

AT EASE

Dear Lovers of "art" by any definition,

The center of politics is Washington, D.C. The center of entertainment is Los Angeles. And the center of culture is New York. Esteemed and prestigious, the New York School of Art has long signified the six to eighteen artists considered to be the center of the art world. Connected by region and iconography, these creators are seen by many as the best. Eventually, however, other areas, such as Chicago and Los Angeles, asked for and received recognition as a school. And now there's Houston.

On Jan. 26, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston opened an exhibit entitled, "Fresh Paint: The Houston School." Consisting of 56 paintings by 44 artists, its purpose is to "announce the recognition of an important regional school, distinguishing Houston from other major American art centers."

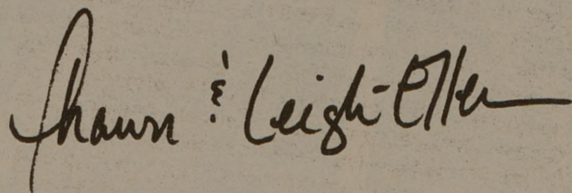
This past weekend, the museum brought several noted art critics and authors, including Robert Hughes, senior art editor of Time, to Houston. And being ever-investigative, At Ease was there as well. These critics were supposed to give Houston their blessing and christen the new school. But they didn't. As one New York critic put it, "I see no signs of a regional school in the exhibit. And that's a compliment." The others agreed.

Their reasoning seems to be that the paintings shown were too varied to exhibit signs of regionalism — no one stylistic feature shone clear throughout. And that is what pleased them. Calling the exhibit "powerful" and "bold," the critics applauded the diversity of painting styles. For they consider regionalism a cop-out, saying it makes it too easy for artists to meld their ideas and become "look-alike."

And as far as we non-critics are concerned, that diversity is what makes the show enjoyable. There's something there for just about everyone, whether it be pathos, humor, realism or mystery. Each of us has our own favorites and very few of them are the same. And once we met some of the artists, it was easy to see why their paintings are so different. They come from every background and artistic stance possible.

As one of the artists, Bert Long, commented, "We all know each other, we talk about our work and we party together. But, we've kept our individualism. What holds us together is our difference. The difference is the thread."

Sincerely,



Shawn Behlen & Leigh-Allen Clark
Co-editors

