

**ART OF
SILENCE**

The Color Inside
by James Turrell,
at the University
of Texas at Austin
campus, is best
viewed at sunrise
and sunset.

Opposite: The
Rothko Chapel in
Houston invites
visitors to reflect.

STATE OF THE ART

TEXAS is known for many things: Southern hospitality, a WILD WEST identity and booming business, from oil to technology. But the ARTS CULTURE that's been brewing BENEATH THE SURFACE has only recently broken into the global spotlight. Now Texas is making a scene – and the world is watching.

WORDS SERENA RENNER

PHOTOGRAPHY: FLORIAN HOLZHER/ COURTESY OF THE LANDMARKS ART PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN. OPPOSITE: GREATER HOUSTON CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU.



ARTS & CULTURE

Ida Soulard was living in Kyoto, Japan, when she heard about the eclectic art culture taking over the West Texas town of Marfa. A French art historian studying creative output following the Fukushima earthquake, Soulard knew of the harsh West Texas landscape, but she was surprised to read that every Friday and Saturday evening in Marfa feels like a night out in Berlin.

"I found that very peculiar," Soulard recalls. "Being in the middle of the desert, with 1800 native residents, and feeling like you're in Berlin."

In 2011, Soulard applied for a position at the research-focused artist-in-residency programme Fieldwork: Marfa in part to discover the culture that had captivated her. She was accepted and soon welcomed into a hospitable art community shaped by inhospitable landscapes.

"Everything feels stronger here," Soulard, now co-director of Fieldwork, says. "The wind is really strong and the weather can be tough in the winter and summer so you feel the elements. You also feel the geology. There's this arid background that can only infuse the work of the people."

Vast plains and deserts have been drawing people to rough-and-tumble Texas for generations and the expansiveness of the land has a way of broadening the mind and bending the culture. Receptivity combined with a pioneering spirit and that famous Texan generosity has created an arts scene where the opportunities seem endless.

"There's this Wild West, come-here-and-make-it-happen kind of attitude," says Ashley Clemmer Hoffman, the community engagement director at the Rothko Chapel in Houston. The interfaith meditation space, which showcases the work of the late American painter Mark Rothko, is but one example of this. "[Texas] is a place that embraces new ideas and possibilities and young people," Hoffman continues. "And I think because of the oil and gas industry, there's a lot of money to back that."

OUT OF BOUNDS

There is no better representation of the union between industry and art than the Texas metropolis of Houston. The headquarters of America's oil and gas production, Houston is a city where money and optimism flow from the streets up to the tops of the high rises. But beyond the skyscrapers, the state's most respected art institutions – the Museum of Fine Arts, the Contemporary Arts Museum and the Menil Collection – command quiet authority. The curators and fans of such establishments often have oil and gas to thank.

"[Oil and gas] companies bring in people from all over the world to work here," Hoffman says. "So they need Houston to be an exciting city where people want to live. It makes a lot of sense that they'd want to invest in culture."

The influence of Dominique de Menil – the French-American art collector who founded Houston's Rothko Chapel in addition to the Menil Collection, the Cy Twombly Gallery, Richmond Hall and the Byzantine Fresco Chapel with her husband, John – can be traced directly to oil money. Dominique was the daughter of Conrad Schlumberger, co-founder of the oil services company Schlumberger Limited.

In the 1940s, after Dominique and John were married in France, they moved to Houston, where John was put in charge of the company's worldwide operations. But the de Menils' passion for contemporary art and architecture quickly seeped into programmes at the Contemporary Arts Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts. The couple established an arts programme at the University of St Thomas (which later moved to Rice University) and then bought a 12-hectare parcel of land studded with oak trees and bungalows from the 1920s and '30s to carry out their vision of creating the Menil "campus".

