' works in Robstown; Ben Carlton Mead's works in Amarillo and whose mural study is on display in this exhibition and Tom Lea's works in El Paso. Lea's famous mural *Stampede* had hung in the Odessa Post Office for many decades, and has now been restored and is on permanent display at the Ellen Noël Art Museum in Odessa, the first of hopefully many more restoration projects in partnership with local museums.



Tom Lea. *The Way to Chihuahua*, 1970. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Lea. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art.

# Minimalism on the landscape

Donald Judd would have considered this exhibition, *Three Millennia of Art in West Texas*, to be fatal. He was an artist who wrote extensively, publishing essays about his own work and that of his contemporaries and his musings on life in the mid to late 20th century. He often argued that to understand art the viewer must be around it for long periods of time, to work toward slow and sustained reflection, and that without its true perception of the artist's intent and greater meaning would be close to impossible. He eventually came to the conclusion that three-month exhibitions like this one are ultimately "fatal," and that he would strive to create permanent installations of his own art and the art of others he admired. Although he was a long-time New York resident, he achieved this goal in West Texas.

The town of Marfa, a three-hour drive from Midland and into the Davis Mountains, has been transformed through the aspirations of Judd. Starting in the 1970s when he bought property in Marfa, he changed the region by thoughtfully and slowly renovating military, residential and commercial sites. Today there is a diverse collection of buildings run by the Chinati Foundation and the Judd Foundation that display permanent installations of art by Judd, Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, Ingólfur Arnarsson, Roni Horn, Ilya Kabakov, Richard Long, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, David Rabinowitch, John Wesley and Robert Irwin. The works by these artists are presented unchanging and without distraction, in a way that transforms the entire town into an art installation.

Minimalism as a term has several different meanings; in art Minimalism refers to a specific artistic movement located primarily in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, although many artists associated with the movement continued to create work after that. Minimalism is often thought of as geometric abstraction, and some critics have derided it as simplistic, cold and impersonal. However, many artists and viewers understand it as stripping paintings and objects down to their most essential qualities, and each person can have his or her own highly personal responses to it. Abstract is often a misused term, and it usually means to take something representational and make it non-representational; an idea or image can be abstracted to the point of being generalized and unrecognizable. Instead of viewing the works of Judd and other artists as abstractions, that is, objects and forms that were simplified down from something more complex, it is more helpful to view them as original and intentional objects without needing to reference other works of art.

Judd's intention in creating a space in West Texas was to have a permanent display for his objects, in just the way he laid them out. The Chinati Foundation retains those spaces in Marfa, and offers guided tours as well as open weekends. From Midland, drive three hours, and watch the landscape transform from the flatness of the Llano Estacado to the rugged mountains. This transformation puts the viewer in the right mindset to appreciate how different the art is in Marfa, but in some ways, it seems like the natural evolution.

## CONCLUSION

All three galleries in this exhibition display works of art, but they also feature objects that represent part of a larger permanent and site-specific type of art. The only way to comprehend is to echo these artists, and move yourself through these rugged and isolated landscapes to find the original contexts of the art sites.

This exhibition showcases some of the major visual cultures that make up the artistic legacy of West Texas, but it only scratches the surface. There are countless artists who have lived and worked in this region, historically and today. The rugged and isolated landscape and its people will doubtless continue to inspire artists in the future.



# EXHIBITION LIST

## Rock Art

Forrest Kirkland (1892 - 1942)

*Rattlesnake Canyon*, 1936. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Rattlesnake Canyon*, 1936. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Pecos River, Site 2*, 1938. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Pecos River, Site 14*, 1938. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Seminole Canyon Shelter 4*, 1936. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Rio Grande Cliffs*, 1938. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Panther Cave*, 1937. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Panther Cave*, 1937. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Ingram Ranch*, 1939. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

*Pecos River, Cave 1*, 1940. Watercolor on paper. 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory. The University of Texas at Austin.

---

Hueco Tanks photograph, digital print on canvas. Courtesy of Marglyph.

---

Paint Rock photograph, digital print on canvas. Courtesy of Bill Yeates.

---

White Shaman photograph, digital print on canvas. Photograph by Vicky Roberts. Courtesy of Shumla. Archaeological Research and Education Center.



*Rattlesnake Canyon*, 1936. Watercolor on paper. Courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, The University of Texas at Austin.

# EXHIBITION LIST

## Regionalism

Harold Dow Bugbee (1900 -1963). *Branding on the Open Range*, 1956. Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in. PPHS 1651/3. Gift of Mr. J. Harold Dunn. Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

---

Jerry Bywaters (1906 - 1989). *Mine at Study Butte*, no date. Watercolor on illustration board, 15 x 22 in. PPHS 1991-149/2. Purchase funded by Ned O. and Linda Miller. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

---

Harvey W. Caylor (1867 - 1932). *Winter Gloom*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 20 x 34 in. PPHS 2012.57.1. Purchase funded by Cynthia and Bill Gayden. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

---

José Cisneros (1910 - 2009)

*Untitled*, 1945. Ink and graphite on illustration board. 12 3/4 x 9 3/4 in. Gift of Dr. Nicholas Cummings and Margot Berlanga-Cummings. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art.

*Untitled*, 1946. Ink and graphite on illustration board. 14 x 11 in. Gift of Dr. Nicholas Cummings and Margot Berlanga-Cummings. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art.

