



South and North of the Border:

Houston Paints Mexico

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Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood, *Mexican Afternoon*, 1955, oil on canvas, 14½ x 24 in.

Collection of Linda and Bill Reaves, Houston

South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Mexico

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and
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August 25 - November 10, 2018

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Exhibition organized by the Houston Public Library and
curated by Christina Wai Grubitz, Randolph K. Tibbits and Tam Kiehnhoff

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INTRODUCTION

CHRISTINA WAI GRUBITZ

The Houston Public Library's exhibition, *South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Mexico*, gathers together the work of early Houston artists who were inspired by their experiences in Mexico. This exhibition journeys from the beginning of the 20th century to the early 1980s. At the turn of the century, Houston was known as a commercial and railroad hub and after 1914, for its ever-expanding Houston Ship Channel, but it had not yet come into its own as a cultural center. However, as goods were transported into the city, so were new ideas and techniques.

As in many other cities across the country, Houston underwent its own burgeoning arts scene in the early 20th century. Artists and patrons in Houston began, in earnest, to develop their own arts organizations dedicated to arts education and the exhibition of art from near and far. From 1900-1913, the Houston Public School Art League placed reproductions in city schools to promote art appreciation and education among schoolchildren. This organization incorporated in 1913 as the Houston Art League and expanded its limited scope from schools to the rest of the city's inhabitants by organizing traveling exhibitions and working towards its main goal of establishing a permanent, collecting museum. They achieved their objective in 1924, when the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston opened its doors.

From 1930-1939, the Houston Artists Gallery (subject of the exhibition, *Planned, Organized and Established: Houston Artist Cooperatives in the 1930s* at the Julia Ideson Building Exhibit Hall in 2017) only exhibited and sold art created by Houstonians. Much of the work by the

artist-members was influenced by their travels nationwide and abroad, which they then practiced and shared with each other, their students, and the general public. Mexico's close proximity enabled Houston's artists to not only explore the culture of Mexico, but witness art movements in real time and to learn from the Mexican artists and intellectuals leading these revolutionary developments.

Although Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, 300 years of colonial Spanish rule left its indelible mark on Mexican culture—art and architecture were largely commissioned by the Spanish church. After independence, the prestigious Mexican-based art academies still taught the classic, European aesthetic, focusing on portraiture and history paintings. However, following the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the Mexican government allied itself with artists and intellectuals, which led to Social Realism and the Mexican muralist movement, which embraced their indigenous Aztec roots, vibrant colors, and celebrated depictions of large gatherings of people and the lives of everyday citizens, versus the staid palettes and portraits of the elites of yore.

In his essay, co-curator Randolph K. Tibbits focuses on leading Houston artists from the early 20th century by starting with Emma Richardson Cherry, ardent arts advocate and peripatetic student of the world (subject of the exhibition, *Emma Richardson Cherry: Houston's First Modern Artist* at the Julia Ideson Building Exhibit Hall in 2013). He ends with Dorothy Hood, who in contrast, put down roots in Mexico for 20 years.

Patricia Covo Johnson picks up with Dorothy Hood in her essay and explores artists from the mid-century to several decades beyond. Finally, Clinton Drake provides an in-depth look into the life of painter and political cartoonist, Crescenciano Garza Rivera, who was born in Monterrey, Mexico. Rivera shared the Mexican aesthetic of the 1920s through his sketches and political cartoons in the now-defunct weekly magazine, *The Houston Gargoyle*, and by exhibiting his drawings and paintings alongside other prominent Houston artists in the Annual Exhibition of Works by Houston Artists (1925-1960) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and at the Hous-

ton Artists Gallery (fig. 1).

This exhibition and accompanying catalogue make it clear that these early Houston artists were captivated by Mexico: by its architecture, ranging from stately domed cathedrals to humble adobe abodes; its people, who were painted solitarily in portraits or in frenetic, crowded market scenes; and by its lively cities and the natural beauty of the land. They brought back these images and impressions of the ancient and progressing country, a country and culture that continue to inspire and captivate Houston artists today.



Fig. 1 This depiction was of the 4th Annual Exhibition of Work by Houston Artists organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. *The Houston Gargoyle*, April 17, 1928.

HOUSTON PAINTS MEXICO IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

RANDOLPH K. TIBBITS

One of the six flags that have flown over Texas is the flag of Mexico. From 1821, the year of Mexico's independence from Spain, to 1836, when Texas itself declared independence, we were a sparsely populated northern territory of the vast and ancient country that is Mexico. In the almost two centuries since then, Texas and Mexico have been neighbors, sometimes friendly, sometimes less so, but always intertwined economically, culturally and imaginatively. It is thus no surprise that Houston artists have long been intrigued by our exotic neighbor to the south, a land of sights, scents and sounds flamboyantly unlike those that surrounded them at home. Particularly through the 20th century, as Houston grew from a small town into a major, wealthy city, Houston artists often looked south, across the Mexican border, for inspiration in their art.

Emma Richardson Cherry (1859-1954), so often a woman of firsts in Houston art, was the first of our artists known to have traveled and worked in Mexico—though only briefly, in March and April of 1905. There may have been some before her: likely there were, since Texas as a country and state, and the part of Northern Mexico that became Texas, has had a centuries-long association with Mexico. But Cherry left numerous postcards documenting her tour, as well as at least three works of art—one of them a postcard itself, which she actually mailed home (fig. 1 and page 18).

Setting the pattern for so many of the artists who would follow, hers was primarily a tourist view of the country. She set out in search of the unusual, the colorful and the beautiful: She was not seeking a deep and piercing examination of the country and people. And, though she was mostly sympathetic with, and clearly intrigued by, the alluring unfamiliarity of much that she saw (she



Fig. 1 Tourist postcards mailed home by Emma Richardson Cherry, March-April 1905.

wrote on one postcard view of an Aztec sacrificial stone, "I suppose the ditch is where the blood ran."¹), she was looking as a gringo surveying a Mexico ripe for exploitation by those from north of the border, who were being welcomed by the administration of President Porfirio Diaz.

Cherry would have been familiar with that phenomenon. She made the tour with her brother, Edward Randolph Richardson and wife Belle Richardson, by then a resident of San Antonio who had previously lived in Houston, may in fact have been scouting business opportunities. He made another tour of Mexico in 1908, when he even seems to have traveled as far as Panama.

And Cherry's brother-in-law, James Mayberry, laid the foundations in Mexico of a fortune large enough by the 1920s to allow him to retire to Paris with his second wife, who was French.

But Cherry herself was looking for whatever might energize her artist's eyes, as she always did when she traveled. And when she returned home, she showed Houston what she'd seen. A review of a show including her work, mounted by the Public School Art League in 1907, noted that:

Mrs. E.R. Cherry has a dainty sketch in water colors showing a courtyard in Jaxe [sic], Mexico. It is the interior of a peasant home, hardly more than a jackal [sic], as the walls are in ruins, but there is a blur of color from the tropical flowering vines[,] and the great stone jars as well as the two figures of the peons give a characteristic touch.²

The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, which brought the end of the Diaz regime, and, for a while, the exploitation of Mexico and its resources by foreigners, also saw a virtual end to casual tourism to the country for a decade. But by the 1920s, the violence of the revolution was subsiding, and a new, more welcoming government took power in Mexico City. A new openness in the Mexico-United States relationship led to what one scholar, drawing an evocative phrase from a 1933 article in the *New York Times*, has dubbed, the "enormous vogue for things Mexican" of the 1920s and 1930s. A new energy invigorated the relationship in general, but proved particularly strong in terms of the flow of culture from south to north.³

Houston felt the impact of the "vogue." As early as November 1921, the Houston Fair and Exposition, in an effort to make even clearer the "already friendly relations between Texas and Mexico," designated the opening day "Mexico Day," welcoming prominent Mexicans, along with "la famosa banda de policia de Mexico," according to the *Houston Chronicle*. The newspaper that day even included articles in Spanish describing the Mexico-related attractions of the fair.⁴

Though that fair was not primarily focused on art, the powerful impact of Mexican art began to be felt in the city soon enough, as it did throughout the United States. In December 1927, an exhibition titled *Modern Mexican Art*, including the work of Diego Rivera, Pablo O'Higgins, Jean Charlot and possibly others, traveled to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and was well received, according to the *Houston Chronicle*, as it had not been in San Antonio, where rumor had it that most viewers "hated the things very decidedly and audibly."⁵ A major exhibition of Mexican arts, organized by René d'Harnoncourt, which opened in 1930 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, reached Houston in 1932, with D'Harnoncourt himself in the city to supervise installation.⁶ At almost the same time, Mexican artist Roberto Montenegro arrived in the city for a showing of his own work at the museum.⁷