In 1971, the octagonal Rothko Chapel – set behind the mesmerising *Broken Obelisk* statue

ART HOP IN HOUSTON

1. The Menil Collection.
2. Dan Flavin's penultimate light sculpture at Richmond Hall.
3. Project Row Houses.
4. Sculptures from the Menil Collection.
5. The Yoshio Taniguchi-designed Asia Society Texas Center opened in 2012.
6. Menil Collection exterior.
7. The Rothko Chapel's *Broken Obelisk* statue by Barnett Newman.
8. The sculpture garden at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



PHOTOGRAPHY: DON GLENTZER / COURTESY OF THE MENIL COLLECTION (IMAGE NO. 1). ALL OTHER PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE GREATER HOUSTON CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU



by Barnett Newman, a dedication to Dr Martin Luther King – crowned the campus. The Menil Collection building, the American debut from Italian architect Renzo Piano, was added in 1987 to house the de Menils' assortment of more than 16,000 art pieces. In 2017, the Menil Foundation plans to debut a permanent home for the Menil Drawing Institute, the first museum dedicated to the medium in the US. While the Menil campus is located in the "Museum District", the boundaries are blurred by native vegetation and traditional homes.

"You're just driving through the neighbourhood and all of a sudden, there's the Rothko Chapel and there's the *Obelisk* and this building designed

by Renzo Piano," Hoffman says. "The city is this really interesting mix of big buildings and freeways and fancy cars, and then there's this insertion of art that's becoming more noticeable, but which for a long time was just under the surface."

Relaxed zoning laws are responsible for the under-the-radar art venues popping up all over Houston, according to Hoffman. Unlike most American cities, Houston doesn't care whether a home sits next to a museum that shares a fence with a bar. This lack of zoning has opened up unique opportunities for creative people to buy land and buildings and offer art experiences in unconventional spaces.

Hoffman used to work at Project Row Houses, centred on a strip of 1930s bungalows in the northern Third Ward, one of the city's oldest African-American districts. In the early 1990s, a group of artist-activists banded together to buy the homes as a way to protect the neighbourhood from development and fill it with public art. Now, three times a year, artists from around the world transform each of the 46.5-square-metre bungalows in provocative ways.

The free-to-enter Rothko Chapel also strives to be an agent of social change. Over its 40-plus-year history, the light-filled space, designed to facilitate an intimate connection between the viewer and the 14 dramatic wall paintings (hallmark fields of dark colour by Mark Rothko), has welcomed some of the world's most reputed

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intellectuals and leaders, including former President Jimmy Carter, Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama. It's also a profound work of art itself in memory of Rothko.

"Even the twisted material of the floor was inspired by the pavers in Central Park," Hoffman says. "And the height of the guardrails in front of the paintings are in response to a wooden bench Rothko kept in his studio. He had a hand in every detail of the space."

The Menil campus has several other single-artist environments, from a body of Dan Flavin's trademark tube-light installations mounted in Richmond Hall to the Cy Twombly Gallery, a venue solely dedicated to the artist's paintings, sculptures and works on paper.

In contrast, the Menil Collection building houses a broad spectrum of objects, especially surrealist pieces by the likes of René Magritte and Max Ernst. The permanent collection inspires rotating exhibitions, which have lately centred on another Houston theme: NASA. *The Infinity Machine*, a sound installation by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, on display in the Byzantine Fresco Chapel until February 2016, is a spinning mobile of mirrors that transmits real sound recordings of deep space from NASA's *Voyager* probes, says Tommy Napier, the Menil Collection's communications coordinator.

"The experience is very transporting," he says. And it's very local. "They're building a space port in Houston right now," Napier adds. "I don't know many other cities building a space port. [NASA] brings out the wonder in you."

