

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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***Identifiably Houston: Foundations III***

September 15 through October 27, 2018

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 15, 2018, from 4:00 to 6:00 pm

Panel Discussion and Open House: Saturday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2:00 to 6:00 pm (Panel at 2:30)

<b>JOHN ALEXANDER</b>	<b>BOB CAMBLIN</b>	<b>MICHAEL COLLINS</b>	<b>VIRGIL GROTFELDT</b>
<b>LUCAS JOHNSON</b>	<b>BERT L. LONG JR.</b>	<b>JESSE LOTT</b>	<b>SHARON KOPRIVA</b>
<b>KERMIT OLIVER</b>	<b>FORREST PRINCE</b>	<b>EARL STALEY</b>	<b>RICHARD STOUT</b>

Deborah Colton Gallery is pleased to present *Identifiably Houston: Foundations III*, a group exhibition of courageous and spirited artists who have made a major impact and have conveyed the pioneering spirit that Houston was founded with over 180 years ago. The exhibition is also paying tribute to Houston's Heritage Society and their related events this season.

Although this is just a small sampling of Houston artists who reveal their strong individualism and brave representational type art that has a narrative -- often with an aspect of abstraction, as viewers enter Deborah Colton Gallery during this exhibition, they will instantly feel and see the connection within this genre or "School" that is something special and unique to Houston!

Sharon Kopriva, Forrest Prince and Kermit Oliver, though working with dissimilar processes, are all sensitive to religious influences where narratives are commingled with their powerful personal visions, spiritual traditions, and attraction to global events and mythologies, all which further energize their strong creative voices. The works of John Alexander, Bert L. Long Jr. and Earl Staley have long represented the rich traditions and highest qualities of story-telling and their works continue to inspire and connect us with a splenetic era. A pioneer and leader in his own right, Jesse Lott has never been afraid to create awareness of serious human rights and humanitarian issues through his art. Lott's important sculpture from 1980, titled *Big Girl –A Tribute to Eula Love* that is featured in this exhibition reveals this clearly. Richard Stout and Michael Collins share inspiration from places remembered and imagined that possess a certain evanescence and soulfully verdant energy. Virgil Grotfeldt has used bold materials and imagery that evoke a sense of mystery that take us to a higher level of consciousness. Both Lucas Johnson and Bob Camblin have used the figurative and the landscape to express bold statements about society and the human condition. The tragic and joyous may be found in all of these masterful creations. All of these artists have not been afraid to tackle tough issues and are as courageous as the first settlers founding Houston, the first artists coming out of Houston, and have been affected by our geography, neighboring boarders, their travels and those artists making a strong statement in Houston before them.

On Saturday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, at 2:30 pm, Deborah Colton Gallery will host a panel discussion addressing the question, is there a type of art, a spirit of art that is "Identifiably Houston"? Does this go back as far as Emma Richardson Cherry and the first artists who organized as a Gallery Guild around the time Houston was founded? What were they influenced by? What artists in the 20's, 30's and 40's were "setting the stage" for this type of art in Houston? Who were the mentors of these artists and who are the other artists whose work displays these qualities? There are certainly many. Is this a "Houston School"? How do the historical roots of our artists in Houston differ from other cities in Texas? What were the outside influences geographically and through artist who came to the city and formed a community with others? Has there been more of a community of artists in the past and where are we now as a community of artists? Panel Members will include Pete Gershon, Randy Tibbits and Michael Collins. Moderator will be Deborah Colton.

Born on the bayou in east Texas, **John Alexander** has made an international career as a skilled draftsman, a painter of lush landscapes, and as a satirist creating allegorical tableaux. Alexander (b. 1945) began studying art at Lamar University in his hometown of Beaumont. After earning an MFA in 1970 from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Alexander took a teaching position at the University of Houston, where he became a key figure in the city's nascent art scene. Alexander moved to New York City in 1979, taking a SoHo loft he still calls home. In addition to his continuing fascination with the surreal and humankind at its worst, Alexander gravitates toward depicting marshy landscapes, and studied portraits of flora and fauna, particularly the birds flocking to his part-time home on Long Island's East End. Naturalism and conservation remain hallmarks of his work, and he says the Beaumont bayou of his youth is never far from his mind. Alexander has been widely exhibited, with major shows at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. His work can be found in public collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Dallas Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and many others. He has received many awards in the arts nation-wide.

**Bob Camblin** was born in Oklahoma in 1928 and studied painting at the Kansas City Art Institute, earning an MFA in 1955. He taught at Rice University from 1967 to 1973 with Joe Tate and Earl Staley, with whom he shared a studio space. His influence and art was a constant undercurrent in the Houston art scene, revealing much about the environment and those that surrounded him. He left Houston in the early 80s. Known for his drawings, watercolors, paintings and his gregarious, direct personality, Camblin was included in the *Fresh Paint, The Houston School* Museum of Fine Arts exhibition in 1985 and was the only artist without a written statement in the catalogue....

