

THIS MONTH'S TOP EXHIBITS

Presented by *Glasstire*

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1. Focus on the 70s and 80s: Houston Foundations Part II

Deborah Colton Gallery

This historical exhibition includes some legendary names from the Houston art world of 40 years ago. It's a densely hung show that's heavy on painting (during the decades covered, there was also a lot of performance and street art going on), but anyone interested in Houston art, it's a must-see, with works by Julian Schnabel, Mel Chin, Dorothy Hood, Luis Jimenez, Forrest Prince, Bert Long and John Alexander, among many others.

www.deborahcoltongallery.com

2. Lauren Moya Ford: Like a Flower and a Current of Air

Front Gallery

Featuring small-scale paintings, handbuilt ceramic vessels, videos and a risograph printed zine, *Like a Flower and a Current of Air* at Front Gallery is a homecoming of sorts for Madrid-based artist Lauren Moya Ford. After earning her MFA from the University of Houston, Moya Ford moved to Europe to continue her art making and research into storytelling, her personal history and natural life. This show is a culmination of some of her findings.

www.frontgallery.com

3. Tudor Mitroi: Nowhere and Now | Loli Fernández-Andrade: Soliloquy

Rudolph Blume Fine Art/Artscan Gallery

This quiet pair of shows features works that reward patience and close looking. Mitroi makes his own paint from archival pigments, and draws on historical images and maps, rulers, dates and times in his handsome, layered works. Fernández-Andrade developed a method of print-making using aluminum foil, the best results of which feature delicately detailed drawing and watercolor over the prints.

www.rudolphblume.com

4. Bradley Kerl: Greenhouse | Angel Oloshove: The Ocean Never Closes | Christopher Cascio: XXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXXXXXX

Galveston Arts Center

Featuring three up-and-coming artists, this round of exhibitions at the Galveston Arts Center includes ethereal, pastel-colored ceramics by Angel Oloshove, dense floral still lifes and landscapes by Bradley Kerl and obsessively patterned paintings by Christopher Cascio. The trio of artists, all of whom are based in Houston, provide a window into some of the tropes and themes emerging from today's contemporary art world.

www.galvestonartscenter.org

5. Jeffrey Dell: Future Castles

Art Palace Gallery

The arguments against Jeffrey Dell's new body of work will go something like this: They're too pretty. They're too pastel. There is something too pleasing, too beautiful, and too easy about the delicate gradations Dell achieves in his technically masterful screenprints. His trompe l'oeil compositions, where tabs of paper appear to flutter against a dreamy background glimpsed through an aperture, are too perfectly deceptive. You should ignore all these arguments, and go see this exquisite show.

www.artpalacegallery.com

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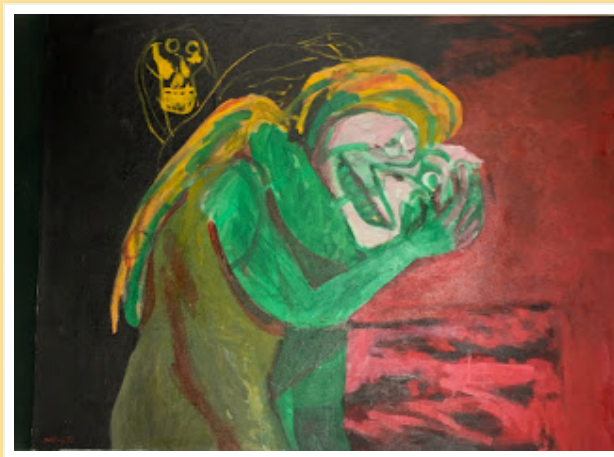
Virginia Billeaud Anderson *(BoudinandBourbon.com)*

Boudin, Bourbon and The Feast of the Assumption

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Wednesday, September 6, 2017

Earl Staley's "Two Lovers Surprised By Death" - Earl Staley - A Closer Look - Essay - Virginia Billeaud Anderson



Being in my twenties and fond of Jack Daniels and weed might account for my not remembering much about 1978. I do remember that despite legal challenges, Keith and Mick cranked out a beast of a song.