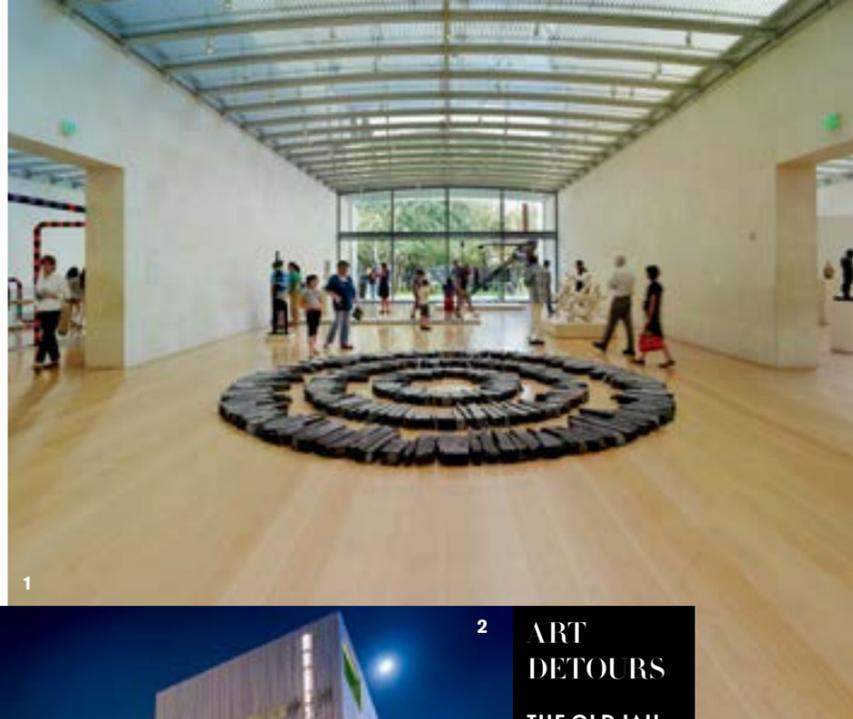
LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Other cities like Dallas, Fort Worth and San Antonio may not have the art history or zoning-free potential of Houston. But higher-art institutions such as the Dallas Museum of Art and the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas; the reflective Tadao Ando-designed Modern and Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth; and the San Antonio Museum of Art, as well as the McNay Art Museum, have all begun collaborating with emerging local artists, steering these cities towards more community-minded programmes and attracting a new generation of creatives in the process. Surprises for the curious visitor to Dallas, for example, now range from the private art collection at Dallas Cowboys stadium to the Power Station, a cutting-edge gallery housed in a 1920s electrical plant.

Dallas is small and accessible, which gives the average artist a chance, says multimedia-maker Lucia Simek, who also spent 10 years as an arts writer and now handles public relations for the Nasher Sculpture Center, one of the main fixtures of the 19-block Dallas Arts District. Compared with places like New York and San Francisco, where it's a cat-and-dog fight to make any progress, Dallas is an easy place to network and grow an audience, according to Simek.

"Dallas still has that frontier feel," she says. "If you're a young artist or writer or filmmaker, you can come here and get known quickly. It's a city making a name for itself and everything feels possible. It's an exciting place to be."

Like Houston, Dallas has some veteran collectors such as Howard and Cindy Rachofsky, who own a gallery called the Warehouse on the outskirts of town. Rather than ▶



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ART DETOURS

THE OLD JAIL ART CENTER

Two hours west of Fort Worth, this cutting-edge centre offers historic and contemporary shows and events, emphasising young Texas artists, in the original Shackelford County jail. *theoldjailartcenter.org*



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ART CAR MUSEUM

This Houston folk art icon is a life force behind the international art car movement. The goal? To present unknown artists and political commentary through the personal medium of bejewelled automobiles. *artcarmuseum.com*



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TOILET SEAT ART MUSEUM

Retired plumber Barney Smith, 94, decorates toilet seat lids and showcases them in his San Antonio garage. He has adorned more than 1000, which document his life and modern times. *Call ahead on +1 (210) 824-7791.*



PHOTOGRAPHY: THIS PAGE, IMAGE 1: TIM HURSLEY; 2: CARTER ROSE; 3: GEORGE BURES MILLER; 4: DANIEL DRIENSKY; OPPOSITE: J. GRIFFIS SMITH/TXDOOT; DON GLENTZER.



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SHOW TIME IN HOUSTON & DALLAS

1. Nasher Sculpture Center. 2. Wily Theatre at the AT&T Performing Arts Center. 3. *The Infinity Machine* by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, on display at the Menil Collection. 4. The Wily Theatre in action. 5 & 6. Modern art galleries feature the likes of Andy Warhol at the Menil Collection in Houston.