**Michael Roque Collins** is an artist recognized for producing some of the most profoundly affecting figurative Post Symbolist painting seen today in Contemporary art. He was born in Houston, Texas, in 1955 and maintains his primary studio in this Gulf Coast city. His works have been favorably reviewed in a variety of international arts publications, such as Art News Magazine, Art In America, Art Lies, and Art World Magazine. His art has been curated in more than 250 group exhibitions in the U.S., Cuba, Peru, Germany, China, Mexico, France, Denmark, Greece, and Istanbul. His paintings have received more than 50 juried awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts-Middle American Arts Alliance grant for excellence in painting and works on paper, as well as three Cultural Arts Council of Houston grant awards for excellence in painting. Collins has held many university teaching positions and is currently the Senior Director of the Visual Arts Department, at Houston Baptist University, where he is also Artist-in-Residence in Painting, Professor of Art and focuses on teaching in the MFA program.

Born in 1948 in Decatur, Illinois, **Virgil Grotfeldt** earned a bachelor's degree in art education from Eastern Illinois University in 1971 and a master's degree at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia in 1974. He moved to Houston in 1977. He began teaching painting and drawing at HBU in 2002, where he was also widely considered instrumental in the concept and construction of the University Academic Center's new building, of which the art department occupies about 70 percent. Grotfeldt's work is included in many private and public collections, including The Menil Collection, Houston, Texas; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, New York; NOG Insurance Company, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Free International University World Art Collection, Zeist, The Netherlands; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Dallas Museum of Art; El Paso Museum of Art; Tyler Museum of Art, Tyler, Texas; and Upriver Gallery Collection, Chengdu, China.

**Lucas Johnson** was a self-taught, multi-disciplinary artist immersed in the creative community in Houston from the time of his settling here in 1973 until his passing in 2002. He lived for an extended time in Mexico City, where he was embraced and influenced by artist contemporaries who followed the great Mexican muralists. Self-taught in drawing, paintings, printmaking and bronze casting, he debuted paintings for the first time in 1967. Johnson was a guest instructor in the arts at the Glassell School of Art and at Houston's Rice University. His work is represented in the permanent collections of museums in Mexico City, the Menil and Museum of Fine Arts Houston, and the Modern Art Museum in Tel Aviv. In 1993 Johnson was a founding board member of the Houston Artists Fund with two associates, effectively establishing a charitable organization, still active, that serves as a fiscal sponsor for nonprofit art-related projects and provides administrative support and budgets monitoring for funds raised from the art community.

**Bert L. Long, Jr.**, a self-taught artist, was born in 1940 in Texas, grew up the Houston's historic Fifth Ward and received his formal education from UCLA. Following a career as a master chef, Long decided to devote himself entirely to art in 1979. He began to explore folk art and assemblage to create a unique body of work, attracting the attention of Jim Harithas, then Director of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and artists John Alexander, Salvatore Scarpitta and James Surls. His life spanned an era of radical change in the American social climate, the influence of which can be seen clearly in his work. Long's paintings and sculptures incorporate a high level of skill and sophisticated knowledge of art history, along with complex philosophical and social issues. Long describes the philosophy behind his work as "a quest to help people diagnose their inner self," believing his art to be "the vehicle to help facilitate [such a] process." The late Peter Marzio, former Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, said of Bert Long: "Bert Long does not avert his gaze from that which is painful, but as [his artworks] testify, he also brings a spirit of joy and redemption to his art. We can all learn from this great artist." Over Long's 33-year career as a painter, sculptor, and photographer, he was awarded several significant awards including the National Endowment for the Arts Grant in 1987 and the prestigious Prix de Rome fellowship in 1990.

**Jesse Lott** is an African-American sculptor of great distinction and a long time 5th Ward, Houston resident, who began his artistic career creating and selling his works as a student at E.O. Smith Elementary School in 1957. Jesse Lott works in paper, metal, and wood as well as working with armatures and wire, all the while building with his artistry a capacity for emotional power. His technique is derived from collecting and recycling discarded materials, as a type of urban archeology fused with scientific methodology. He has influenced many artists, including Texans as well known as James Surls, Bert Long Jr. and Angelbert Metoyer. The all-ages workshops that he has held over the years in his studio as a community service have inspired many students who would otherwise have no exposure to art. Lott's community-oriented philosophy and his Artists in Action program helped spark the creation of the now famous Project Row Houses."

**Sharon Kopriva** is a Houston native. Her career launched in 1985 with the exhibition *Fresh Paint* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. In the past 25 years she has exhibited her art in major cities in the United States, Mexico, Peru, India, Cuba, China, and Europe. In addition to her participation in *Fresh Paint – The Houston School*, her most notable exhibitions include a solo show curated by the legendary Walter Hopps at The Menil Collection in 2001 and a retrospective of her work shown at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, curated by Bradley Sumrall in 2012, entitled *From Terra to Verde*. Kopriva is deeply influenced by a varied set of inspirations, including her Catholic upbringing, the wonders of nature, and her continued spiritual journey.