Ain't I rough enough? oh
Ain't I tough enough?
Ain't I rich enough, in love enough? Oh please!

Another sure thing about 1978 is Earl Staley was passionately entangled. Any nitwit who looks at his erotic, intensely biographical painting, "Two Lovers Surprised by Death" (1978), can see that. "Two Lovers Surprised by Death" is one of four paintings Staley will show in "Focus on the 70s and 80s: Houston Foundations II" at Deborah Colton Gallery, an exhibition of artworks by twenty-six artists who were making and exhibiting art in Houston during the 1970s and 1980s. Here's what I learned about Staley's painting.

"Two Lovers was about Suzanne and I and passion," Staley told me, "with Death surprising us. It is based on compositions from the late middle ages and the Renaissance, such as Durer's."

Essentially, Staley (b. 1938) was working within the European Dance of Death or dance macabre tradition in which artists pictorially portrayed lovers accompanied by a symbol of death. Handling of the theme varied, Durer in his 1498 engraving "Young Couple Threatened by Death (The Promenade)" allegorized death as an hourglass-holding skeleton hiding behind a tree, unnoticed by the gussied-up couple. Hans Burgkmair's woodcut "Lovers Surprised by Death" (1510) depicted death as a skull face winged demon who violently pins down the male lover with an ungodly throat clutch and foot on chest maneuver. Rembrandt's 1639 composition locates the lovers near their freshly dug grave, from which a skeletal death climbs out.

Art historian and curator Marcia Tucker found in Staley's painting a metaphor for uncontrolled passion. In her 1983 catalogue essay for the retrospective exhibition "Earl Staley: 1973-1983," Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Tucker intimated that the theme of love is a major one within Staley's oeuvre, he shows lovers "in every possible state of transport," and frequently juxtaposes sexuality with death. "The allusion," Tucker wrote, "is that sexuality is associated with loss of control, and loss of control is associated with death."

It's difficult to look at "Two Lovers" without thinking about the old hoochie-coochie man Picasso. Tucker made this comparison, and based it on the painting's autobiographical nature and the manner in which Staley distorted his figures to offer two perspectives to the viewer.

Though Staley's delineation of death as a skeletal goon with skinny arms borrows from medieval art, it draws on an additional source. By 1978 he had begun regularly traveling to Mexico where he encountered Day of the Dead celebrations and Mexican folk art. I asked Staley if he stylistically conflated a medieval iteration of death with iconography associated with Mexican religious rituals. "Yes," he said. "Mexico was influential. In 1976 I drove through Mexico, and began returning often to Oaxaca where I had found a place to stay courtesy of Lucas Johnson, and many other Houston artists followed. I remember being in Oaxaca in 1977 and seeing long lines of stalls with masks and sugar skulls, really good folk art, and I hauled some back to Houston. You know, I was born on Halloween, and have always been in tuned with the death images. Unfortunately, the great Mexican folk art tradition has ended. When I returned with Suzanne, it wasn't the same. Recently Mary Margaret and I were there, and could see all the stuff is mass produced."

There was an interesting aesthetic shift taking place at the time Staley painted "Two Lovers." Painting, which had come to be considered stale, sclerotic, and too academic in the post-minimalist age, was regaining popularity, but with fresh aberrance. Its reemergence was institutionally acknowledged by the Whitney Museum's 1978 landmark exhibition "New Image Painting," and by other shows, such as "Bad Painting" (1978) and "The 1970s: New American Painting" (1979) exhibitions at New Museum in New York. Staley was in the two New Museum shows. At the time of his participation he was categorized as a "new image" painter who by definition employed an unrefined or gross style.

It was inaccurate though to link him to a particular style, he uses many different styles. "Skull with Landscape" which he exhibited in the 1975 Whitney Museum Biennial Exhibition, and is now in the collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, has a sparse linear style. Staley's elegant radiantly colored landscapes have a descriptive impressionistic style. We see a very different style in "Two Lovers." Versatility of style reeks of Picasso.