Even closer to home, however, Houston had its own resident Mexican artist, with the arrival of Crescenciano Garza Rivera (1895-1958) in 1928 to serve as art director of the *Houston Gargoyle*, a weekly magazine that surveyed local culture and politics. A native of Monterrey, Mexico, Garza Rivera studied art in Mexico City, Paris and Madrid. He served as the chief artist of *El Universal* in Mexico City, leaving for "political reasons," and finding his way to Houston via Los Angeles and San Antonio.⁸

Every week for five years, from 1928 to 1932, when the *Gargoyle* ceased publication, Houstonians saw Garza Rivera's depictions of the world, both local and further afield, envisioned through eyes deeply rooted in a Mexican graphic tradition, drawing on a history of revolution and social commentary quite unlike their own. But not only did they see his work in the magazine, they also saw it in the Houston Annual Exhibitions and in one-artist exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Houston Artists Gallery. The impact would have been considerable, even for those who were already mature, well-traveled artists—and perhaps especially for younger eyes, such as those of the young Dorothy Hood (1918-2000), just learning ways of seeing. After

the *Gargoyle* folded, Garza Rivera left Houston, eventually returning to his native Monterrey, but his influence remained.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Grace Spaulding John (1890-1972) was the Houston artist most enamored of Mexico, and the one most enthusiastic about employing her version of a Mexican aesthetic in her work, and sharing it with her fellow Houstonians. She made her first visit in 1928 when she accompanied her husband, Alfred Morgan John, an attorney and a descendant of Sam Houston, to Monterrey and Mexico City. During that first trip, she gathered enough observations for a series of articles in the *Houston Chronicle*, illustrated by her own drawings, and she painted enough paintings for an exhibition when she returned.⁹

The canvases were “colorful,” as were her verbal observations: “Mexican Indians in their unbleached trousers and shirts, sandals of rawhide on thin feet, burdens on their back, little Indian mothers, dirty children.” She was particularly impressed by the art schools the Mexican government opened to develop young artists at all social and economic levels. At one she visited:

the courtyard was so lovely in light and shade I spread my own canvas. Here were bright yellow walls of the small buildings where the servants had their homes, here curling blue smoke from their little fire where they made thin tortillas of corn paste.¹⁰

John returned to Mexico in 1930, 1932, 1934 and 1935, sometimes accompanied by her children and sometimes on her own (fig. 2). She attributed her inspiration for the founding of the Houston Artists Gallery, which she organized along with other Houston artists in late 1930 (subject of the exhibition, *Planned, Organized and Established: Houston Artist Cooperatives in the 1930s*, at the Julia Ideson Building Exhibit Hall in 2017) to an international mix of artists she encountered in Mexico City in 1930.¹¹

In 1935, she took a train down the west



Fig. 2 Grace Spaulding John painting in Mexico City, c. 1930. Grace Spaulding John Papers, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University.

coast of Mexico and through the interior to Mexico City, again writing a series of newspaper articles describing her journey accompanied by her own illustrations. She even intended to recount her “Mexican Meander” in an illustrated book, though it was never published (fig. 3).

But all the while she painted from her Mexican experiences, exhibited and lectured in Houston and beyond. According to one critic, it was in Mexico that she solidified a “new and clearer style” in her work.¹²

Forrest Bess (1911-1977) was another Houston artist who found inspiration in Mexico. He studied for a time at the San Carlos Academy in Mexico City and like Grace Spaulding John, found the company of other artists he met there and in Taxco, both Mexican and European, energizing. One in particular, the British artist, Richard Carline, even visited him and worked for a period in his Bay City studio. Together they hatched a plan to exhibit the work of their fellow Taxco colleagues internationally in cooperating galleries. In Houston, Bess would mount both group and one-artist exhibitions in his stable-turned-studio/gallery on South Main. There was even talk that Diego Rivera would be one of the artists shown.¹³ There is no evidence that the ambitious exhibitions were ever hung, but the time Bess spent in Mexico clearly broadened his artistic vision, and the works he created there were a prelude to his more famous, visionary works of later decades.

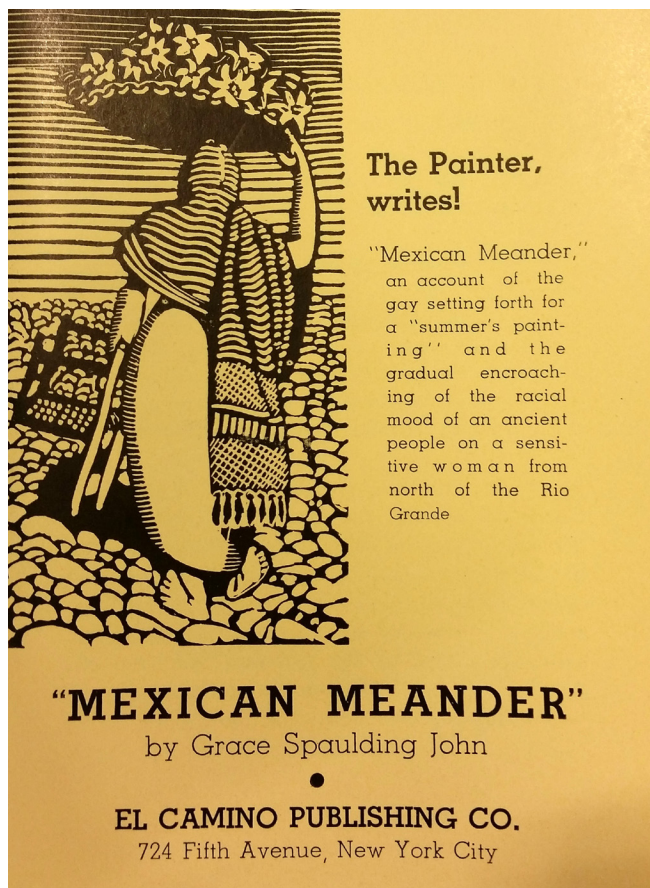


Fig. 3 Prospectus for "Mexican Meander," c. 1936, apparently never published. Grace Spaulding John Papers, Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University.

The coming of World War II drew the attention of most Americans, including Houston's artists, away from what was at heart pleasure travel. But with the end of the war, the allure of Mexico revived. From late 1947 through most of 1948, Gene Charlton (1909-1979) rented a house in Cuernavaca—a mansion, actually, with: "Eight bedrooms – verandah, gardens [,] swimming pool, gardener, cook, and for so little \$."¹⁴ He and his as yet unidentified companion intended to rent rooms out, "at cost," to friends in order to help cover expenses.

During the war, Charlton had been stationed in England for his Army service. Through the London gallerist, Duncan Macdonald, who had bought one of his paintings on a visit to Houston in 1941, Charlton met a number of the young, neo-romantic British artists of the day.¹⁵ After the war, he and his then-partner and fellow Houston painter, Carden Bailey, moved to New York City.

Those experiences had, of course, opened his eyes to art in a world far beyond the Houston of his youth.

But, even so, what he found in Mexico had a huge impact on him. "You must imagine me, here, stark mad, with all of this amazing beauty. Never felt anything like it," he wrote to close friend and pioneer of regional theater, Margo Jones, in the same letter in which he described the Cuernavaca house. "Sweetie, I'm about to launch a new project – and it can all be blamed on Mexico! – I want to, not only want to but must paint here – and I'm determined." By the next spring he wrote, "I think I'm painting stronger and better than I ever have. (But I always think that!)"¹⁶

Whether or not Charlton's painting was "stronger and better" as a result of his immersion in Mexico, the impact was noticeable, even to a reviewer for the *New York Times* (fig. 5):

At the Contemporary Arts Gallery, Gene Charlton is holding his second show in two years [in New York City]. Since his last exhibition, a trip to Mexico has apparently introduced a new intensity into his work and his flamboyant color, somber backgrounds and angular shapes show the influence of Mexican modernists. Subjects alternate between tightly patterned ritualistic figure groups, freer still-life and some stormy romantic landscapes.¹⁷

Dorothy Hood, who went to Mexico for what was planned as a brief visit in 1940 and stayed 20 years, is perhaps the Houston artist most profoundly and thoroughly molded by her encounter south of the border. Her time in Mexico and the profound impact the country had on her work has been well documented in the recent exhibition and accompanying book, *The Color of Being/El Color del Ser: Dorothy Hood, 1918-2000*.¹⁸ Suffice it to say that when she returned to Houston in 1960, she brought with her half a lifetime of immersion in the cultural aesthetic of Mexico, which continued to infuse her work for the remainder of her productive career.