The Nasher Sculpture Center, another sky-lit Renzo Piano masterpiece surrounded by a garden landscaped by Peter Walker, is most famous for 20th-century icons such as a walk-through canyon of rusted steel called *My Curves Are Not Mad* by Richard Serra and the sensual *Age of Bronze* figure by Auguste Rodin. Smaller pieces seem transported straight from the artist's studio and curated exhibitions challenge the public's understanding of "sculpture". One upcoming show will host Swiss artist Mai-Thu Perret, who will act out her fictional feminist alter egos using puppets. "I can't wait for that one," Simek says.

AUSTIN CITY LIMITS

When Louis Grachos left his directorship at the 150-year-old Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, to lead the newly established Contemporary Austin, he knew he had his work cut out for him. Music, food, film and technology: these are cultures Austin does well, but a high-quality fine arts scene? That has been slower to gel in this thrift-store-loving, rockabilly-baring city, despite the best efforts of long-running organisations like the Texas Fine Arts Association. Simek shares a common sentiment: "[Austinites] have music going for them; they should stick with that."

But the challenge of building an arts scene from the ground up is exactly what attracted Grachos to the Contemporary Austin, a fusion of two art centres: the Austin Museum of Art and Arthouse (formerly the Jones Center for Contemporary Art). In 2013, the Contemporary took over the Jones Center space on Congress Avenue as well as a lakefront property called Laguna Gloria, shaded by juniper, oak and cottonwood trees and watched over by a Tuscan-style villa, the former home of the late Austin art benefactor Clara Driscoll.

"One of the things I learned early about Austin is that the university culture compounded by the state government creates a very interesting demographic," Grachos says. But he also noticed an infectious energy spurred by such local residents as the inventive restaurateur Larry McGuire and the art-conscious hotel developer Liz Lambert (of Hotel San José and Hotel Saint Cecilia), not to mention big Austin festivals such as South by Southwest and Austin City Limits, which each attract tens of thousands of tourists every year.

"People who have been to Austin want to come back, and those who haven't been are interested in what's happening," Grachos says. "The influx of new ideas is wonderful. It's not a city rooted in deep traditions or ways of doing things."

Another thing Grachos noticed was an enthusiasm for nature and the organic way open-air places like the Hope Outdoor Gallery of murals and street art grow and change. "I've talked a lot about museums without walls, that we need to be much more expansive in our mindsets. Part of that is just that we don't have many walls," Grachos jokes.

That mindset has resulted in the Betty and Edward Marcus Sculpture Park at Laguna Gloria, an expanding network of site-specific sculptures connected by trails and installed along Lake Austin and the Gloria Lagoon. The most recent acquisition, in a collection that currently ▶

CREATIVE STAYS

HOTEL SAINT CECILIA

Named after the patron saint of music and poetry, this 14-room Austin hotspot is dedicated to the pioneering writers, musicians and artists of the 1960s and '70s. First stop: the pool (right). hotelsaintcecilia.com

HOTEL ZAZA

With properties in Houston, Dallas and, in the future, Austin, Hotel Zaza offers concept suites themed around everything from NASA to ranching, and partners with arts institutions like the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. hotelzaza.com

THE JOULE

A restored 1920s neo-gothic landmark a short walk from the Dallas Arts District, The Joule features an ever-growing art collection, which includes more than 70 salvaged mosaics by California artist Millard Sheets. thejouledallas.com



PHOTOGRAPHY: IMAGES 1, 5, 10, COURTESY OF THE NASHER SCULPTURE CENTER; 6, NATE REHLANDER; 7, NICK SIMONITE; 8, PAUL BARDAGY; 9, BRIAN FITZSIMMONS; 11, BETTY IMAGES.

OLD & NEW ART

- 1. Renzo Piano and Raymond Nasher.
- 2-5. Nasher Sculpture Center.
- 6. Dallas Museum of Art.
- 7. Hotel Saint Cecilia.
- 8. *Prometheus and Vulture* by Koren Der Harootian.
- 9. *Canopy Tower* at the Laguna Gloria sculpture park.
- 10. Raymond and Patsy Nasher.
- 11. Austin city light show.

oil, business and banking are the lifeblood here; Howard Rachofsky ran a successful hedge fund, while Raymond Nasher – the art patron who, with his wife Patsy, opened the Nasher Sculpture Center in 2003 – was once the chairman of Comerica Bank.

