

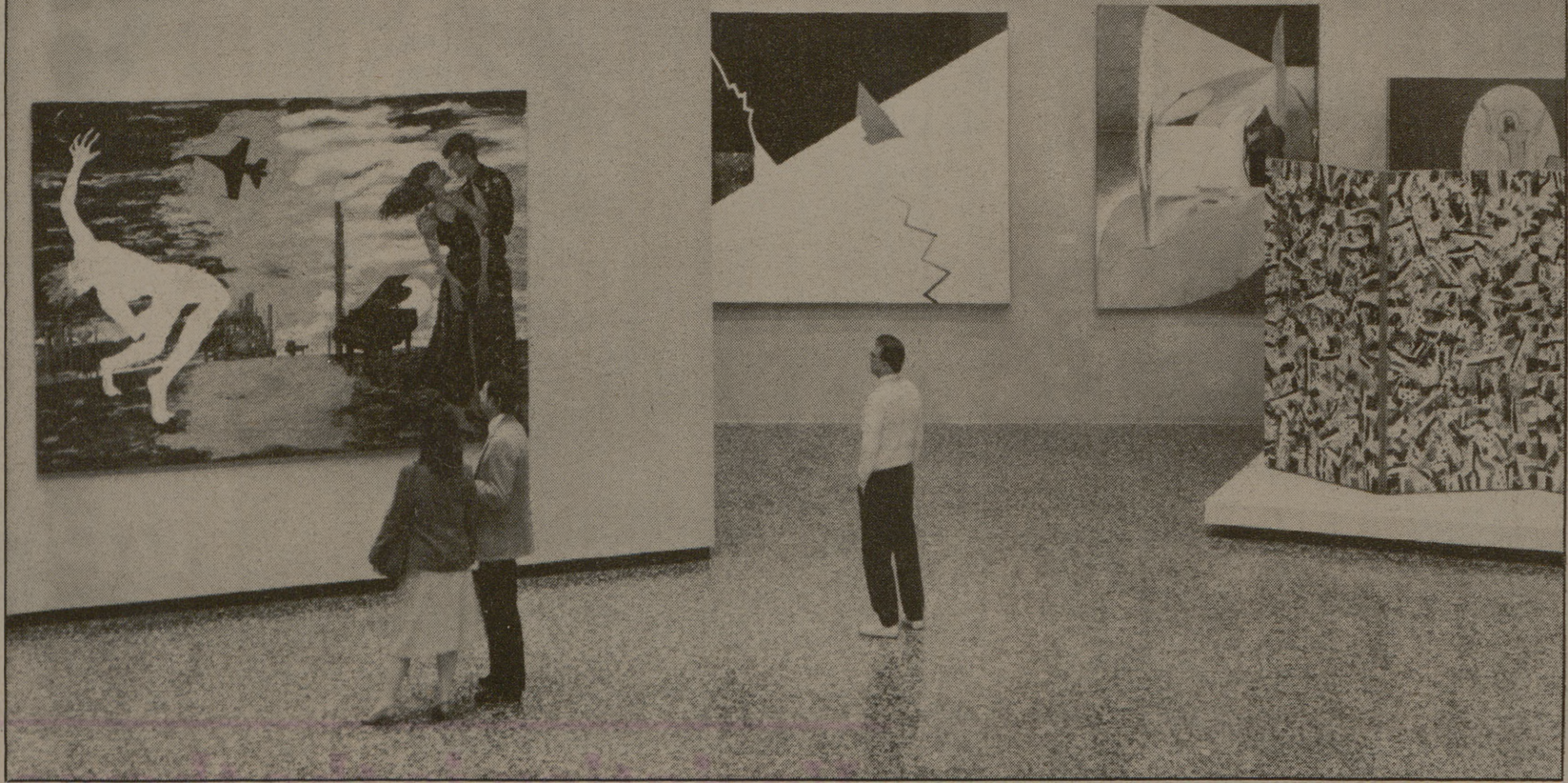
By PATTI FLINT  
Staff Writer  
The only thing that

It is a responsibility to send that work off into the world and say, 'This is me. This is me.'