Fig. 5 Gene Charlton, *Untitled figure group*, oil on paper, 1949, showing the influence of Mexico on his color palette.

In the decades after 1950, the pace of travel to Mexico by Houston artists increased steadily. During the 1950s, artists traveling south included Mildred Wood Dixon, Bill Condon, Henri Gadbois,

Leila McConnell; and in the 1960s and after, Richard Stout, Earl Staley, Lucas Johnson, Herb Mears, Erik Sprohge, Harold Phenix, David Gray and many others.

For all these Houston artists, the impact of their Mexican experiences—the sights and sounds seen and heard, and the people encountered, often including other artists—did not stop at the edges of their specifically Mexican canvases. But through those works, they have helped their fellow Houstonians form an image of our neighbor to the south, a neighbor of which we were once a part, and of which in many cultural ways we are becoming a part again, especially now, as our own Latino population (many with roots in Mexico) approaches fifty percent. Politicians may (or may not) really believe that “good fences make good neighbors,” but it was a poet who said, “something there is that doesn’t love a wall”; and it has been our artists over many decades who have helped us see over walls, real or imagined, as we view our closest neighbor, Mexico.

NOTES

¹ Emma Richardson Cherry, postcard to Dorothy Cherry, [c. March-April 1905], in the possession of the author.

² “Traveling Art Gallery,” *The Houston Chronicle*, March 20, 1907.

³ Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992); Delpar is drawing from “Topics of the Times,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 1933.

⁴ “Mexico Day Features Opening Day of Houston’s Fair and Exposition,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 6, 1921.

⁵ “Visitors to Art Museum Show Appreciation of Mexico City Collection,” *Houston Chronicle*, December 18, 1927.

⁶ *Houston Chronicle*, March 11, 1932.

⁷ “Exhibit of Mexican Paintings Opened,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 22, 1932.

⁸ “Garza Rivera to Have Exhibit At Artists Gallery,” *Houston Chronicle*, November 5, 1931; Xavier Moyssén, “Un dibujante erótico: Crescenciano Garza Rivera,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, México, vol. 16, núm. 63, 1992, pp. 137-139.

⁹ “Canvases to Be Exhibited By Artist,” *Houston Chronicle*, October 7, 1928.

¹⁰ Grace Spaulding John, “Courtyard Of A Mexican School,” *Houston Chronicle*, August 12, 1928.

¹¹ Ola H. Beaubien, “Houston Artists’ Gallery Unique as Civic Project,” *Houston Post-Dispatch*, December 13, 1931.

¹² “Canvases to Be Exhibited By Artist,” *Houston Chronicle*, October 7, 1928.

¹³ “Resourceful Houstonian Hits on New Exhibit Idea: Converts Stable into International Gallery,” *Houston Press*, October 28, 1938.

¹⁴ Gene Charlton, letter to Margo Jones, Cuernavaca, November 4, 1947, MA62-1 Margo Jones Collection, 1936-1960. Texas/Dallas History & Archives Division, Dallas Public Library, box 2, folder 6.

¹⁵ Gene Charlton, letter to Carden Bailey, England, April 2, 1944, in the possession of the author.

¹⁶ Gene Charlton, letter to Margo Jones, Cuernavaca, May 13, 1948, MA62-1 Margo Jones Collection, 1936-1960. Texas/Dallas History & Archives Division, Dallas Public Library, box 2, folder 6.

¹⁷ “American Painting Placed On Display,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 1949.

¹⁸ Susie Kalil, *The Color of Being/El Color del Ser: Dorothy Hood, 1918-2000*, (College Station.: Texas A&M University Press, 2016), published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same name at the Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, 2016.

HOUSTON-MEXICO, MEXICO-HOUSTON

PATRICIA COVO JOHNSON

Mexico's dramatic geography, pre-Columbian and colonial pasts, its multicultural native population, rich artisanal heritage and revolutionary modern art, exerted powerful magnetic forces. They drew a circuit of international travel to the ancient land from across the United States and Latin America, as well as Europeans, many of whom sought refuge from their war-torn countries.

The art of Mexico was known during the first half of the 20th century in the United States primarily for its pre-Columbian sculpture and the controversial muralist firebrands Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco. It was rarely visible in Houston at the time. Two notable exceptions at mid-century were the monumental Olmec head temporarily displayed by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston on its south lawn in 1963, and the majestic 42-foot long mural, *America*, commissioned from Rufino Tamayo in 1955 for the mezzanine level of Bank of the Southwest on Louisiana Street.

History and travel changed all that.

For Texas artists living a Rio Grande away from Mexico, that magnetic power was nearly irresistible. They made the border crossing in buses, trains, cars and planes from the US to Mexico, staying for days, weeks, sometimes months and occasionally years at a time. They returned with artwork created or collected during their travels, with perspectives that informed their future work, and that in turn broadened Americans' understanding of contemporary Mexican art.

South and North of the Border: Houston Paints Mexico highlights work by nineteen Texas artists who made the voyage between the 1900s and

the early 1980s. In his essay, Randolph K. Tibbits discusses the artist travelers during the first half of the 20th century, from pioneering Emma Richardson Cherry to eccentric Forrest Bess. My narrative is a glimpse at a few who found Mexico in later decades: Dorothy Hood and Lucas Johnson made Mexico their home for several decades; Richard Stout and Earl Staley made multiple visits over the years.

Dorothy Hood (1919-2000), a grand dame of Texas art, is considered a crucial link between Mexican surrealism and American color field painting. A native of Bryan, Texas, she studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and the Art Students League of New York, then drove into Mexico City in 1941. It was planned as a few days' vacation, but the creative and cosmopolitan environment of Mexico instead became her base for 20 years. It was an era, she said, "of action for artists and intellectuals," and she was embraced by Mexico's leading artists, among them Jose Clemente Orozco and Chilean poet Pablo Neruda.

Hood's first exhibition was in Mexico City, followed by solo shows in the US and in prestigious group exhibits, including a drawing in New York's Museum of Modern Art *Recent Acquisitions* in 1945. She returned to Texas in 1961 with renowned Bolivian composer Victor Maidana, whom she married in 1946, and settled in Houston. The city's community of artists was small; she felt isolated and sorely missed the camaraderie she had enjoyed in Mexico. Exhibiting regularly in Houston's Meredith Long gallery, her free-flowing drawings and gorgeous color field paintings were highlighted in solo exhibits in

the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Witte Museum in San Antonio, among others. Last fall, the Art Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi presented the major retrospective of her work, accompanied by the book, *The Color of Being/El Color de Ser: Dorothy Hood, 1918-2000* by Susie Kalil.

When Lucas Johnson (1940-2002) landed in Mexico City in the early 1960s, he said he immediately felt he was home—and stayed for a decade. He worked and exhibited alongside his Mexican contemporaries in Mexico, like Jose Luis Cuevas, and connected with American and European poets and filmmakers who had also chosen to make Mexico home. The country's dramatic landscape, the people and their festivals became his lifelong subjects. Johnson made regular trips to the United States for exhibitions in Houston's David Gallery and after settling in the Bayou City in 1973, reversed the route. He continued to travel throughout Mexico for exhibitions of his work and, as often as he could, for the sheer pleasure of it, frequently with Texan and European friends. An avid student of the natural world and human interaction with it, in later years they became his principal subjects in drawings and paintings, which were spotlighted in solo exhibitions at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, as well as institutions from Belfast and London to Chengdu, China. In 2005, the Houston Artists Fund published *The Art and Life of Lucas Johnson*.

Earl Staley (b. 1938), a Chicago native, came to Houston in the summer of 1966 for a teaching position in the recently formed art department of Rice University. He later joined the art faculty of University of St. Thomas.

His first trip to Mexico was to Oaxaca in 1975: "It was the Day of the Dead, my birthday, and I thought, 'Oh my god, they're painting my life!'"

Annual visits until 1979 followed—sojourns that he said prepared him for Rome when he won the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1982.

Landscapes, both Italian and Mexican, as well as the folk art from Mexico he has collected through the years, have carved their presence into his paintings and prints. He said, "my pictures are a dialogue between the events in my life and the history of art."

His resume lists dozens of solo shows across the US. Among the most significant are *Directions 1981* at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC, that traveled to Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston in 1981, and the retrospective, *Earl Staley: 1973-1983*, at New York's New Museum of Contemporary Art and the Contemporary Art Museum Houston, which was on view from 1983-1984.