**Kermit Oliver** was born in Refugio, Texas, the son and grandson of African American working cowboys. He majored in art and education at Texas Southern University and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and teaching certificate. Throughout college, Kermit was mentored by professor and artist, John Bigger who recognized strength and individual spirit. Over the years, Kermit Oliver's masterfully executed paintings and drawings have earned him worldwide recognition as one of the finest contemporary American artists of our time. Oliver's work was included in the inaugural exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture and recently also, The Nave Museum held a solo exhibition of selected works by Oliver. In 2013, Oliver received the first Lifetime Achievement Award from the Art League Houston. Oliver's work was the subject of a major retrospective at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston in 2005. His work was included in the 2001 international SITE SANTA FE biennial, curated by art historian/critic Dave Hickey. His works have a sense of spirit and mystery that reflect his unique and personal vision.

**Forrest Prince** was born in Houston, Texas in 1935. With no formal art education, he began making art in 1969, and in 1976 was given his first solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston. In 1983 Prince founded the Praise God Foundation. His body of work is unusual in its' freedom from the machinations and impurities of the art world and represents man's higher spiritual aspirations. In addition to his Christian religious work, Prince's artwork is also concerned with political and social issues. Some of his artworks involve the artist's investigations into food consumption other works severely question the satanic practices of the US Government. He has participated in many group exhibitions in museums and galleries including: Diverse Works, Hooks-Epstein Gallery, San Antonio Museum of Fine Arts, Lawndale Art Center, Art Car Museum, Station Museum, and The Menil Collection.

**Earl Staley** was born in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park, received his BFA from Illinois Wesleyan University and his MFA from the University of Arkansas. His first teaching position was at Washington University, Saint Louis, Mo. Earl arrived in Houston in 1966 to teach at Rice University. In 1969 he became the chairperson at the new studio art American Academy in Rome. He remained there four years studying the old masters and painting from the Classics. His major influences are Texas/Mexico and Classical Art. Earl showed at the 1973 Whitney Biennale, and then in 1979 in the landmark show, *Bad Painting*, at the New Museum, in New York. He has had two exhibits at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; one was a 10-year survey 1974-1984 which traveled to the New Museum, New York. Earl was included in *Fresh Paint – Houston School* Museum of Fine Arts exhibition, the Venice Biennale 1984 and numerous exhibits across the USA and Europe. Since 1992 He teaches at Lonestar College/Tomball.

**Richard Stout** was born in 1934 in Beaumont, Texas. He quickly discovered his interest in art and, while still in high school, studied at the Art Academy of Cincinnati during summer visits with family in Ohio. Stout received a scholarship to attend the School of Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA). He completed graduate studies and earned his Master of Fine Arts (MFA) at the University of Texas at Austin. From 1959 to 1967, Stout was an instructor at the Museum School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. After completing his MFA, he began teaching art at the University of Houston, a career he maintained until his retirement in 1996. Stout was named Texas Artist of the Year in 2004 by the Art League of Houston and, in 2010, received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art (CASETA). Currently, Richard Stout has the exhibition "A Sense of Home" at the O'Kane Gallery at the University of Houston – Downtown. This exhibition debuted at the Art Museum of South East Texas in Beaumont and then traveled to the Art Museum of South Texas. Richard Stout resides in Houston, Texas.

**Deborah Colton Gallery** is founded on being an innovative showcase for ongoing presentation and promotion of strong historical and visionary contemporary artists world-wide, whose diverse practices include painting, works on paper, sculpture, video, photography, performance, conceptual future media and public space installations. The Gallery aspires to provide a forum through connecting Texas, national and international artists to make positive change and to help Houston become a leading destination city of the arts.

Since 2013 especially, Deborah Colton Gallery has had a strong focus on establishing **HOUSTON FOUNDATIONS** which reveres our city's artistic roots. By understanding where we came from, we can build on this foundation to become an even more dynamic and empowered "City of the Future" in the national and international art world. Deborah Colton Gallery's *Foundations I* was Suzanne Paul's *PROOF* exhibition in 2016, which the gallery actually started researching over a decade earlier when it started to house this important archive after Suzanne Paul's passing. Suzanne Paul's archives are the most comprehensive photographic documentation of Houston art scene from the 1970's to 2005. September - October of 2017, Deborah Colton Gallery organized and exhibited *Foundations II: Focus on the 70's & 80's* which featured 26 of the most significant artists of that time period who have made a major impact on who we are as an art city today. The Foundations Symposium Series of panels and lectures was part of this exhibition. Deborah Colton Gallery has a permanent **Foundations Room** in the back of the gallery which highlights Suzanne Paul's photographs of the Houston art scene plus a video excerpt of our Foundations Symposium Series from 2017. The video was created by Lee Benner. There also is a library of publications on Houston artists. For more information on our Foundations Projects, please access our website.