Artists' union in purpose

# FRESH PAINT

## The Houston School



Fresh Paint will be in the Cullinan Hall and Andrews Gallery until April 7.

# Critics rule Houston isn't 'school of art'

By PATTI FLINT  
Staff Writer

"Operating on the Outer Perimeter" might be a more accurate name for the opening of the self-proclaimed Houston school of art, as controversy surrounds the first major exhibition of paintings by Houston artists.

Last weekend's Shartle Symposium at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston brought together critics, authors and museum directors to discuss a new definition of regionalism.

Robert Hughes, senior art editor of Time magazine and author of "Shock of the New," opened the symposium, explaining the beginnings of a cultural center.

In ancient cities of Italy, centers conveyed to the visitor a cultural wholeness, Hughes said. When the papal states declined, the centers lost their papal patronage and thus their authority, he said.

About 200 years later, Paris became the world's center of art and thought, he said. The division between

Paris and the provinces became more acute with industrialization, Hughes said, increasing the superiority of the center over the periphery.

Since then, New York City, more specifically Manhattan, has become a cultural center, but he says it is now receding.

"This idea of the center has been seen as Utopia," Hughes said. "The periphery, quite simply, is where culture is not, or where culture is not interesting."

The periphery and the center, though, are not geographic regions, but a state of mind for the visual arts — the periphery is provincial, he said. It's regionalism without self-confidence, he said. They experience what Hughes calls the cultural cringe: the hope of favorable judgement from the center.

When thinking of artists in the periphery, Hughes said artists in the center think of "hayseeds and swamp hogs or of nice, failed artists. They think regional art is quaint, nostalgic, folksy."

He compared the art world of his native Australia to artists in the periphery in America. He said they are afraid to claim their own qualities fearing criticism from others and themselves.

"For fear of feeling unsophisticated, we keep asking 'Is this up to international standards?'" Hughes said.

Hughes said artists are no longer faced with the schematic choice between the center and the periphery. Artists live away from the center, but have access to it.

"The ancient model of the center and the periphery no longer holds," he said. "Use it, but don't allow yourself to be used to make a market homogeneity."

Lucy Lippard, art critic, author and political activist, concurred with what Hughes said about the relationship between the center and the outer regions.

Lippard said that regional art is rooted in the place where it's made. The artists look around at the place where they've landed and are challenged by their surroundings. She said regionalism

is often a progressive culture where the artist turns to the local past to look at the broader present.

"Art needs both roots and reach," she said.

Lippard favors a movement toward "cultural democracy," against the melting down of multi-racial, multi-cultural differences which she sees in the cities. She said it would encourage people to speak for themselves, but wouldn't dictate taste from above to counter mainstream homogeneity — visible muzak.

Lippard, like the other speakers, doesn't believe that Houston is a school of art, which is generally defined as a group of artists that are under the same influence, producing similar work.

"I'm not really big on either rules or schools," Lippard said. "I'd probably call it (the exhibit) 'Looking Around' or maybe 'Cowboys and Astronauts.' Something is lost if the artist loses touch with his or her audiences."

She said regional art is

better when it's innocent, when it's not reacting to current marketing trends, but ignoring them.

"Rules made by the community feel better than those imposed by above," she said. "Art tends to be stronger when it controls its own destiny."

Marsha Tucker, director of the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, said, "narration and figuration, which are the mainstream in New York now came out of the south, come out of Texas."

Tucker is a strong proponent of regional art.

"I believe that we are, at the moment, at a time of broadening, so that New York is not the only place where art is being made," she said. "The worst thing you can do to an artist is identify the work by geography."

Hughes made the same point.

"Regionalism has become political, therefore it will be used for promotion," he

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