

arts

MAGAZINE

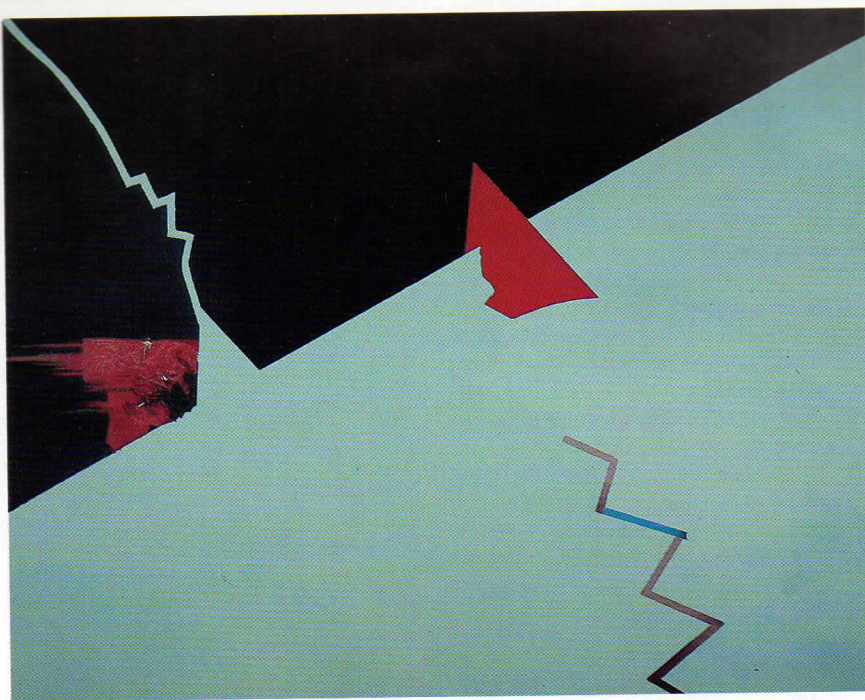
SUMMER 1985

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Dorothy Hood, Centrifugal Orbit, 1984. Oil on canvas, 96 x 120". Courtesy The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



FRESH PAINT: THE HOUSTON SCHOOL

CAROL J. EVERINGHAM

"Fresh Paint" is a round-up of prime Texas stock.

Once upon a time . . .
Sometime ago back on the gulf coast
In Houston town to be exact . . .
A bunch of artists and painters and
sculptors and musicians and
poets and writers and dancers
and architects . . .
All got together and decided
They would show those Soho Noho
TriBeCa types a thing or two
About art in the fourth largest city . . .
So they hired themselves a truck.

It was a spanking new white-shiney
Chrome-plated cab-over
Eighteen wheeler Peterbilt . . .
With new Lone Star decals
And "Fresh Paint"
Printed on the side of the door
With solid 24-karat gold-leaf type . . .

And they filled up this truck
With the most significant stacks—
Long and bigger samples of artwork
Ever to be assembled in Modern Times
And sent it East . . . to chide,
Cajole, enchant and entreat
The Big Apple.

And this is the story of that truck—
That Peterbilt . . .

A truckload of Art
From Boom Town
Went rollin' down the road
Yeah, the driver was singin'
And the sunset was Rose pretty . . .
Yippee ey aye eye ooooo . . .

With all due apologies to Terry Allen and a "Truckload of Art" from his "Lubbock (on everything)" album, the irresistible is the pulse, that same kind of rev 'em up, head 'em up Texas spirit which is similar to that of "Fresh Paint: The Houston School" which has just left the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, for New York's P.S. 1.

"Fresh Paint" is a stampede of the mind. The whole round-up begins with the experienced rustler—that rugged individual who comes along and announces that the steers are ready to move. Barbara Rose breezed into town—not as a stranger, having passed through the Museum ranch several times already—but as that one who could spot a good steer, see it in prime state, and announce to the ranch hands that it was time to round 'em up and move 'em past the Houston horizon. So Rose, the rustler, who had seen the camps/schools in and around Paris, Athens, Rome and elsewhere, came to Houstontown and proclaimed that this was the year for the big Texas round-up.

"The hour has come," she deemed; "we must gather up the steers and get them on up the trail!" So Rose, astride her finest cutting horse named Intuition, set out for the distant fenced-in owners/studios of the 50-square-mile Prairie town ranch to seek the sturdiest—those who were ablest, strongest, healthiest to handle over the long rugged trip.

