

Ultra Violet and the Light

WARHOL'S SUPERSTAR CONTINUES HER ARTISTIC PURSUITS TOWARDS SPIRITUALITY. BY SHARON ROESKE



AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: With Salvador Dali at the opening of his exhibit, Huntington Hartford Museum, 1969 (Ron Galella); On the Merv Griffin Show; On the cover of the New York Times Magazine, 1968; With Andy Warhol at the Factory, 1969 (Paul Berg); With Rodney Bingenheimer and David Bowie during Bowie's first tour of the U.S. in 1970.

Some people have star power. It's more than the clothes they wear, the attitude they convey or the people they know. It just is. And Ultra Violet, born Isabelle Dufresne, has it. Salvador Dali recognized it in their first encounter that led to a fast, furious and lasting connection. So did Andy Warhol. After the three of them lunched together in 1963, Warhol asked Ultra Violet to be in one of his films. The rest, as they say, is history. She quickly became one of Warhol's most visible and unforgettable "Superstars".

There is no mistaking this woman as she enters the room. Of course, the full-length, crushed velvet violet jacket with violet pants and a lavender shirt would be a dead give-away. (I looked for traces of violet in her hair, but could not be sure.) She has lived an extraordinary life and continues to do so between her residences in Brooklyn and the south of France.

Ultra Violet has pursued her own art throughout her lifetime and has worked as an actress (Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy*, Mailer's *Maid Stone*, Foreman's *Taking Off* and Warhol's *I, a Man*) a writer (*Famous for Fifteen Minutes: My Years with Andy Warhol* and a play titled *You Are What You Eat*) and

a visual artist whose mixed media works have been exhibited in more than 60 venues worldwide.

I sat down with Ultra Violet during her short stay in Houston on a Friday evening at Deborah Colton Gallery where several of her works are included in the current exhibition, *New Cartoon!* Her investigations of art as a spiritual endeavor are engaging and she has much to say on many diverse subjects, from the current Christo exhibit in Manhattan to flying apocalyptic angels and rainbows overhead in Houston.

On Light

I think that light is essential. Every artist has addressed the subject of light. And I thought as an artist, I would start with the light. Meaning the rainbow, of course, there is no greater light than that. And there is such a puzzlement and intrigue about light. It goes from ultraviolet to the blues which very softly become the greens and into the warm yellows and then oranges and reds. What a mystery!

I like luminous people and luminous solutions. I don't like darkness and I find that crime and misery are dark. So, I guess my message is to show the light, which I think

is so very beautiful. It should really be enlightening. There is so much art that is dark and void and brutal and bloody and that's the state of the world. I don't think you have to show it again!

On Warhol

It was very exceptional to be right there at that time. I don't live any regrets. But I am more interested in the future than the past. It was a great era, but you know, things change. Like for instance, Warhol was shot in 1968, and was crippled for life because the bullet went through 11 vital organs. So then he changed. He moved the factory. Before that, the door was wide open and all the crazies came in. They put a lock on the door and it was different. And so there were different phases and stages. Even Warhol had the commercial era and then the pop art era, the film era, then the portrait era and same is true for my life. You move on to wherever you think you should be.

A lot of people are fascinated by Warhol and I think it is mostly the fame that fascinates them. But his work is extremely profound...What I see in his work is that he depicted the American dream...the prosperity, the dollar sign, the glamour, the fame,



ABOVE: The surrealist meets the absurd, Ultra Violet with Salvador Dalí in 1969.

the first man that walked on the moon, the Statue of Liberty and so forth. But then he also depicted the American disasters, the atomic mushroom, the most wanted man, suicide, car crashes, the electric chair. And so he represented pages in American history, the yin and the yang of our culture and I think it's very profound. But all this in the appearance of very pretty colors!

What is more fascinating is that in the two years before he died, all his work had spiritual quotation. He was doing the Last Supper, Madonna, crosses, words of the Scriptures. So I think his real legacy is not the American dream, not the American disaster, but it is the spirituality.