Richard Stout (b. 1934), born in Beaumont, Texas, made his first trip to Mexico in the late 1930s to visit an uncle who had lived in Guadalajara since around 1915. He went back with his brother in the early 1950s, visited Lake Chapala and saw Orozco's dramatic fresco *Prometheus* on the cupola of a former orphanage. Later trips south also took him to Oaxaca and Copper Canyon, Morelia, Guanajuato and Merida.

He said, "I was overwhelmed, by Mexico and Mexico City." The sketches and watercolors he created everywhere during his travels formed a base for paintings back in his studio in Houston. "I was excited," he said. "The light was wonderful, the silence (reflected) in the paintings was profoundly moving."

Borders are mere political conveniences that culture does not recognize. As exhibited by artists through time, the flow of ideas and human connection are the lasting foundation of civilization.

C. GARZA RIVERA

CLINTON DRAKE

Crescenciano Garza Rivera (C. Garza Rivera) was born during the year 1895 in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, to Juan E. Garza Flores, a government official, and Dolores Rivera Vasquez. As a child, he studied art at the Colegio Civil in his hometown, and at age 13 began to study painting at Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City. Upon expulsion “for his revolutionary ideas concerning the drawing of figures,” he went to France around 1914, where he studied nude figure painting at the École des Beaux-Arts, the Académie Colarossi and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière.

Following his studies in Paris, he returned to Mexico, but on account of the Revolution “ruining” the French schools there, he went to Madrid. During this period, he began to create black and white drawings, feeling that color could not adequately communicate his vivid imagination forged by the “vast mixture of love, hate, death, greed and brutality that environed the Mexican youth of his time.” While in Madrid, he fell among the resident circle of artists and writers, befriending dramatist Ramon del Valle-Inclan, who initiated an exhibition of his works at the Ateneo de Madrid. His painting entitled “La Vendedora de Flores” won the gold medal at an exposition held in Barcelona in 1917.

After illustrating a Spanish edition of the works of Edgar Allen Poe, he returned to Mexico around 1921, where his drawings illustrated the magazine Sueño. He served as the art director for the newspaper *El Universal* in Mexico City, producing controversial political cartoons, depicting President Plutarco Elias Calles as a

cannibal, donkey, and midwife, which he signed with the pseudonym “Tick-Tock.” His identity was eventually discovered, and life in Mexico City became a risky proposition. At the behest of his new wife, the former Agueda Avila Camacho, whom he married in 1925, he resigned from *El Universal* for a supposed sabbatical in Monterrey. He quickly returned to creating art, his brand of controversial cartoons appearing in the local newspaper, *El Porvenir*. Not long after, an unknown assassin made an attempt on his life, firing a bullet into his left side, which grazed a rib, but left him relatively unharmed. His wife, again, insisted upon their departure, which led them to the United States.

The year 1927 found Rivera as a political refugee in San Antonio, where he collaborated with Dr. Aureliano Urrutia, larger-than-life pioneer surgeon and Mexican Revolutionary, who commissioned Rivera to paint murals in his elaborate mansion named “Quinta Urrutia.” According to art history professor Kathryn O’Rourke, “[Urrutia] assembled copies of Aztec sculptures, ceramics, paintings, and representations of iconic works of European and Mexican art to...remember the place that he had left.” Presumably, Rivera’s work at Quinta Urrutia fell under this category, a celebration of Mexican pride and nationalism, a theme he would explore again in his later years.

Upon making the acquaintance of Frank Gibler, former U. S. consul to Guadalajara and founder of Asamblea Mexicana, a defense group created to protect Houston’s Mexican community from increasing legal abuses, Rivera relocated to Houston by 1928. Rivera and his family re-

mained in Houston until 1932, residing at residences on Capitol Avenue, Houston Avenue, and James Street. According to a profile on Rivera in Houston's Spanish-language newspaper *La Gaceta Mexicana*, Rivera "did not need any recommendation beyond his own merit" to secure a position at *The Houston Gargoyle*, a major publication printing 20 – 30 thousand copies of each edition.

The Houston Gargoyle magazine, "a local weekly of news and opinion" was founded by Allen V. Peden, and although it bore a strong resemblance to East Coast publications, such as *The New Yorker*, Peden assured fellow alumni in the *Princeton Alumni Weekly* that his magazine was not a copycat, but "something different in journalism" lauded by eminent journalists of the time, such as H. L. Mencken, Irvin S. Cobb, and Will Irwin. *The Houston Gargoyle* catered to the "up-and-doing, keen-of-perception, discriminating class of Houstonians," and "like the Gargoyle of medieval architecture... hopes to drain the waters that fall on the roof away from the foundations of Houston and thus keep the body politic from becoming all wet."

The first issue of *The Houston Gargoyle* debuted on January 3, 1928, and Rivera was announced as the staff artist that March. The magazine arranged for the cover to feature his designs, which he carved from rubber with "musical patience," and several of his illustrations to accompany the journalistic content. One issue reported that "not to understand the symbolism and artistic perfection of Rivera's drawings and paintings is no disgrace, but not to have tried honestly to do so will soon be a thing for secret chagrin with any intelligent Houstonian." Ruth West, *Gargoyle* reporter, exclaimed: "He is cursed, besides, with an amazing versatility. His color effect in oils and watercolors are unique. His sense of humor has made it possible for him to see how exaggerated

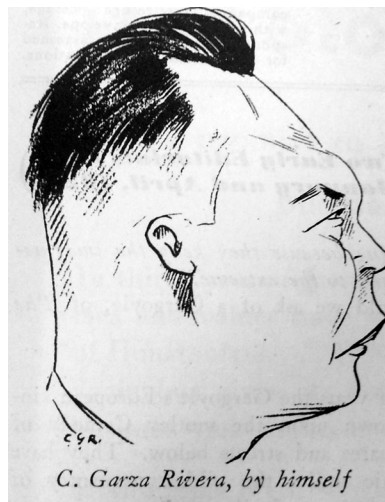
the average man must think his interpretation to be. Therefore, as a cartoonist, Rivera has reversed his own point of view, and exaggerates in his black and white caricatures the apparent simplicities of the world and its number of things."

In addition to crafting hundreds of evocative magazine covers deeply embedded with symbolism and social commentary, Rivera illustrated all aspects of Houston life, as well as national and international events, with the dazzling range of his entire career. From his fantasy-based paintings accompanying featured poetry, to his black and white caricatures featuring a range of prominent figures from politicians to landscape architects, his imagination challenged Houstonians to view their world in a new way. When political conditions involving Mexico made headlines, Rivera crafted illustrations based on his own intimate experience of living so much of his formative years in direct relation to Revolution. During his time in Houston he also collaborated with the Spanish-language newspaper *La Gaceta Mexicana*, and exhibited his works at the Museum Fine Arts Houston annual exhibition of "Work by Houston Artists" in 1928, 1929, 1931, and 1932.

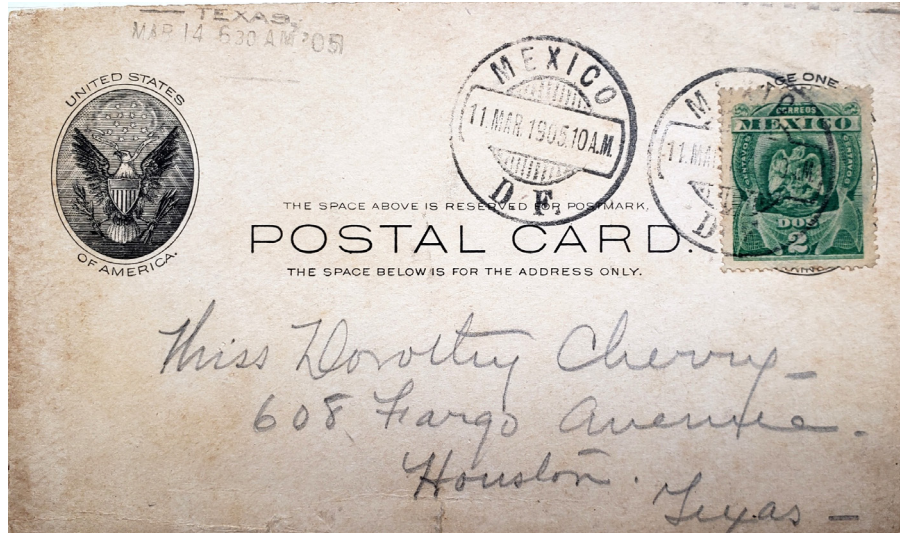
The Houston Gargoyle was short-lived, dissolving in 1932, during the peak of the Great Depression. By the latter 1930s, Rivera and his family had returned to Monterrey at the invitation of the state government, where in 1938, he published a compilation of fifty drawings featuring erotic interpretations of the femme fatale from throughout his career. He produced several works important to the regional identity of his native Monterrey, including a series of murals in the Casa del Campesino, which sparked the trend of public muralism in the area, and a large painting depicting the events surrounding the founding of Monterrey. He served as director of the painting program at Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and died in Monterrey on June 3, 1958.