Quick word about that 1975 Whitney show. The artists who were chosen were believed to work independently of the New York art scene, which motivated a few mouthy critics to call them

“virgins.” Looking back on that in 1993, Roberta Smith said Staley was one of the virgins who had become “quite experienced.”

Not sure what to think about the obese dragon-tailed mermaids Staley presented in the 1978-1979 New Museum exhibitions. They are hellish. It is fun to imagine he devised those harpies to attract New York curators who were scavenging for audacious “bad” paintings they could announce were good, but I’ve spent enough time in Staley’s studio looking at old stuff to know he’s too independent to give a shit about what’s trendy. Linda Cathcart said precisely this when she organized "Earl Staley: Mythologies" at CAMH (1980). In her curatorial notes Cathcart wrote that Staley’s “personal expression has never seemed to mingle with current mainstream ideas or styles - either nationally or locally.”

It’s more likely the fat mermaids are grounded in mythology, myth-based images have major presence in Staley’s repertoire, particularly after he received the Prix de Rome and moved to the Villa Aurelia. The mermaids’ modeling and sharp tonal contrasts mirror those in a painting of a Triton and Mermaid, so you’ll understand my linking them to his narratives inspired by Greek and Roman classical myths. That Triton, by the way, I’ve seen him many times in the Piazza Navonna and the Piazza Barberini.

Here’s what you have to know about the show. "Focus on the 70s and 80s: Houston Foundations II" at Deborah Colton Gallery is September 9, 2017 to November 4, 2017. Included are John Alexander, Lee Benner, H.J. Bott, Bob Camblin, Mel Chin, Ibsen Espada, David P. Gray, Virgil Grotfeldt, Roberta Harris, Ann Harithas, Mike Hollis, Dorothy Hood, Perry House, Luis Jiminez, Lucas Johnson, Sharon Kopriva, Bert L. Long, Jr., Jesse Lott, Suzanne Manns, Basilios Poulos, Forrest Prince, Don Redman, Julian Schnabel, Earl Staley, James Surls, and Dick Wray. On Saturday September 9, there is Open House, exhibition viewing and visit with the artists from 2:00 to 2:30 pm, the Foundations Symposium Panel Discussion, Open Forum, questions and answers are 2:30 to 3:30 pm, and Opening Reception is 3:30 to 6:00 pm.

To those who are unimaginably young, born after the era documented in the exhibition, I encourage you to chat up H J Bott who is 84, or the old professor Earl Staley who is 78, or Perry House, or any of the others, and hear what they have to say about dedication and lifetime commitment, and pain. Don’t take too long. Seven of the artists have joined the shades.

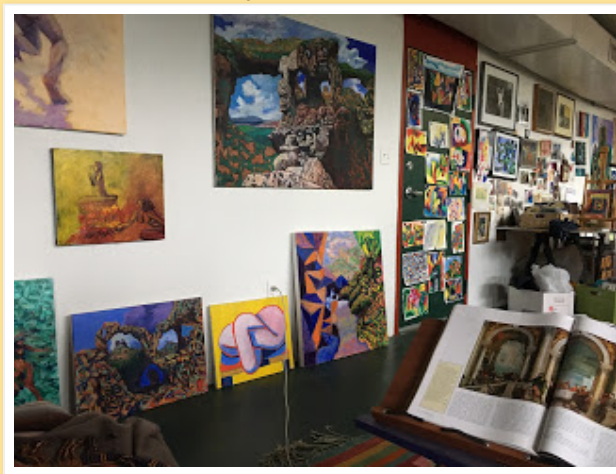


Image - Earl Staley, Two Lovers Surprised by Death, 1978, Acrylic on canvas, 37 x 48

Image - Earl Staley Studio 8-30-17. Sent by the artist to assure me he was safe during Hurricane Harvey.