On Herself

This is 2005! And the question is: What should an artist do in 2005? You just can't do things that you've seen 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 40 years ago. And that's very hard to have the answer and to go after it. But that's what I am after. I think the artist is the antenna of society and they feel what might be coming. But it's not so much just to show it, but to present solutions. Maybe the artist can serve a better role as a politician in some sense!

On Houston

I am happy to be back in Houston. I was here in 1968, a long, long, long time ago. I was invited by the de Menils, Dominique and John. I went to their home and I stayed a few days. But I have not been here since. At the time, they did not have the museum. They had their tremendous collection and they had a warehouse where

they kept paintings and once in a while they would change [the art] in their house.

Dominique had a tremendous eye; she could pick probably the very best work of any artist. Their house was extraordinary. She could have a 12th-century pillar and next to it a Magritte with a rock in the sky, but somehow, there was a relationship between the pedestal and the rock...She could put pieces together from centuries apart and just make it very comprehensive.

On Christo

Christo is a fascinating artist because he's doing monumental work. It's remark-

able what he is doing...[He] is having *The Gates* in New York and he is probably going to have 10 million people to look at it. Ten million! He gets 100,000 people to work on the project. He takes hold of space, and history, and besides the great beauty in his work, it has meaning, social meaning. It is social sculpture. So I think he is one of the most exciting artists today. He really has understood the global vision of things.

Little paintings on the wall? I think it's too late. That doesn't mean that you can't do a little painting that is very remarkable, but we are somewhere else. This is the era of globality and connection and the work really has to have meaning.

We do art not so much for ourselves, but for other people. And for interaction. That's what I like: interaction. So therefore, the project, if possible, should be monumental. Then you get a monumental interaction.