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"C. Garza Rivera, by himself," *The Houston Gargoyle*, January 4, 1931.



Emma Richardson Cherry

Sierra Madre [postcard], 1905

Colored pencil on card stock

3¼ x 5½ in.

Collection of Randy Tibbits and Rick Bebermeyer, Houston

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION



Herb Mears

The Guadalupe, c. 1970

Oil on board

23 x 36 in.

Courtesy of Reaves | Foltz Fine Art



Grace Spaulding John

Guadalupe Market, Mexico, 1934

Oil on canvas

28 x 32 in.

Collection of Rosenberg
Library, Galveston, TX



Herb Mears
Untitled [Mexico cathedral painting], 1960s
Oil on board
12 x 29¾ in.
Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Herb Mears
Untitled [Mexican Cathedral], c. 1965
Oil on board
16 x 20 in.
Collection of Larry Martin, Houston

Herb Mears
Untitled, n.d.
Oil on canvas
21 x 25 in.
Collection of Tom and Tam Kiehnhoff,
Houston



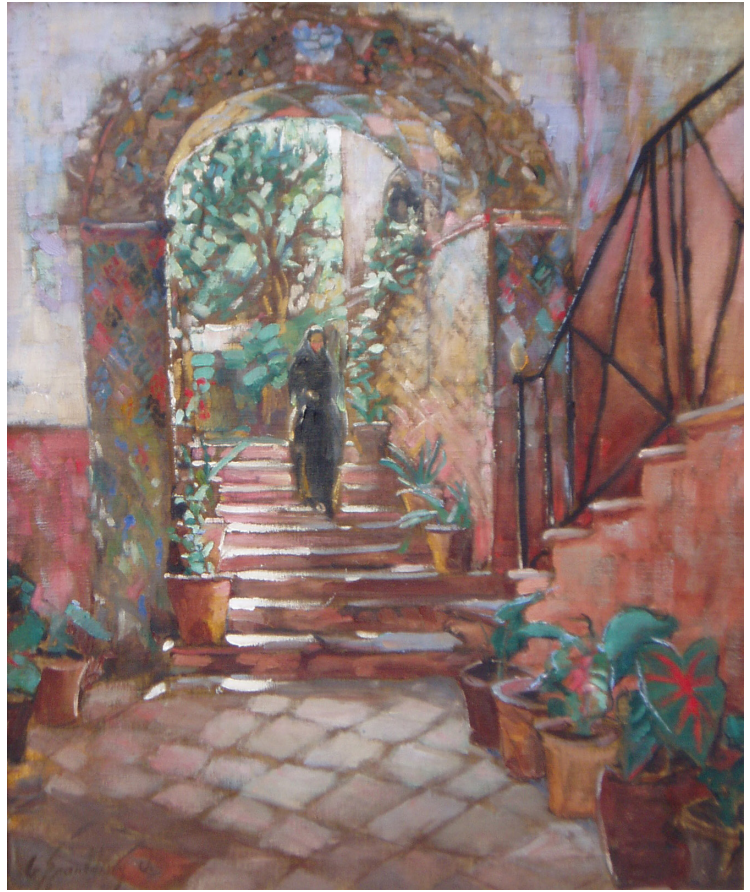
Grace Spaulding John

Cathedral, Mexico, 1927

Oil on canvas

16 x 11 in.

The John L. Nau III Collection of Texas Art



Grace Spaulding John

Untitled [Mexican Courtyard], c. 1935

Oil on linen canvas

30 x 25 in.

Collection of Marcia and Marc Bateman, Dallas, TX



Grace Spaulding John

El Jardin Encantado, 1935

Oil on canvas

29 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 36 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.

Courtesy of Panhandle-Plains
Historical Museum, Canyon,
Texas; Gift of Patricia Keightly



Emma Richardson Cherry

Untitled [Mexican Market], n.d.

Watercolor and gouache

14½ x 22½ in.

Permanent Collection of the Heritage Society, Houston



Grace Spaulding John

Parasols for Posies, Study, c. 1930

Oil on burlap

31½ x 38 in.

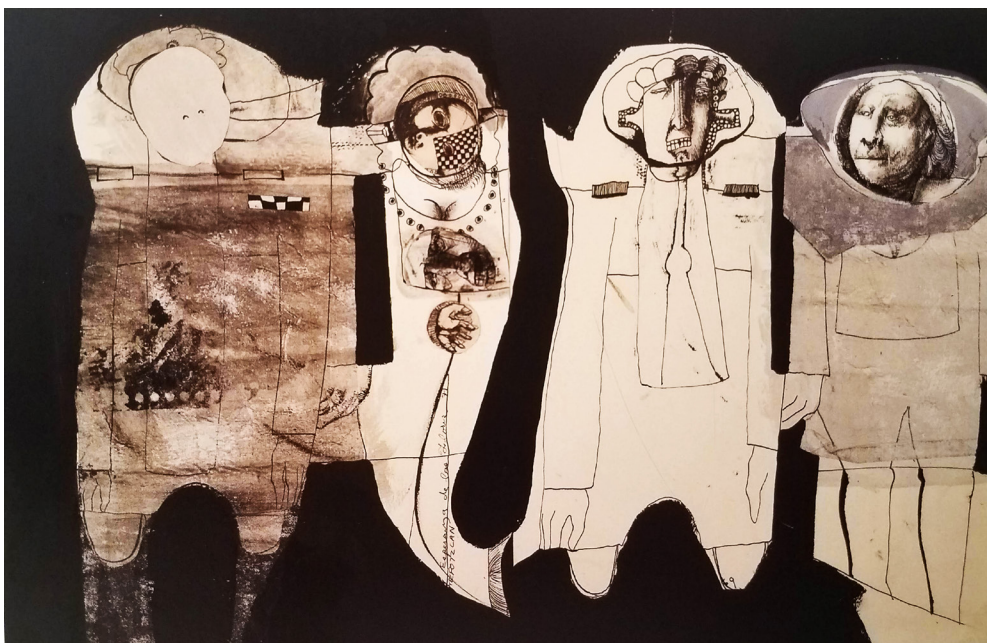
Collection of Linda and Bill Reaves, Houston



Erik Sprohge
Women with Limes, c. 1968
Acrylic on board
23 x 18 in.
Collection of Erik Sprohge, Houston



Erik Sprohge
Under the Umbrella, c. 1968
Acrylic on board
24 x 17 in.
Collection of Erik Sprohge, Houston



Lucas Johnson
Esperanza de las Flores,
1971
Ink and collage drawing
on paper
12 x 17¾ in.
Collection of Patricia Covo
Johnson, Houston



Edward Muegge (Buck) Schiwetz
La Luz Torreon Mexico, n.d.
Acrylic on board
21½ x 28 in.
Collection of Pamela Nelson Harte and Will Harte,
Fort Davis



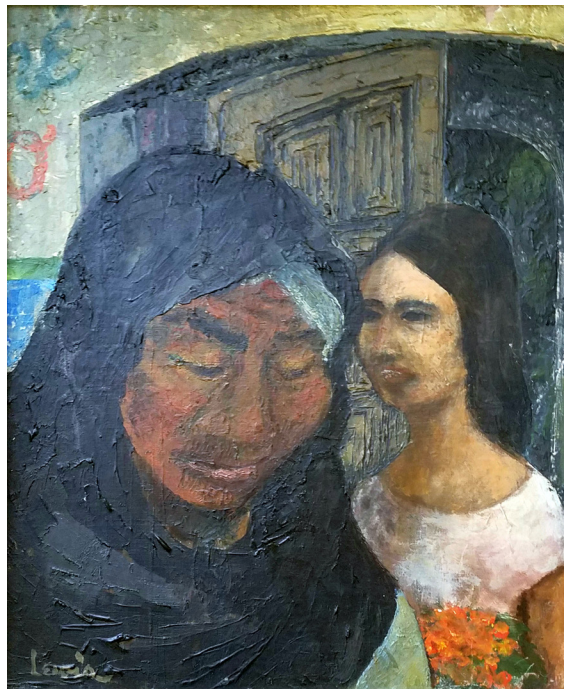
Edward Muegge (Buck) Schiwetz
Water Carriers - Venegos, Mexico, 1934
Watercolor on paper
13 x 16 in.
Collection of Lias J. (Jeff) Steen, Houston



Paul Sprohge
Untitled [Mexican Market], 2 of 2, 1963
Paper lithograph
12 x 24 in.
Collection of Linda and Bill Reaves, Houston



Henri Gadbois and Leila McConnell
Mexican Girl, 1964
Oil on canvas
34½ x 27 in.
The John L. Nau III Collection of Texas Art



J.R. Lewis
Las Dos Marias, 1960s
Oil on board
12 x 10 in.
Collection of Tom and Tam Kiehnhoff, Houston



Leila McConnell
Untitled [Mexican Woman], n.d.
Oil
10 x 8 in.
Collection of Leila and
Henri Gadbois, Houston



Lucas Johnson
Cabeza, 1967
Lithograph
29 x 20¼ in.
Collection of Patricia Covo Johnson, Houston



Erik Sprohge

Night Wanderer I, 1982

Oil stick on art board

16 x 34 in.

