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SETX favorite
art exhibits.

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Caleb Sims at The Art Studio, Inc.

Photo by Andy Coughlan

COVER STORY

These are our favorite Southeast Texas art exhibitions from 2022

As the year draws to a close, every publication pulls out its annual “best-of” lists of movies, TV shows, songs, Tweets or what have you in an attempt to put themselves forward as an arbiter of taste. Why should the Beaumont Enterprise be any different? Or at least, why should I be any different?

Southeast Texas has a fine visual arts scene, which is my particular beat, so I thought I’d revisit my favorite exhibitions from the year. These are in chronological order, and the list does not imply that shows not on the list were not worth seeing. In fact, as usual, there were a lot of art excellent exhibitions, both big and small, during 2022.

I also have not included invitational group shows with multiple artists. In each of those the variety is so broad as to be impossible to just as a singular show. They are all worth seeing and it is up to the viewer to choose the particular nuggets that suit their fancy.

With the disclaimer out of the way, let’s begin:

Mark Greenwalt and Mayuko Ono Gray “Cohabitation 2022” Dishman Art Museum

The year began brightly with this excellent show at the Dishman Art Museum. Greenwalt and One Gray are husband and wife, but their work is different but equally interesting. Greenwalt’s paintings are Surreal and vaguely disturbing. They pull from Cubism and Da Vinci’s grotesque drawings, while carrying a vibe that is part Kafka and part David Lynch. Greenwalt also has a rich sense of humor that run through the works. Ono Gray’s drawings, in contrast, incorporate beauti-

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Keliy Anderson-Staeley at Art Museum of Southeast Texas.

ful swirling calligraphic lines that draw on her Japanese culture, that sweep and swirl through detailed images of daily life — her cat, household objects. Her technique is immaculate, and her pieces are beautifully alluring.

Let’s pause for a moment. The Dishman seems to be a sadly well-kept secret around Southeast Texas. Lamar University’s gallery consistently has wonderful shows, yet I consistently hear people say, “Oh, I’ve never heard of it.” Well now you have so there’s no excuse not to go see the exhibitions.

“Enlarging the View” Stark Museum of Art

The Museum Project is a loose group of photographers, who donate works to museums. Stark Museum curator Sarah Boehme took advantage of the project to create an interesting exhibition pairing contemporary photographs with items from the museum’s holdings. The result was a dialogue that forced the viewer to engage with the works from the collection in a new way.

A great example of Boehme’s wit was pairing Robert von Sternberg’s “Silva Oil Company, Ventura, California,” a nighttime view of an isolated gas station, with Oscar Edmund Berninghaus’ “The Faithful Ponies,” a Western

painting of horses tied up outside a saloon. Produced almost a century apart, these pieces are stylistically distinct from each other, but transportation is the through line that links them. Here’s hoping there are more shows in the future that use creative methods to show collections in a fresh light.

Carolyn Marks Johnson: “Woman, the Spirit of the Universe” Museum of the Gulf Coast

This exhibition featured 21 bronzed collars that spotlighted historical women and their contributions to society. Many of the women (including the iconic collar sported by Ruth

Bader Ginsberg) represent the legal profession — reflecting Johnson’s career as a judge. While the collars stand alone as works of art, the exhibition also served as a history lesson with articles, photographs and images adding biographical detail. Johnson made all the collars by hand from 100% cotton, before dipping them in wax and making a plaster foundation. The original collar was burned out, leaving the mold into which the bronze was poured. The original collar is gone, but what remains is a fine tribute to women’s history.

Caleb Sims: “What I’ve Become” The Art Studio, Inc.

Sims’ one-man show, his prize for winning TASIMJAE 2021, The Studio’s membership show, was a fun confection in the best possible way. Sims used self-portraiture to insert himself into a variety of imagery from 1980s pop culture. Sims pops up as a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, a Hungry Hungry Hippo and a Garfield Car Window suction toy, among others. The exhibition positively dripped with wit, with the star turn being “Orange Scale for Kupka, which sees the artist in a tiger suit holding a Cheeto. The real knowing joke is the pose mirrors Frantisek Kupka’s “The Yellow Scale,” an iconic image from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. “What I’ve Become” wonderfully blended technical skill with a knowing cleverness.

Keliy Anderson-Staeley “Documents & Dwellings” Art Museum of Southeast Texas

Anderson-Staeley is an artist,

HNP



Photos by Andy Coughlan

Mark Greenwalt and Mayuko Ono Gray at Dishman Art Museum.

photographer, detective and storyteller. Her excellent exhibition at AMSET incorporated all these elements to offer a visual feast to which everyone could relate. Anderson-Staley grew up in an off-the-grid cabin in Maine built by her parents, Tom and Ginny. At age 12, she found out Tom was not her biological father leading her to reevaluate her life. That process plays out in a series of works that include letters, documents, photographs and objects as she pieces together the fragments of her history in a search for identity. A grid of 44 photos of Tom and her biological father, Bill, is a compelling work. The two men are similar in look, which only adds to the intrigue. Both men contributed to Anderson-Staley's identity, but to what extent is a mystery. If she continues to make such fascinating work, may the search continue.

“Collecting a Master: Carlomagno Pedro Martinez from the John Gaston Fairey Collection of Mexican Folk Art”



M.C. Escher at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Art Museum of Southeast Texas

OK, this one is a total cheat as the exhibition opened in October 2021, but I didn't write about it until September and it runs through March 2023. So, you still have a chance to see it and you must see it. The installation features more than 360 ceramic pieces that come together to tell the story of 20th-century Mexican history. It is hard to do this exhibition justice. You simply have to see

it. The workmanship alone is breathtaking but add in the storytelling element and it is an exhibition worthy of any museum in the world. I have seen it six or seven times and see something new every time. If you have already seen it, you know you want to see it again. If you haven't seen it yet, head downtown now. You'll regret it if you miss it.

While I focused on Southeast Texas (and I could easily have put 10 or 12 shows on this

list), there were two shows at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston that deserve mention. “Virtual Realities,” the M.C. Escher retrospective, was fabulous mainly because it was such a surprise. There's a real pleasure in seeing something you think you know in a different light. I thought I knew Escher for the ubiquitous crazy never-ending staircases and optical illusions that are on T-shirts and coffee cups and posters. But this massive retro-

spective did as good a job as I've ever seen of showing an artist's process. Collector Michael S. Sachs purchased Escher's personal collection, including printing blocks and tools. It was as complete a look at a single artist as one will find.

“Gordon Park: Stokely Carmichael and Black Power” has a special place in my heart as it proves that photojournalism is an artform as much as “art” photography. Parks' eye for the story is captured through a series of magnificent images, most of which have never been seen before. Curator Lisa Volpe has compiled an exhibition that is art, journalism and history rolled into one — and a part of history that I am particularly interested in. If there was ever a target audience for this show, it is me. And it is on display through Jan. 16, so there's still time.

Don't wait for my 2023 year in review to see what you missed. Make plans to visit shows in Southeast Texas to see the variety of visual arts on display. I'll see you there.



Carlomagno Pedro Martinez at Art Museum of Southeast Texas.

Photos by Andy Coughlan



Gordon Parks at Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



Carolyn Marks Johnson at the Museum of the Gulf Coast.