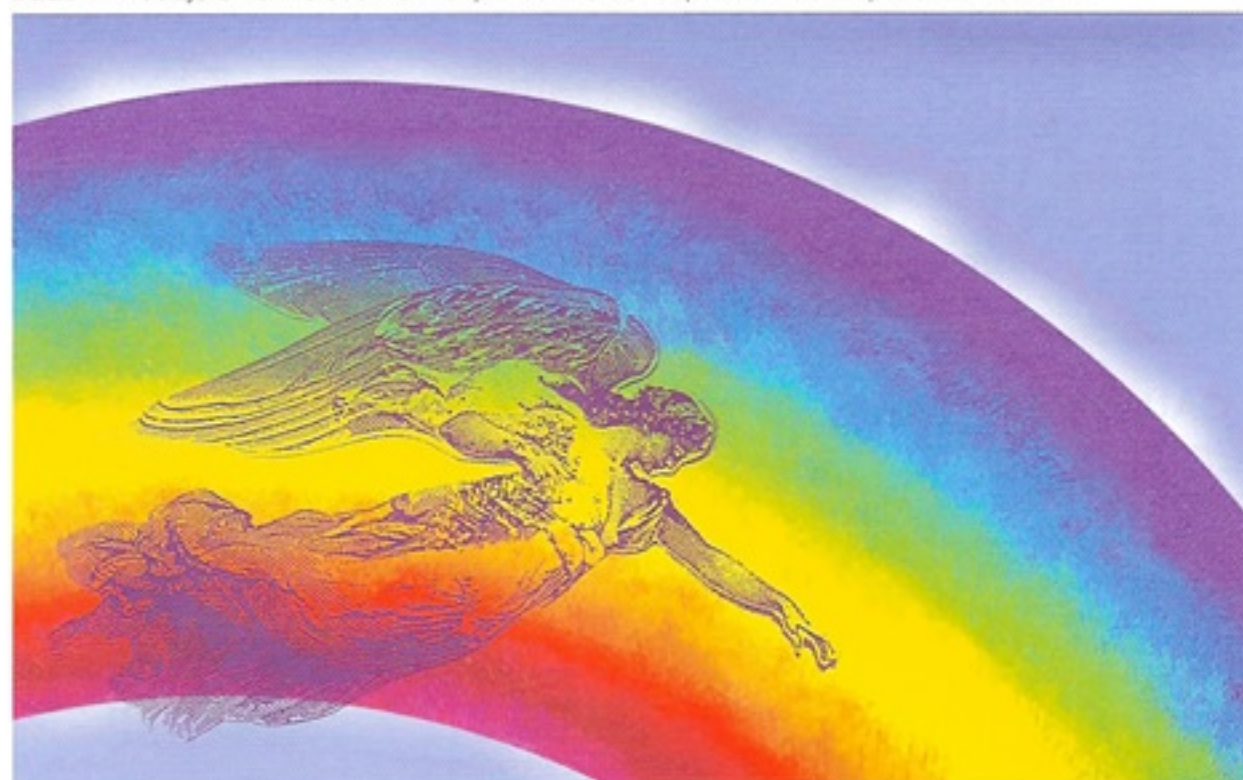
On Her Houston Project in 2006

We need a monumental project for Houston. So we have two choices! Either on a given day at a given hour, there should be an angel flying over Houston and everybody could look at it at noon or some such thing and everybody could see it. It would be a very democratic move. Or, we could do a monumental rainbow.

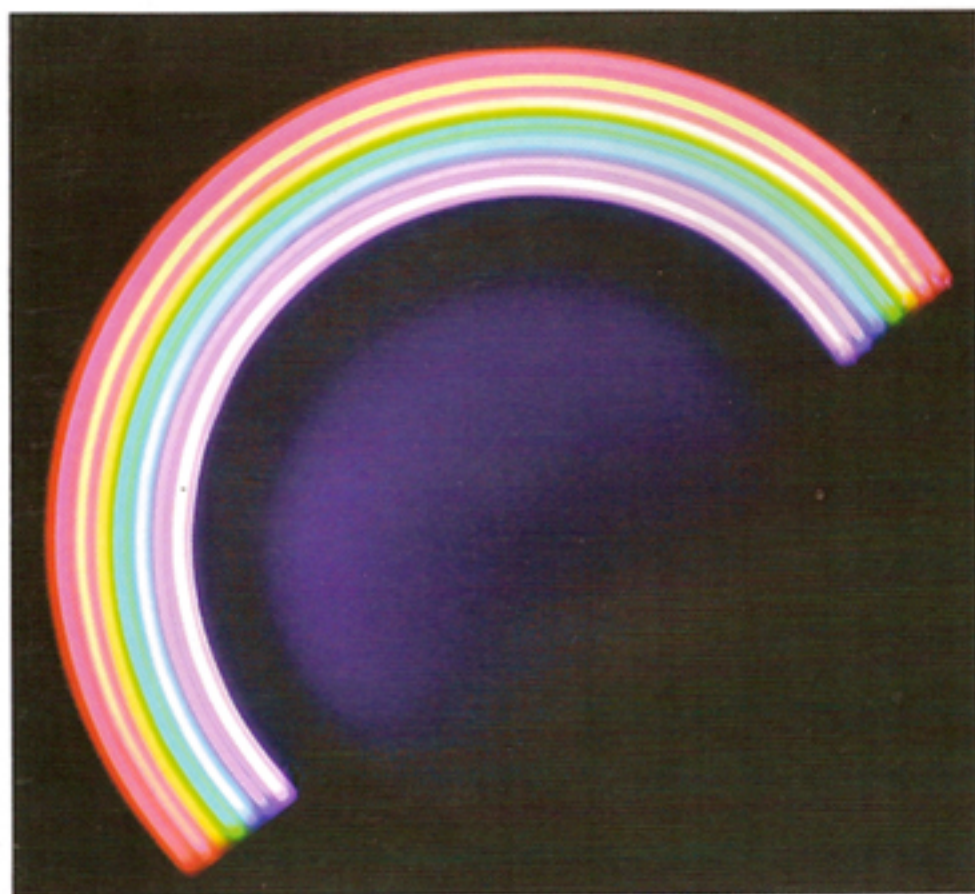
After this angel flies over Houston, then it can fly over Dallas and over New York and then across the United States and in Africa and Europe!