Collection of Kay Sheffield, Houston



Henri Gadbois

Untitled [Guanajuato Man], 1961

Oil on canvas

34½ x 22½ in.

Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Lucas Johnson and Bill Steffy

Puzzle, 1977

Acrylic on wood door

80 x 32 in.

Assembled by Jack Massing, 2018

Collection of Patricia Covo Johnson, Houston



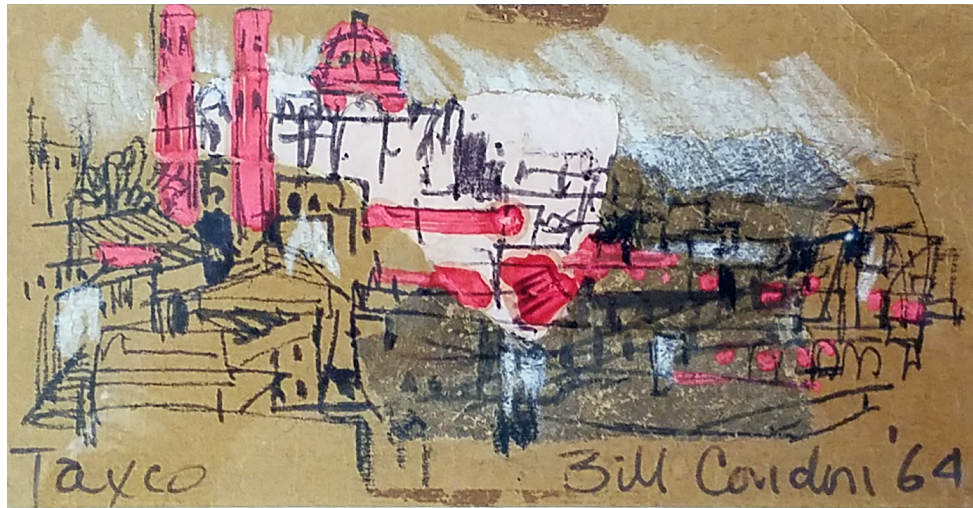
Richard Stout
Mexico (Guanajuato), 1963
Oil on canvas
24 x 30 in.
Courtesy of Reaves | Foltz Fine Art



Bill Condon
Guanajuato, 1957
Ink and wash on paper
18½ x 25 in.
Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Bill Condon
Guanajuato, Mexico [postcard], 1966
Ink and oil on card stock
5⅞ x 3⅞ in.
Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Bill Condon

Taxco [postcard], 1964

Watercolor on cardboard

4 x 7½ in.

Collection of Tom and Tam Kiehnhoff, Houston



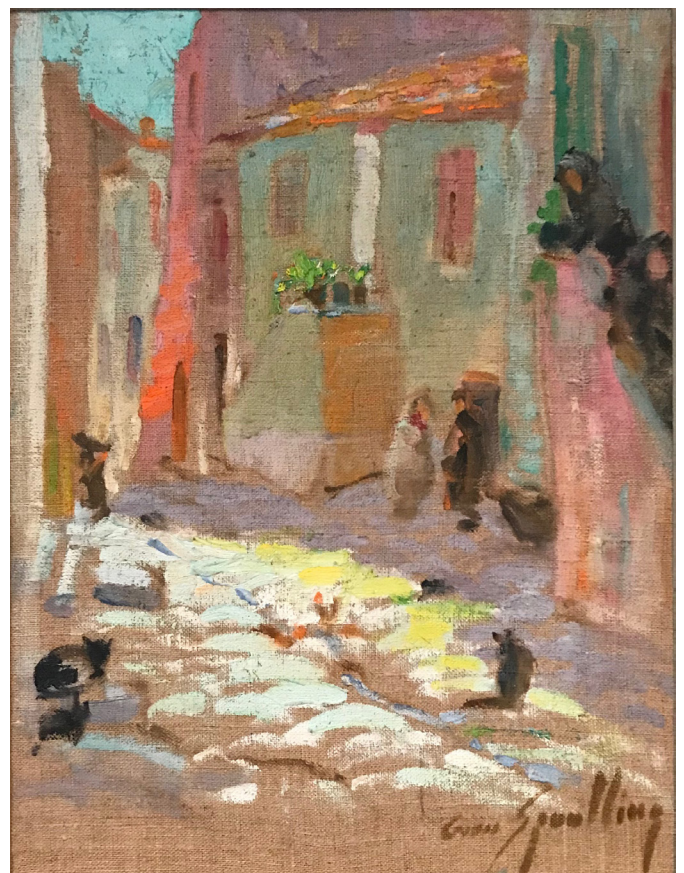
Bill Condon

Taxco, Mexico [postcard], 1964

Mixed media on card stock

8 x 6 in.

Collection of Randy Tibbits and Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Grace Spaulding John

Taxco, n.d.

Oil on linen laid on board

12 x 10 in.

Collection of David Lackey and Russell Prince, Houston



Grace Spaulding John

Untitled [Mexico scene], n.d.

Oil on canvas

19 ½ x 15 ½ in.

Collection of David Lackey and
Russell Prince, Houston



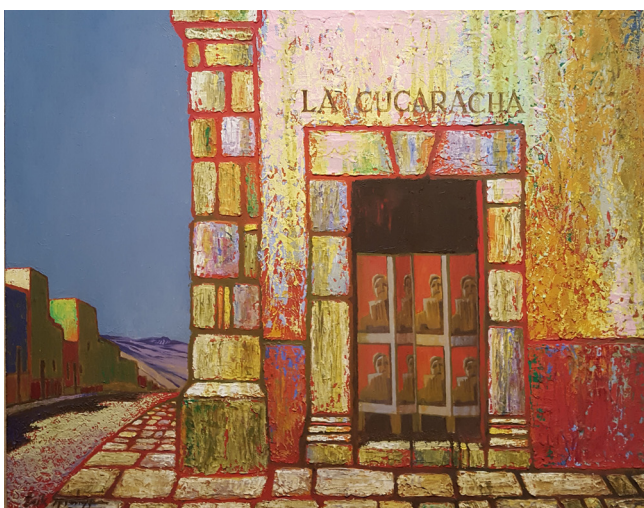
Gene Charlton

Untitled, c. 1947

Oil on paper

11 ½ x 15 in.

Collection of Tom and Tam Kiehnhoff,
Houston



Erik Sprohge

La Cucaracha, c. 1968

Oil on board

24 x 30 in.

Collection of Linda and Bill Reaves, Houston



Frank Freed

Viva Mateos, 1965

Oil on board

9 x 12 in.

Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Edward Muegge (Buck) Schiwetz
Mexican Study, n.d.
Watercolor or mixed media on board
14½ x 21 in.
Collection of Pamela Nelson Harte
and Will Harte, Fort Davis



Edward Muegge (Buck) Schiwetz
Afternoon Cerralvo, Mex, 1951
Pencil on paper
11 x 15 1/2 in.
Collection of Lias J. (Jeff) Steen, Houston



Bill Condon
Untitled [Mexico Scene], 1956
Mixed media on board
14 x 21 in.
Collection of Pamela Nelson Harte
and Will Harte, Fort Davis



Edward Muegge (Buck) Schiwetz
Mexican City, 1949
Mixed media on board
19 x 23 in.
Collection of Pamela Nelson Harte
and Will Harte, Fort Davis



Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood

Waterfall, n.d.