Virginia Billeaud Anderson *(BoudinandBourbon.com)*

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Thursday, September 21, 2017

Bas Poulos: More Talk - Essay - Bas Poulos Paintings - Virginia Billeaud Anderson



When my buddy Gus Kopriva organized *Western Sequels: Art from the Lone Star State* in 2012-2013 in Athens, then in Istanbul, some crazy things disrupted the exhibition. Unaware of the importance of Texas art, the Greeks staged a transportation strike which delayed the Athens opening by several days. At the same time, they rioted in the Square at the Hellenic Parliament building, “near our hotel, with tear gas and flying pieces of marble,” Gus told me. “Then, when we brought the show to Istanbul, there were riots there too.”

Despite the foolishness, Bas Poulos went to Istanbul to see his paintings in *Western Sequels*. He chose paintings from the *Arcadia Vista* series, highly abstracted seductively colored landscapes with depictions of Hellenic stone bridges in the compositions, these objects disassembled to the point of non-recognition. Perhaps you saw some of his *Arcadia Vista* landscapes at Meredith Long Gallery in 2013, it was a breathtaking presentation.

The paintings evolved out of an imaginative and challenging project, to find and pictorially depict stone bridges in the Peloponnese. Old Hellenic stone bridges are not for cars, they are for seasonal crossings of river beds and gorges, used by shepherds and goat herds. Poulos located over thirty of them within one day's travel from his home and studio in his ancestral village of Karies, but not easily, most are hidden in the landscape, in olive groves and away from the roads. "Once near Dimitsana, it was only because I heard the sound of the gorge water that I was able to find the bridge."

Poulos' Greek and South Carolina landscapes knocked me over, and we eventually did a fun interview. Because of the time we spent discussing his art, I know a tiny bit about the paintings Klana (1984) and Pana (1985), which are prominently displayed in the exhibition Focus on the 70s and 80s: Houston Foundations II at Deborah Colton Gallery through November 4, 2017.

But before I get into that let me tell you about his welcome ritual. It might be a chilled bottle of water quietly placed near your chair, or something more elaborate, it is part of the Greek hospitality tradition in which even strangers are greeted with drink and food. It's there in Homer, and you'll encounter it throughout Greece and Turkey. In the villages. There was the old woman in the Peloponnese who handed me a basket of fruit, and the man on the mountain in Crete who poured me a glass of raki simply because I appeared. In the Eastern provinces of Turkey, villagers greeted us with trays of hot tea. Poulos and I talked about his excursions to Greek monasteries to see Byzantine art where the monks' ritual is to serve visitors a glass of raki, a glass of water, and a loukoumi (a Turkish delight), and I recall the day he searched Houston markets for loukoumi to have for the South Carolina museum people who were coming to his studio.

It was October 2014. Poulos and I were discussing the painting "Klana" which was propped against his studio wall in front of my chair. When he painted it, he told me, he had an interest in Jackson Pollock and automatic writing, then described his process. He placed an un-stretched canvas on the floor, and used a template to define then paint the primary image, around which he flung paint. Flung means a poured or dripped line. Flung paint "was the automatic part of it." Paint application was with industrial brushes and squeegees, in fact those horizontal bars in "Pana" 1985), his other painting in "Focus on the 70s and 80s" are squeegeed. Some may remember "Ornomenos" (1984), the painting Poulos exhibited in MFAH's 1985 "Fresh Paint" exhibition, which caught the eye of the "Artforum" guru, it was made essentially in the same way. He used this process until 1987.



He said more, I wrote it down. "At that time, I painted color field abstraction in the vein of Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, and Helen Frankenthaler. I was engaged in this kind of art for a very long time, had many exhibitions, in fact for a time I worked with four galleries simultaneously, showing regularly in Houston, San Francisco, New York and Atlanta, while teaching full time at Rice. I was young, and felt powerful then, but eventually realized I could not sustain it, primarily because abstraction has to be supported with critical theory, and I realized my theory was based on nature, that I was a landscape painter."

That was 2014. Last month, in August, when Deborah Colton announced her "Focus on the 70s and 80s" show, Poulos and I began to discuss his paintings, again. "Bas, one further question." I felt timid about bothering him, a hurricane out of the mouth of hell was coming at us rapidly which made me a pain in the ass, but I'm happy we continued our discussion because ultimately he gave me the key to understanding his art.