It was the dawn of a glorious morn, that spring day 1984, as the sun was comin' over the horizon. Alongside Intuition rode the ambitious, the faithful steed of Susie Kalil who had been designated curator cowgal of the ranch. They set out, side by side, to round up the banks of the bayous and through the endless flatlands to round out the prize steers amongst the scattered herd.

It was easy for them to spot the older ones, for they had been branded in years past as being in obviously tip-top shape for traveling. But scattered around were the young'uns, frolicking and frisking about, who needed to be added, 'cause they were full of creative energy that would make for a fine herd. So, one by one, old and young were rounded up—44 longhorns in all—for all to see in the countryside to see.

When the time came to see the final selection, 5,000 ranchers had gathered to witness the occasion. Without a doubt, the

Jim Alexander, *Birds in Bondage*, 1984. Oil on canvas, 90 x 100". Courtesy
 Kermit Oliver Gallery, Philadelphia, and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



Jim Poag, *Last Oasis*, 1983. Acrylic
 and litho-crayon on paper on canvas, 62 1/4 x 68 3/8". The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



Two more were found down the Biggers path, Kermit Oliver and Bert Samples, whose artistic integrity and impeccable technique allude to the "alchemy, dreams, myths and visions," as Samples would state of the Biggers influence. To round out the group, Rose and Kalil took the Spanish/Mexican line by the horns, so to speak, and ferreted out the independent ones like Cantu, Luna, Davila, Garza and Espada, who were pursuing their own paths, quite unbeknownst to the others (except for the latter who had studied with Hood).

Yes, a truck load of art
 That big eighteen wheeler
 Arrived in the Big Apple
 For artists/patrons/press to see
 And New Yorkers came over
 To Long Island City
 With champagne, fireworks,
 A Texas style bar-b-que
 And a drum and bugle corps
 To roast and toast
 The Boom town bunch

The story of "Fresh Paint" is *not over yet*, for it was taken one step further to see if it had held up well. So over to the Whitney we all went to catch a glimpse of the Biennial. And y'all know what? We came back mighty proud, 'cause there is a lot more lasting flavor to the Houston School show. Bets have it that a year down the pike, the Erector sets of TODT, the rip off the Russians of Sherrie Levine, the thunder and lightning of Jack Goldstein, the pathetic Ulysses of Charles Garabedian, and the subway day-glo characters of Kenny Scharf (although terrifically exuberant on site) will soon be dated and not hold up to the furies of ravaging time.

There are the exceptions (Judd, Johns, Surls, Witkin, Garet) who seem to have lots of mileage left. Not to say that there are not a few duds in "Fresh Paint," notably the unbearable puss-ridden pimple of Andy Feehan, titled *Tropical Anastasia*, which is a cross section of the epidermis, right down to the scaly hair follicles. (Why, oh why, didn't they choose his *Wrestler Series* which does have a particularly more rewarding feel to it?)

But "Fresh Paint" is exciting for the path it has taken. It has been a round-up of prime stock, cultured and grown on the prairie lands of Texas which have produced new strains to be tasted on the buffet tables of New York. Shipped in a truck up East, "Fresh Paint" has arrived like a grand bar-b-que—from satisfying beef on the ribs to genuine Spanish-style beans—a hearty Texas flavor right down to the bones. And don't forget to try the very special jalapeño.

Bon appetit, y'all.

...and Greek myth, which tickles and tortures the
 ...of a *raison d'être*. Ingrained in the tableau is, indeed,
 ...imate identification with his favorites: Rimbaud,
 ...the Strauss, Mahler, and van Gogh.
 ...continued to put her eye and her reputation on the line as she
 ...the most powerful of the region—Dick Wray, Derek
 ...Lucas Johnson—those who could hold their own
 ...circumstance. With them came a distinct quality and style
 ...an unmistakable signature. She had already sighted
 ...the celebrated stud of the country, who had sired a
 ...registered student/offspring who carried his markings:
 ...Jim Poag, Kelly Alison, Chuck Dugan, Jeff DeLude,
 ...Two others, Robert McCoy and Ron Hoover,
 ...from the Alexander hold and went off in their own



Jim Poag, *Fresh Paint*, 1983. Oil on canvas, 88 1/4 x 132 1/2". The Museum of Fine
 Arts, Houston. Museum Purchase with Funds Provided by the
 Resistance League of Houston.