Oil on masonite

14 x 12 in.

Collection of Leila and Henri Gadbois, Houston



Lucas Johnson

Border, 1986

Acrylic on masonite

60 x 48 in.

Collection of Patricia Covo Johnson, Houston



Forrest Bess

Acapulco, 1939

Oil on canvas

18 x 20 in.

Courtesy of

Reaves | Foltz Fine Art



Bill Condon

Janitzio, 1961
Mixed media on wood
40 x 18 in.
Courtesy of Reaves | Foltz Fine Art



Harold Phenix

Untitled, n.d.
Watercolor on paper
16 x 20 in.
Collection of Pamela Nelson Harte and Will Harte, Fort Davis



Bill Condon

Patzcuaro [postcard], 1964
Watercolor on cardboard
4½ x 6 in.
Collection of Tom and Tam Kiehnhoff, Houston



Bill Condon

Mexico [postcard], 1958
Watercolor on cardboard
5½ x 3 in.
Collection of Tom and Tam Kiehnhoff, Houston



Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood

Mexican Afternoon, 1955

Oil on canvas

14½ X 24 in.

Collection of Linda and Bill Reaves, Houston



Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood

Mexican Procession, c. 1950s

Oil on board

15 x 20 in.

Collection of Linda and Bill Reaves, Houston



Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood

Procession, n.d.

Oil on masonite

16 x 20 in.

Collection of Leila and Henri Gadbois, Houston



Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood

Catacombs [Mexico City], 1951

Oil on board

18 x 24 in.

Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Bill Condon

Cemetery, Saltillo [postcard], 1960

Ink and wash on card stock

4 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.

Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



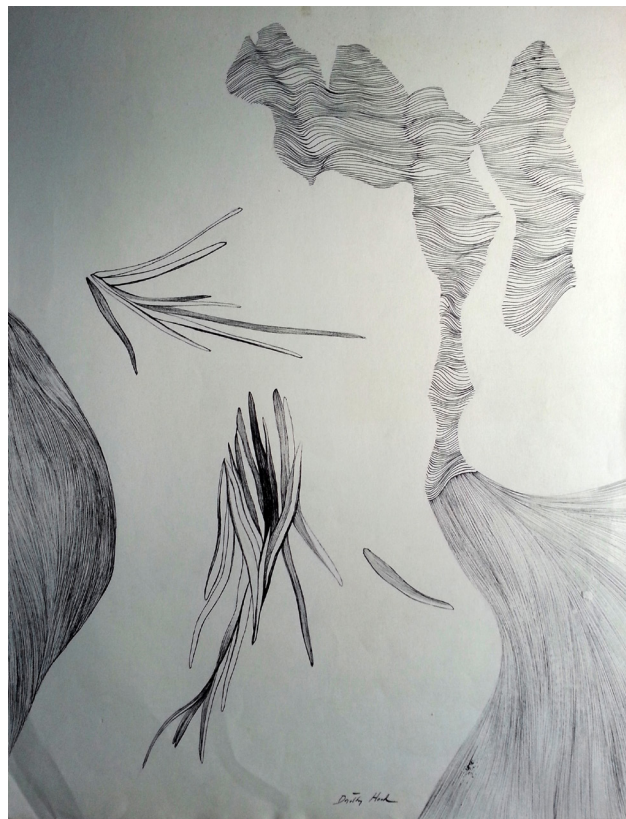
David Gray

Votive with Skull, 1985

Oil on canvas

18 x 24 in.

Collection of David Gray, Houston



Dorothy Hood

Winged Figure, c. 1956

Oil on canvas

29¾ x 25½ in.

Collection of Linda and Bill Reaves, Houston

Dorothy Hood

Untitled, 1960s

Ink on paper

22 x 17 in.

Collection of Randy Tibbits and Rick Bebermeyer, Houston

Earl V. Staley

Angels Over Oaxaca, 1981

Oil on linen

74½ x 48 in.

Collection of Sally and Norman Reynolds, Houston



Dorothy Hood

Rending and Being Mountain, 1948

Oil on canvas

24 x 26½ in.

Collection of Linda and Bill Reaves, Houston



Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood

Fleeing Angel, n.d.

Oil on masonite

11¼ x 14 in.

Collection of Leila and Henri Gadbois, Houston



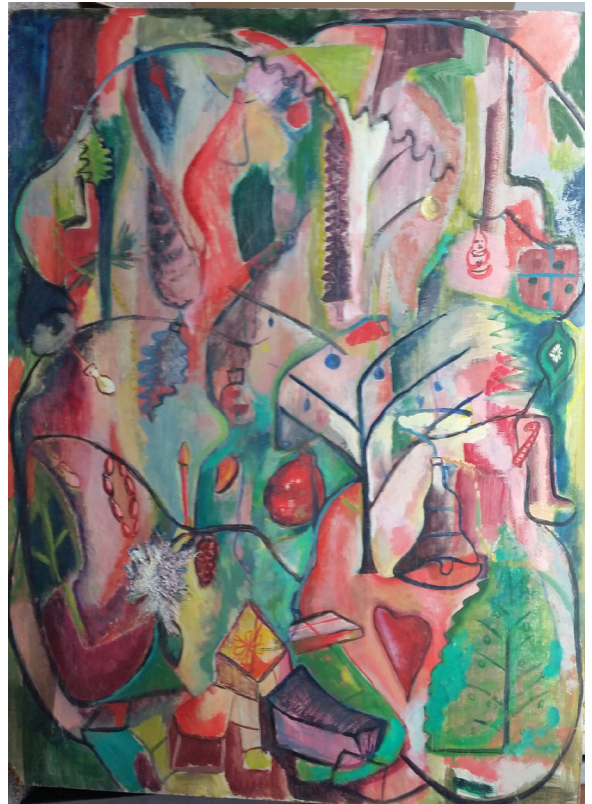
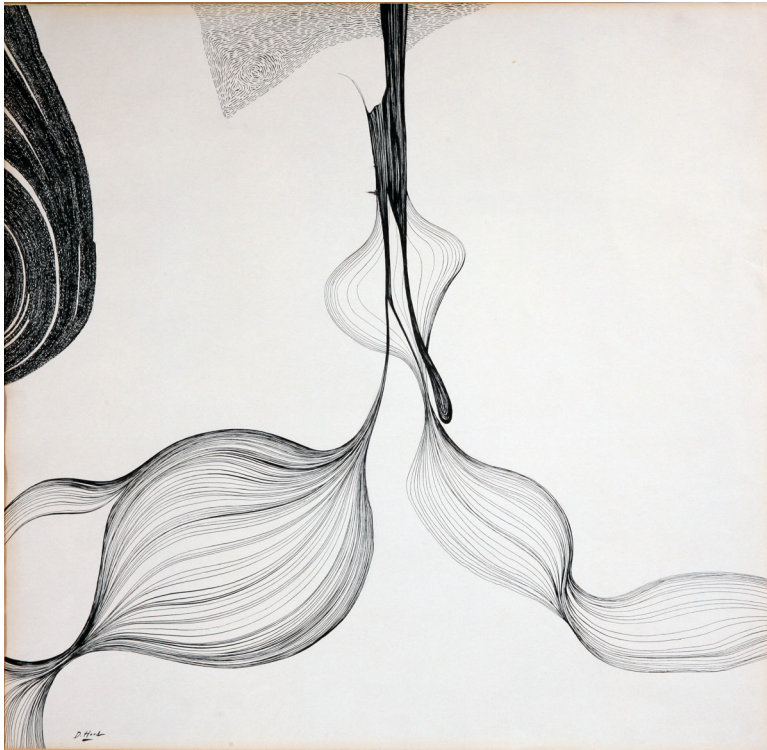
Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood

Angels, n.d.

Oil on masonite

16 x 20 in.

Collection of Leila and Henri Gadbois, Houston



Dorothy Hood

Untitled, c. 1950

Pen and ink on paper

19 x 20 in.

Collection of Tom and
Tam Kiehnhoff, Houston

Mildred Wood Dixon Sherwood

Ornaments, n.d.

Oil on masonite

24 x 18 in.