The world is pulling you in every direction, so you really need light. Happiness is light...I am hoping to do something spectacular here!

BELOW: Today, Ultra Violet's work explores the concept of art as a spiritual endeavor.



gallery reviews



LEFT: Ultra Violet, Rainbow, 2006 Neon, ed. 1/7.

DEBORAH COLTON GALLERY

Ultra Violet, *LIGHT: The Mirror of the Soul*

Once you've made it inside Deborah Colton Gallery you realize there could not be a more perfect venue for Ultra Violet's current one-person exhibition titled *LIGHT: The Mirror of the Soul*. The artwork encompassing the room evokes a feeling of floating in heaven with an equally heavenly picture created by the gallery's own beautiful view of the sky.

The entire mixed media installation works very well together as a whole but if each were displayed individually, there would definitely be a similar impact. *Sky Chairs and Table*, *Sky Discs*, *Sky Wedding*, *Rainbow* and *Sky Chair* are sure to be the most sought after by collectors. The interactive nature of the work gives the viewer a more complete experience. Ultra Violet believes that through the rainbow, and by viewing the beauty of the sky each day, whether a dark day or light, we can find simple answers to the complications of this crazy, de-humanized 21st century world.

Ultra Violet's extraordinary life experiences have made her who she is today and influenced her current philosophy of life which in turn greatly impacts her art. She may seem familiar to those that visited Deborah Colton Gallery in 2005 where her work was exhibited in *New Cartoon*. You may also be familiar with Violet from her roles in Andy Warhol films. She was the companion of Salvador Dali, through whom she met Andy Warhol in 1963. Ultra kept a diary of her days at Warhol's Factory that was later published as her autobiography titled *Famous for Fifteen Minutes: My Years with Andy Warhol*. She has experienced a metamorphosis and at this stage of her life has returned to a more spiritual existence.

Also on view is an excellent exhibition of work by the late Suzanne Paul, the first female photographer to have a solo exhibition at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. This show focuses on Paul's lush and luminous photographs of fish. In addition, albums of Paul's work and a display of an assortment of her

personal effects, such as the Brownie camera she used as a child, serve as a moving reliquary of sorts. With her career in New York and her portraits of well known artists such as Mel Chin, Julian Schnabel, Andy Warhol, and playwright Edward Albee, Paul and Violet most definitely had to have crossed paths on more than one occasion throughout their careers.

The Deborah Colton Gallery is founded on being an innovative showcase for ongoing presentation and promotion of strong historical and visionary contemporary artists world-wide.

— Nichole Pruitt

Through July 1, 2500 Summer Street, 3rd floor, 713.864.2364, www.deborahcoltongallery.com.

POISSANT GALLERY

Randall Reid

Randall Reid is both an accomplished and productive working artist. With his first accolades won in 1978, he has since swept prizes and cash awards as well as given many solo and group shows each year. Across the country and internationally, this artist is heralded as both seasoned and contemporary. He earned his Master's degree in painting, but his interesting choice of media is what sets his work apart: most of his pieces are comprised using paint on wood and steel. The construction of the paintings lends itself more to the strength and endurance of a sculpture, but thickness and resonance is what this artist's subject is all about—a connection with the elements and symptoms of the Earth. This depth and the muted color palette is all about the regeneration, renewal, and timelessness of the Earth's features.

With an eye for antiquity in a world of industrial materials, Reid makes the steel of his palette warm as he layers paint and wood, leaving a small cut-out window, usually layered transparent papers or inlaid copper, brass, or steel, as the only portal into the meaning of his ambiguous titles.