---

Otis Dozier (1904 -1987)

*Persidio, Tex.*, 1938. Watercolor ink and pencil on paper. 9 x12 in. Purchase with funds provided by the Robert U and Mabel O Lipscomb Foundation Endowment. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art.

*Jackrabbit*, 1943. Oil on Masonite, 20 x 16 in. PPHS 2014.73.92. Gift of the Edward Jay Matsler Estate. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

*West Texas*, 1978. Oil on canvas, 24 x 48 in. Museum Acquisition Fund. Museum of the Southwest.

---

Emma Hendricks (1869 - 1959). *Palo Duro Canyon, Panhandle of Texas*, circa 1936. Oil on canvas, 25 x 28 in. PPHS 1996.325.1. Gift of Susan Nelson. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

---

Alexandre Hogue (1898 - 1994).

*Desert Glare*, 1945. Lithograph, 6 3/4 x 11 3/4 in. Purchase with funds provided by anonymous donors. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art.

*Palo Duro Cedars*, 1924. Pastel on paper mounted on board, 21 3/4 x 17 in. PPHS 2007.78.2. Purchase funded by Cynthia and Bill Gayden. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

---

Russell Vernon Hunter (1900 - 1955). *Horizontal Life*, no date. Oil on masonite, 18 x 28 in. PPHS 1893/2. Gift of Mr. Skillman Cannon Hunter. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

---

John Eliot Jenkins (1868 - 1937). *Palo Duro Canyon, West Texas*, 1934. Oil on canvas, 21 x 30 in. PPHS 2009.87.1. Purchase funded by Cynthia and Bill Gayden. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

---


Tom Lea (1907 - 2001). *The Way to Chihuahua*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Lea. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art.

---

Conny Martin (1925 - 2010). *T.F.A.A. Regional*, no date. Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 26 in. PPHS 2004.78.1. Gift of the artist. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

---

Merritt Mauzey (1898 -1973). *Nugent's Homestead*, circa 1941. Oil on Masonite, 22 x 36 1/8 in. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William S. Marshall. Museum of the Southwest.



Otis Dozier. *West Texas*, 1978. Oil on canvas. Museum Acquisition Fund. Museum of the Southwest.

Ben Carlton Mead (1902 - 1986). *Compositional sketch for Amarillo Post Office Mural*, 1939. Opaque watercolor on cardboard, to 10 1/2 x 21 1/4 in. PPHS 2015.148. Museum Acquisition. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

LaWanda Murfee (born 1921). *Episcopal Church - Fort Stockton*, 1950. Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in. PPHS 2002.26.1. Gift of Joe L Murfee, III. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

Audley Dean Nicols (1875 - 1941). *Sunland Landscape*, 1923. Oil on canvas. 11 1/2 x 19 3/4 in. Gift of Mrs. W. W. Turney. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art

Frank Reaugh (1860 - 1945)

*Eagle's Nest*, no date. Pastel on pastel paper, 4 x 8 in. PPHS 1865/59. Gift of the Frank Reaugh Estate. Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

*Untitled [Joshua Trees]*, no date. Pastel on pastel paper, 3 x 6 in. PPHS 1865/79. Gift of the Frank Reaugh Estate. Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

*Sentinel of the Plains*, circa 1908. Pastel on paper, 3 x 8 in. PPHS 1865/136. Gift of the Frank Reaugh Estate. Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

*House Mountain*, no date. Pastel on pastel paper, 5 x 9 in. PPHS 1865/162. Gift of the Frank Reaugh Estate. Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

Alice Reynolds (1910 - 1984). *Mitre Peak*, no date. Watercolor on paper, 12 x 14 in. Courtesy of Museum of the Big Bend.

E.H. Ruffner (1845 - 1937). *Red River*, 1876. Watercolor on paper, 10 x 14 in. PPHS 2003.74.1. Museum Acquisition. Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas.

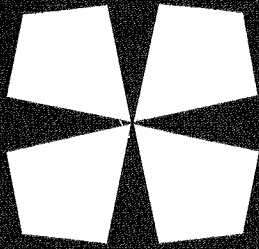
Julius Woeltz (1911 - 1956). *Mitre Peak*, circa 1930s. Oil on canvas, 89 x 65 in. Courtesy of Museum of the Big Bend.

## Minimalism

Donald Judd (1928 - 1994)

*Untitled*, 1974. Aquatint etching on paper, 41 x 29 1/4 in. Purchase with funds provided by the Robert U. and Mabel O. Lipscomb Foundation Endowment. Courtesy of the El Paso Museum of Art.

*Untitled*, 1988. Clear anodized aluminum and black acrylic sheet. 25 x 100 x 25 cm (9 3/4 x 39 3/8 x 9 3/4 in.). Courtesy of the Judd Foundation. Donald Judd Art © Judd Foundation / ARS.



# MUSEUM OF THE SOUTHWEST

1705 W. Missouri Ave.  
Midland, TX 79701  
432.683.2882  
MuseumSW.org

## *Three Millennia of Art in West Texas*

On view Saturday, July 22  
through Sunday, September 24

**Museum of the Southwest**  
Concho Resources Inc. and Wagner Galleries

Exhibition made possible by Denna and Allen McGuire and  
CASETA – Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art

**CASETA**★