Collection of Leila and
Henri Gadbois, Houston



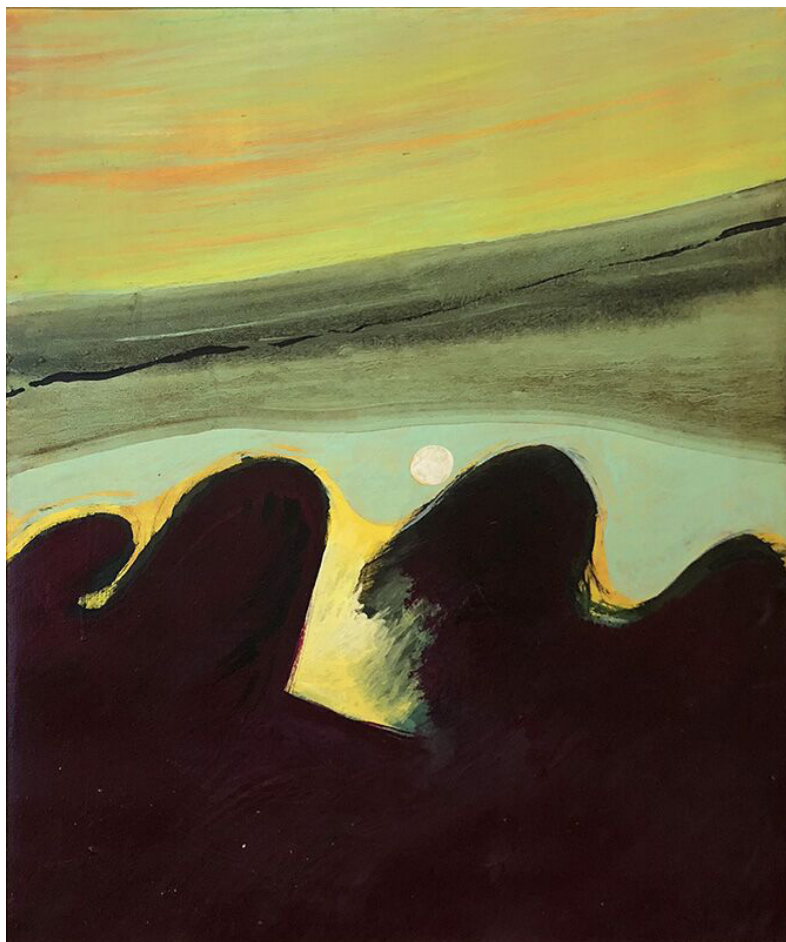
Dorothy Hood

Untitled, 1950s

Oil on canvas

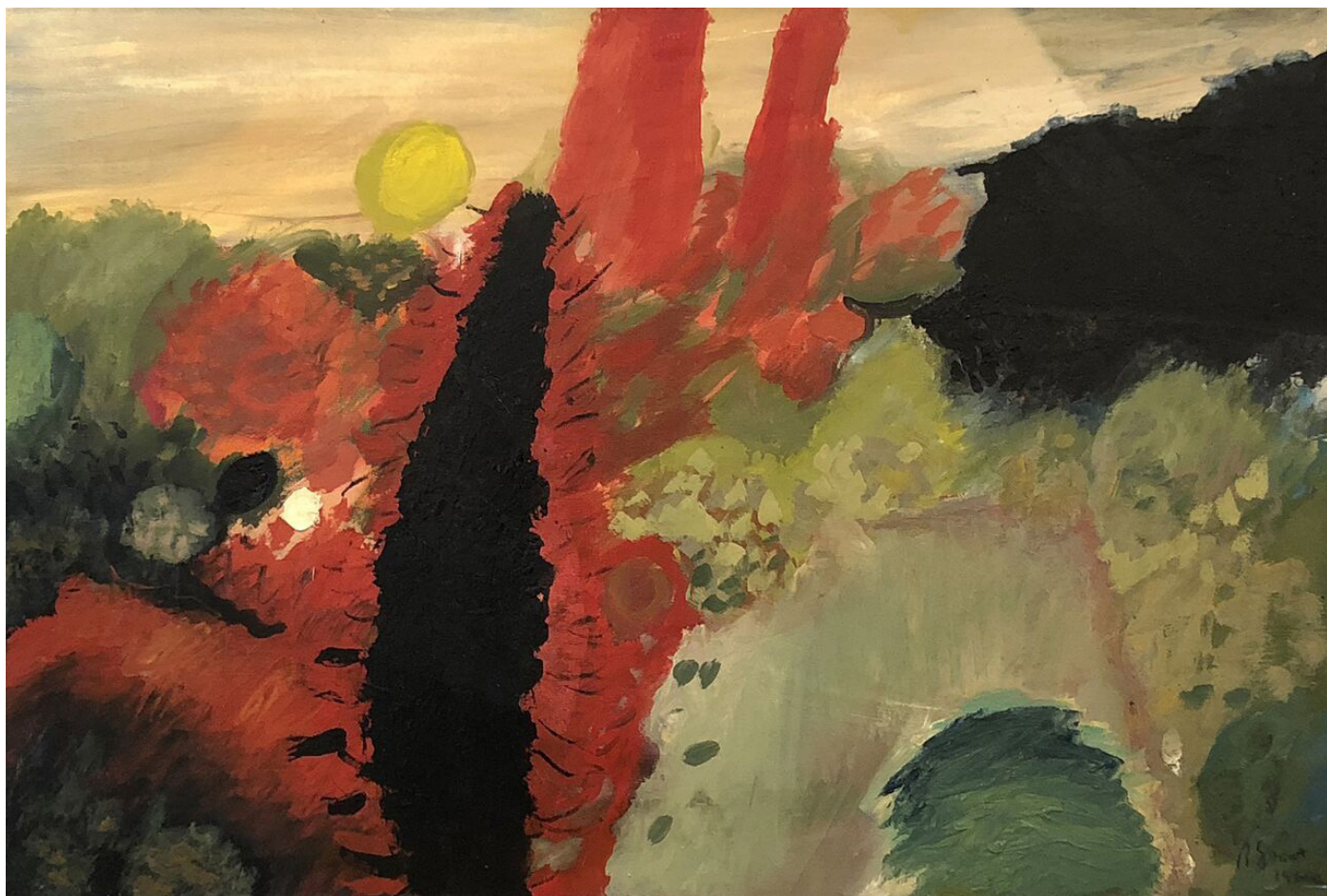
11 x 8 in.

Charles M. Peveto, Austin



Richard Stout
Mexico, 1965-66
Oil on canvas
30 x 25 in.
Courtesy of Reaves | Foltz Fine Art

Richard Stout
Mexico, 1962-63
Oil on canvas
24 x 36 in.
Courtesy of Reaves | Foltz Fine Art





C. Garza Rivera

The Houston Gargoyle cover, March 27, 1928

Rotogravure

11½ x 8½ in.

Courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

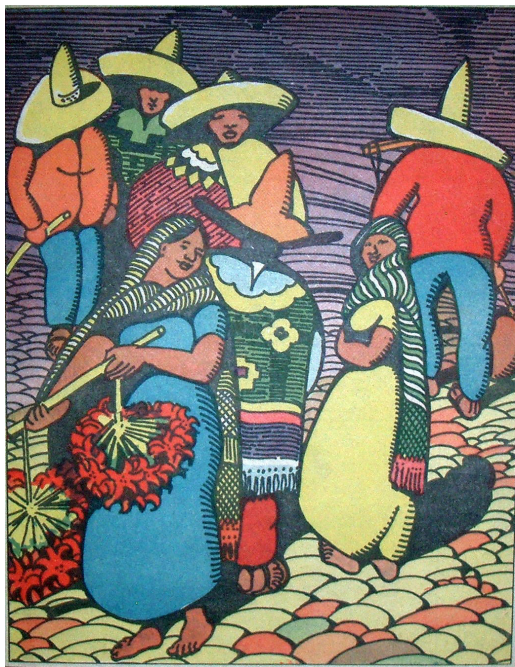
C. Garza Rivera

The Houston Gargoyle cover, April 24, 1928

Rotogravure

11½ x 8½ in.

Courtesy of Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library



Grace Spaulding John

Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine cover, October 4, 1936

Newsprint

13½ x 10 in.

Collection of Randy Tibbits and Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Grace Spaulding John
Mi Esposa, Mi Niño, Mi Burro, c. 1934
Linocut
5½ x 3¾ in.
Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Grace Spaulding John
Wash, c. 1934
Linocut
11 x 8¼ in.
Collection of Randy Tibbits and Rick
Bebermeyer, Houston



Grace Spaulding John
Adelina Dulce, c. 1934
Linocut
5¼ x 4 in.
Collection of Randy Tibbits and
Rick Bebermeyer, Houston



Grace Spaulding John
Untitled [Mexico ink drawing for print], n.d.
Ink on paper
8½ x 12 in.
Collection of Virginia McNeely, Houston

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