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Regional Trends: Texas

by staff

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Although the state's budget was hit belatedly by the current economic crisis, with Gov. Rick Perry's recent proposal to cut funding for the Texas Commission on the Arts looming large in recent headlines, Texans remain if anything a resilient bunch. So its no surprise that the state's expansive visual art scene has continued to grow and stretch out in new directions over the last year. A powerhouse of events taking place across the Lone Star State--ranging from fairs and month-long festivals to renovated institutions--offer solid evidence of the vitality and resilience of the arts communities that reside here.

The continual proliferation of art fairs has officially found its way into Texas, as the state hosts two additional events in 2011. The most senior event, the Dallas Art Fair (April 8-10, 2011) returns for its junior year to the Fashion Industry Gallery with over 60 national and international exhibitors ranging from modern to contemporary works. The fair features collaborations with several nearby institutions, including Dallas Contemporary, the Meadows Museum at Southern Methodist University, and the Nasher Sculpture Center, where an ADAA Collectors panel will be held on Saturday, April 9.

The new SUITE Art Fair takes place in the historic Belmont Hotel. Running concurrently with the Dallas Art Fair, SUITE's inaugural event opens with 17 contemporary galleries featuring works by emerging and established artists. Putting a new twist on the usual art fair standard, SUITE integrates a digital aspect to their buyer-seller interface, broadcasting the exhibitors and their featured artists beyond their physical confines via social media technologies. Rounding out the trio will be the Houston Fine Art Fair, scheduled to take place September 16-18 at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Fair promoters anticipate bringing over 80 galleries from the United States and abroad under one roof, ranging from post-war to contemporary with a special showcase of Latin American and Mexican Art.

Balancing out the propagation of the new is the long-standing San Antonio Contemporary Art Month (CAM), now in its 26th year. The art month was established in 1986 under the director of Southwest School of Art and Craft in what is now the Blue Star Contemporary Art Center. Last year the event moved from July to the milder climate of March, where it continues this year with the "Kick-Off Party" taking place at Blue Star on March 3, and events scheduled to take place at venues throughout the month in San Antonio's art venues, including the San Antonio Museum of Art, Artpace, and San Antonio Botanical Garden.

The fourth Triennial event, "New Art in Austin: 15 to Watch" currently taking place in the capital city at the Austin Museum of Art, brings together a curatorial team from numerous Texas institutions: Kate Bonansinga, Gallery Director of the Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts at The University of Texas at El Paso; Andrea Mellard, Assistant Curator at the Austin Museum of Art; and Toby Kamps, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art with the Menil Collection, Houston. The exhibition highlights emerging artists working to "stretch the boundaries of contemporary art," and includes mixed media artists Leslie Mutchler and J. Parker Valentine; printmaker Miguel Aragon; along other artists working in sculpture, drawing, photography, installation and video.

This past fall saw renovations and relocations throughout the state. Beginning last September, the new Visual Arts Center at the University of Texas in Austin, opened with an installation by Los Angeles-based artist Ry Rocklen, and exhibitions by Mexico-based Magali Lara, the experimental artist collective Lucky Dragons, and other group shows. Also in Austin, the non-profit center Arthouse at the Jones Center in Austin reopened in October with a renovation and expansion of their existing space by the New York-based firm Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis. The project added 14,000 square feet of space, which included the addition of a video/projects room, a large open gallery, two artists' studios, additional preparation areas and roof deck. The following month, the Goss-Michael Foundation, a center bringing the work of contemporary British artists to Texas, moved into a renovated warehouse in the Dallas Design District with an inaugural exhibition featuring Michael Craig-Martin, Tracey Emin, Gilbert & George, Damien Hirst, and Eva Rothschild among many others. Dallas Contemporary's new director, Peter Doroshenko, also looks toward European artists, combining exhibitions this spring of local artists David Willburn and the collective Sour Grapes, with Michel Verjux from France. The building trend continues at the Kimbell Art Museum, which is in the early phases of adding a new Piano-designed building to its campus (scheduled to open in 2013) and the Blaffer Gallery at the University of Houston, which recently announced that WORK Architecture Company has been selected for the major renovation beginning this July. Before its renovation hiatus, the Blaffer will be hosting the 2011 annual meeting of the Association of Academic Museum & Galleries on May 21.