While most of his subject matter is obscure and intangible in title, with neatly shaped cut-outs and constructionist canvases called things like, *Subdivisions*, and *Past Time*, other works are mainly concrete. For instance, in *Red Sea*, the image of the Red Sea parting is represented as a tiny square within which stands a white steel bar separated by two red rectangles on either side. The steel is built up with planks of wood painted a dark desert brown. This same nearly literal sentiment is taken away from *Shifted Sands*, in which an off-center window reveals steel bars of yellow in a sea of olive-yellow paint. And what would a show entitled *Of the Earth* be without the sentiment of seasonality? Works like *Thru Winter's Snow* relate the purest form of weather on the cold of a metallic background, reflective of water, snow, crystal and other earthly geographic concoctions. Think Cy Twombly without the canvas—the trees, the bark, all brought to shimmering life on the background of neatly hand-cut steel.

artshouston

MAGAZINE

Houston's monthly guide to the performing and visual arts

may 2006

backstage

Historic Houston expanded its influence beyond vintage homes last month to focus on vintage cars and aircraft. The group worked with the **Houston Aeronautical Heritage Society** to sponsor an open house at the **1940 Municipal Air Terminal Museum** west of Hobby airport. Families arrived – including by aircraft – to tour the museum and vintage vehicles and planes.

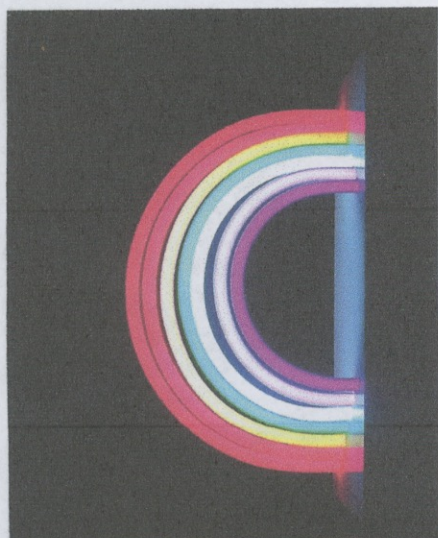
Congratulations to Lithuanian filmmaker **Jonas Mekas**, founder of the Anthology Film Archives in New York. In April both Houston's **Deborah Colton Gallery** and the international art journal *Frieze* both featured the artist and his work.

chitecture: a shimmering, glowing swirl of oranges, yellows and golds, to further explore and discuss these exciting 'salonierres' as well as auction artists **L.C. Armstrong, Polly Apfelbaum** and **Christopher French.** For more information, call 713.743.9530.

Speaking of shimmer-

with Janet H. Moore

may editor's picks



Ultra Violet at the Deborah Colton Gallery

Having spent many moments of solitude in the spacious gardens of her New York apartment, Ultra Violet is deeply inspired by the light and the sky. She feels light is essential, and that there is no greater embodiment of light and optimism than the rainbow. Rainbows provide a universal inspiration to many since they arrive after a dark storm to reveal the beauty of a normal day. Rainbows are free, can be seen all over the world, and have no social, racial or economic boundaries. Ultra Violet feels that by accepting and acknowledging the dark, but overpowering it with a vision of good and light, that we as a society have the capacity to create universal peace, balance and happiness by going to a higher level than the material stratifications and myopic, ethnocentric thinking that divide rather than unify. Ultra Violet believes that through the rainbow, and by viewing the beauty of the sky each day, whether a dark day or light, we can find simple answers to the complications of this crazy, dehumanized 21st century world. In her show *LIGHT: The Mirror of the Soul*, which opens at Deborah Colton Gallery on May 13th, Ultra Violet will transform the space of the gallery with a "sky installation" accompanied by seven neon rainbows. Through July 1st, 2500 Summer Street, 3rd floor, 713.864.2364, www.deborahcoltongallery.com

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SATURDAY 5/13



Suzanne Paul has a fish story for you.