The Nashers started collecting modernist sculptures in the 1960s, a time when they thought the medium was overlooked. They opened the retail complex NorthPark Center in 1965 and adorned the mall with lesser-known pieces by Picasso and Matisse, which were moved to the new centre in 2003. Today, NorthPark showcases the growing collection of Nancy Nasher, Raymond and Patsy's daughter, which includes several Andy Warhol screen prints, intermixed with modern sculptures.

"Once you go there, any other shopping centre you visit feels so terrible," Simek says with a laugh.

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includes 11 pieces, is *Looking Up* – a 10-metre-tall humanoid fashioned from crushed baking dishes cast in steel – by conceptualist Tom Friedman. The long-legged giant peers up at the clouds and invites onlookers to do the same.

Grachos says he hopes to work with some of the biggest names in contemporary art and encourage them to design for the outdoors in addition to white walls. He adds that he's motivated to collaborate with Austin art leaders such as the University of Texas, which runs the impressive Blanton Museum of Art. Through the end of January, the exhibition *Strange Pilgrims* displays works of "experiential art" by such influencers as Charles Atlas, Phil Collins, Ayşe Erkmen and Yoko Ono across Laguna Gloria, the Jones Center and the visual arts galleries on the University of Texas campus.

"We want to connect exciting artists and curatorial projects to this growing artist community and this young collecting community," Grachos says. "We'd like to be an arm into the global art world that respectfully works in the community but also pushes outside of it."

WIDE OPEN SPACES

Nearly 700 kilometres from Austin and more than 300 kilometres from anywhere else, Marfa is a place most people wouldn't know about if the late pioneer of minimalism Donald Judd hadn't chosen this barren blip in the Chihuahuan Desert for his artistic playground in 1972. Judd traded Manhattan for Marfa and laid the foundation for a backroads bohemia that's still blossoming today.

In 1979, Judd established the Chinati Foundation in a former army artillery shed to house his trademark hollow boxes, along with works by artists ranging from Rembrandt to Dan Flavin. He also purchased additional buildings, such as two aircraft hangars, with the help of the New York-based Dia Art Foundation, which at the time had unlimited access to the Schlumberger oil fortune. A former rail stop, Marfa is



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both a border patrol town and a film location (*Giant*, James Dean's last movie, and more recently *No Country for Old Men* and *There Will be Blood* were shot here). Now, Marfa is an East Coast-flavoured hipster haven famous for film festivals and four artist-in-residency programmes including Chinati and Fieldwork. Pilgrimage sites range from non-profit centre Ballroom Marfa, which helped erect the *Prada Marfa* installation about 50 kilometres from town, to Liz Lambert's El Cosmico, a trendy encampment of tepees and vintage trailers – complete with a "hammock grove" – that has hosted everyone from Karl Rove to Beyoncé. This must be the "Berlin buzz" Ida Soulard heard about.

"It's a very addictive town," Soulard says. "It's a combination of the landscape, the highly intellectual art conversations and the Texas hospitality. So you're in these amazing settings and at the same time, you feel like you're at the centre of what's happening in contemporary art."

How exactly this tiny town in the middle of the West Texas desert became a centre of the global art conversation is anyone's guess. But it was surely the work of big dreamers and big thinkers, those who pushed the boundaries in a larger-than-life state known as Texas.



READ AN INTERVIEW WITH MULTIDISCIPLINARY AUSTIN ARTIST BEILI LIU AT STYLE.CO.NZ.



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PUBLIC ART

1. *Prada Marfa*.
2. El Cosmico.
3. *Looking Up* at the Laguna Gloria sculpture park.
4. Marfa residents.
5. Still frame from *Giant*, starring James Dean.
6. Donald Judd's famous concrete boxes.



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PHOTOGRAPHY: IMAGE 2: NICK SIMONITIS; 3: BRIAN FITZSIMMONS; 4: CHARLES STANKIEVICH; 6: GETTY IMAGES.