Are we to understand that at some point in the 70s or 80s he shifted from non-objective and theoretically based "color field abstraction" to figuration drawn from nature and the world around him?

It is so that before he came to Houston to teach at Rice University in 1975, around the time of his Guggenheim fellowship, he had a studio in New York and showed at Andre Emmerich Gallery which specialized in color field, and Clement Greenberg praised his work. It would be natural for him to be influenced by Greenberg's priestly edicts against representation, and all the carrying on about paint reduced to its essence.

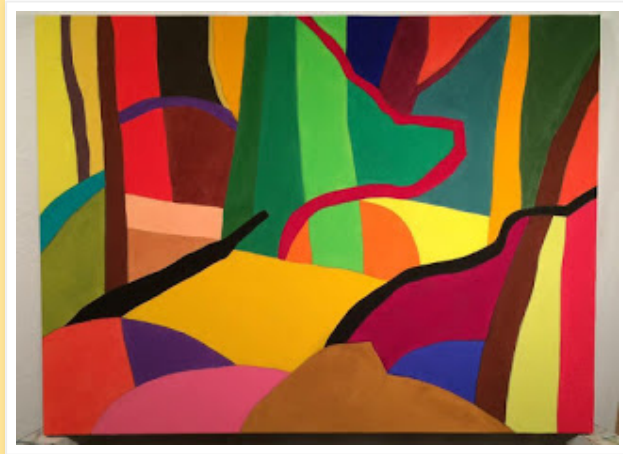
There was no shift. "Virginia, even in the early New York days, the paintings referenced nature." To back this up Poulos showed me four abstract paintings from the seventies which he considered referential. In one with horizontal bars similar to those in "Pana" he observed "clearly a sense of field, with an implied horizon edge at the top," in another "the figure started to creep in with the rounded edge." Two others he introduced as "earlier paintings with vertical bars that I now view as figurative."

Add to this his qualifying statements about the way he treats nature. Poulos spoke eloquently in his studio. "You know, Picasso said he observed the landscape then entered his studio. I take it one step further and walk the landscape, which allows me to see how the light filters through branches and leaves, hits trees and the ground plane, and casts shadows, so my beginning impulse is observation. From the photo or sketch I create the armature or structure of the painting, the drawing and blocked in colors, then arrange for cohesiveness. I'm not creating a portrait of the landscape, but a visual experience. It's the same with bridges, the patterns of stones in the arches form the drawing armatures for color that works in opposition to organic shapes of the foliage. I'm not interested in documenting the bridge, just taking from it for the painting's armature, which with color and luminosity factored in, are crucial elements of the visual experience."

It's my opinion the art always referenced his surroundings. As I told him, I'm skeptical about the purely theoretical and formalist baloney. And now critical shifts are sussing out botanical and marine forms in Morris Louis' stained paintings, Greenbergian dogma out the window. Could it be he was coming to a deeper understanding of his work at the time Deborah Colton was getting excited about trotting out Klana and Pana and I was asking questions? Perhaps. "I think artists who have long studio careers are constantly re-considering and re-adjusting their perception of their art work, a mark of the engaged artist."

You get what you need. In 2016 Poulos accepted a residency in a no phone, no television, honky-tonk shack in rural Georgia where he produced new landscapes, lovely and highly abstracted. These, and some

made before, are being shown at William Reaves/Sarah Foltz Fine Art in the exhibition Landscape Journeys, through October 7, 2017. See the “abstracted pond” series. Poulos will give an Artist Talk at William Reaves, on Saturday, Sept 23, 2017, 2-4 pm.



Images - Bas Poulos, "Klana," 1984, Acrylic on Canvas, 78" x 56.5"

Bas Poulos, "Pana," 1985, Acrylic on Canvas, 42.5" x 54"

Bas Poulos, "Carolina Landscape No. 1 with Figure," 2014, Acrylic on canvas, 36" x 48"

Posted by Virginia Billeaud Anderson at 4:56 PM



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