BY JOHN NOVA LOMAX

Ultra Cool

Perhaps in response to the recent doom-and-gloom-themed FotoFest, or maybe just in celebration of spring, **Deborah Colton Gallery** has put together a refresh-

ingly positive, optimistic exhibit featuring two stars of an art-world revolution.

Warhol superstar **Ultra Violet** was born Isabelle Collin Dufresne in France. She was famous for being Salvador Dalí's girlfriend in the early '60s. Promising her a part in one of his movies, Warhol lured Ultra into his infamous Factory, a world from which few were lucky to escape with their lives. Ultra survived and apparently found God. On the surface, her work in the new exhibit "LIGHT: The Mirror of the Soul" is as pop as Factory product, but it reveals its soul through her titles. A winged, naked Mickey Mouse, his genitals hidden beneath a green-neon-light dollar sign while he lounges atop a rainbow, goes by the name *Heavenly Bodies Give Light to Each Other*.

Also on view is the photography of **Suzanne Paul** (1945-2005), a pioneering photographer from Houston. Known for her portraits of famous artists including Warhol, Julian Schnabel and Edward Albee, she helped connect Houston to the national art world.

Little known, in contrast, was Paul's fascination with fish. "Rejuvenation" focuses on her fish photos, many of which were shot with soft light shining on the animals, exposing what seems like millions of colors. See them from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Exhibit runs through July 1. 2500 Summer. For information, call 713-864-2364 or visit www.deborahcoltongallery.com. Free.

— TROY SCHULZE

SUZANNE PAUL

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— TROY SCHULZE

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Art Notes

The season finishes with a flourish, and important international shows abound. First stop: **Blaffer Gallery** pairs Swiss installationist **Urs Fischer** (on view at the Whitney Biennial) with Vietnam-born, L.A.-based **Tam Van Tran** (through August 5). Fischer's forte is the intersection of fantasy with reality, and Van Tran creates organic works using chlorophyll ... **New World Museum** unfurls El

Salvadoran **Ronald Morán's** poetic cotton-swathed art (through May 28) ... "The Spirit of Ancient Colombian Gold" lives at the **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** (May 14 - September 10). While you're there, catch "**Tom Wesselmann** and **Roy Lichtenstein: American Pop**" (through August 13), reflecting the MFAH's increasing emphasis on this seminal period ... At **Rice Gallery**, see the annual Summer Window series, featuring New York artist **Lisa Hoke's** epic installation, which involves more than 100,000 strips of curled colored paper ... Then head south to **Galveston Arts Center** for a peek at the Arthouse Texas Prize finalists: the video by \$30,000 winner **Eileen Maxson**, plus works by **Robert A. Pruitt** (also in the Whitney Biennial), CAMH-exhibited **Robyn O'Neil** and internationally shown **Ludwig Schwarz** (through May 28).

Gallery Top Touts: Internationally known, Colombia-born **Maria Fernanda Cardoso** at **Sicardi Gallery** (May 4 - 27), including exquisite pieces fashioned from butterfly wings ... **Mackey Gallery** returns from exhibiting at the Pulse art fair in NYC, Art Brussels in Belgium and MACO in Mexico City to present brooding, surreal canvases by Mexican artist **Arturo Rivera**, the grand-prize winner of the 2005 Beijing

Biennial (May 13 through June 17) ... At **McClain Gallery**, **Christian Eckart's** futuristic sculptures (through May 27), and on June 1, op-art master **Julian Stanczak's** "Four Decades of Painting" (through July 1) ... At **Texas Gallery**, important New York art-maker **Bill Jensen** mounts exquisite, lyrical abstractions inspired by Asian art (May 16 - June 17) ... **Andy Warhol Factory** superstar **Ultra Violet's** fantastic rainbow installations and late Houston lensman

Suzanne Paul at **Deborah Colton Gallery** (May 13 - July 1) ... **Gremillion & Co. Fine Art, Inc.**, pairs husband and wife **Lionel** and **Muriel Kalish**, he of the lush Italian landscapes, she a fantasy-world painter (May 18 - June 18) ...

Still-lifes headline at **Meredith Long & Company:** 19th-century masters through contemporary realists, from **Emil Carlsen** through **Sarah Lamb** (opens May 4) ... Houston artists **Christopher French** and **Dean Ruck** and California

artist **Nicole Fein** make a cool trifecta at **Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery** (May 20 - July 1) ... **Barbara Davis Gallery** pairs two hot, rising, international abstract painters: New York-based **Jane Fine** and London talent **Danny Rolph** (through May 27) ... **Peel Gallery Shop** goes to the birds, unfurling "Nest," all about contemporary design as it relates to our feathered friends (May 6 - June 3) ... Also at 4411 Montrose, **Anya Tish Gallery** showcases **Nadezda Prvulovic's** dramatic, steel-inspired gouaches (through May 26) ... **Koelsch Gallery** presents works by two artists who



Top: Ultra Violet's *Untitled* from the series "Light: The Mirror of the Soul," 2006, at Deborah Colton Gallery

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CALENDAR VISUAL ARTS

Andrew Logan

Self-taught Logan, an Australian sculptor, exhibits female forms carved in stone or wood and cast in bronze. An opening reception will take place on May 5 from 6-8PM. **May 5-June 30.** Booker-Lowe Gallery, 4623 Feagan St., 713.880.1541, www.bookerlowegallery.com

7th Annual Fayetteville Art Walk

This regional juried fine art show, just one hour from Houston, will feature 45 artists, music, food and wine amid pecan trees and wildflowers. **May 6-7, 10AM-5PM.** Free admission. Town Square in Fayetteville, 979.378.2413, www.texasartwalk.org

20th Century Modern Market

Specialist dealers from around the country gather to sell furniture, glass, ceramics, metalwork and fashion. **May 6-7, 10AM-5PM.** Tickets \$5. Lawndale Art Center, 4912 Main St., 713.528.5858, www.lawndaleartcenter.org

Wildflower Portraits by Eloise Thompson

Houston artist Eloise Thompson captures 350 varieties of wildflowers native to the Southwest in watercolor. **May 6-Sept. 4.** Tickets \$8. Houston Museum of Natural Science, One Hermann Circle Dr., 713.639.4629, www.bmns.org

Fabrications: Up Close and Personal

Houston-area fiber artists (makers of baskets, clothing, dolls, felt, paper, jewelry, quilts, etc.) present wearable art. **May 13, 10AM.** Tickets \$40. Marriott Galleria Hotel, 5150 Westheimer Rd., 281.332.0310, www.fiberhouston.org

Ultra Violet and Suzanne Paul

French-born Warhol super-artist Ultra Violet presents a full-gallery installation of the sky and rainbows titled "Light: The Mirror of the Soul." Also on display will be marine-life works by the late Suzanne Paul, who extensively photographed the Houston art world for three decades. An opening reception will take place on May 13 from 6-9PM. **May 13-July 1.** Deborah Colton Gallery, 2500 Summer St., 713.864.2364, www.deborahcoltongallery.com

Urs Fischer: Mary Poppins and Tam Van Tran: Psychonaut

See Zurich-born Fischer's drawings, collages and sculptures. Emerging artist Van Tran will exhibit underwater seascapes and Chinese landscapes on textured paper brushed with chlorophyll and algae. **May 13-Aug. 5.** Blaffer Gallery, UH, Entrance 16 on Cullen Blvd., 713.743.9530, www.blaffergallery.org

The Spirit of Ancient Colombian Gold

View gold objects shaped as intricate birds, crocodiles and serpents created by Pre-Colombian cultures. **May 14-Sept. 10.** Tickets \$7, Thursdays free. Caroline Wiess Law Building, MFAH, 1001 Bissonnet St., 713.639.7300, www.mfab.org