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## ***Questions of Texas: Avant Garde and Outlier***

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The idea of an art of the American South and how one might locate Texas within this concept is a complicated question for art history. There is the matter of whether Texas is part of the South, the West, or neither. Its geographical largeness and the diversity within the state further contribute to the challenges of its Southernness. Despite the omission of Texas from most contemporary art discourse, many artists who exhibited in the art capitals of the United States have roots in the South. Texas, in between New York City and Los Angeles, the two cities that dominate postwar narratives of American art history, is a space far removed from those art capitals, and its inhabitants are often excluded from those narratives. This essay focuses on two Texas artists, Forrest Bess (1911–1977) and Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), who are now considered important and established avant-garde postwar American artists.

Bess and Rauschenberg were born in Texas, and each offers an example of what the American South might mean toward framing a postwar American art of the center and its margins. Both artists grew up in Texas, did not complete traditional art undergraduate or graduate training, and served in the military. Bess, born in Bay City, initiated degrees in architecture at two Texas universities,<sup>1</sup> enlisted in the military during World War II, and spent most of his adulthood in “near-total isolation” in his hometown.<sup>2</sup> Bess was mostly relegated to a place outside of the contemporary canon, despite his connections to scholar and critic Meyer Schapiro and early years spent with the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York City, a pioneering representative of postwar avant-garde artists. His first inclusion in the Whitney Biennial was posthumous and did not occur until 2012. In contrast, Rauschenberg has come to define avant-garde art practices in the postwar period and reached national and international acclaim during his lifetime. He was born in Port Arthur, began but did not complete his art degree at the Kansas City Art Institute, and attended courses at two established art schools, Black Mountain College and the Art Students League.<sup>3</sup> A comparison between the reputations of these two Texas artists raises larger questions about regionalism in American art.<sup>4</sup> Looking closely at the careers and scholarly appraisals of Forrest Bess and Robert Rauschenberg helps us to register how the South—and specifically Texas—is considered in relation to the histories of postwar American art at large.

While these artists would appear to share some details of biography and training, the scholarship on Bess and Rauschenberg epitomize different edges of the art-historical canon: the outlier and the avant-garde. Forrest Bess, whose work featured a network of personal symbols within the field of abstraction, exhibited in New York City during his lifetime (between 1949 and 1967<sup>5</sup>), as well as in Houston (his closest city). Although he maintained contact with mainstream figures, such as Betty Parsons and Meyer Schapiro, Bess lived

largely outside the art world and died in obscurity. Like Bess, Rauschenberg worked in such a way that many art historians try to decode or read his art through his biography. Unlike Bess, however, it may be difficult to name a more canonical postwar artist than Robert Rauschenberg. Perhaps it comes down to a question of geography; Rauschenberg lived mostly in New York City during his rising career. It was one of the art centers of the postwar period, while Bess lived in Bay City, Texas. The focus here is on Bess and Rauschenberg, because both worked at about the same time, using a similar language of abstraction. Yet the labels used to describe the artists’ practices imply different value systems. Indeed, if a postwar artist working at the geographic periphery—especially in the South—challenged the parameters of avant-garde art, how did the structures and networks of the mainstream art world react? This question is fundamentally rooted in the problems of art history and relates to the ways in which these same structures silence “unknown” artists.

Questions of the outsider and the avant-garde—and how to denaturalize the structures that delineate the two—are posed by Lynne Cooke in the 2018 exhibition and catalogue *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*. Cooke seeks to create a place where the nomenclatures of difference—between avant-garde and self-taught—no longer retain meaning as separate categories. To accomplish this, Cooke suggests “outlier” as a more useful term.<sup>6</sup> This terminology may operate within questions of regionalism—an issue which seems to be at the root of appraisals of most artists from smaller cities (for example, in the immediate postwar period, any American city outside of New York City). While Cooke claims Bess as an outlier, Rauschenberg is then positioned as a part of the establishment. Cooke views Bess as an outlier because he chose to find power in his social position; he “preferred life on the margins—a space of resistance, in bell hooks’s words.”<sup>7</sup>

That space of resistance is in full view in Bess’s work, which registers the landscape of Texas and therefore speaks of an otherness in opposition to New York. Works such as an untitled painting sold at Christie’s in 2012<sup>8</sup> (n.d.; current location unknown) suggest the expanse of the sky and water of Bay City, Texas. Likewise, another work from the same sale, dated 1968<sup>9</sup> (current location unknown) also features the suggestion of water—a familiar view. As Clare Elliott describes it: “A fisherman, Bess must have stared for hours at the Gulf of Mexico’s flat, unceasing horizon, and a deep connection to nature was imperative to his livelihood.”<sup>10</sup> She states that “many of his compositions divide the canvas horizontally, creating the impression of a horizon line.”<sup>11</sup> This is evident in *Chinquapin*<sup>12</sup> (1967; previously estate of Bernard J. Wilford), whose title references the area he lived in near Bay City, while the pink sky—familiar to anyone who has seen a Texas sunrise—shoreline, and play of water suggest the landscape.

Through Bess’s unique mode of abstraction, however, these places could also be anywhere. Examining work by artists both from and of Texas, such as Frank Reaugh (1860–1945), Everett Spruce (1908–2002), Jerry Bywaters (1906–1989), Alexandre Hogue (1898–1994), and Georgia O’Keeffe (1887–1986), art historian Susie Kalil identifies what she calls a traditional Texas landscape. Kalil locates Bess’s paintings such as *Chinquapin*, *Seascape with Sun* (c. 1947; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago), and *Seascape with Moon* (1950; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago) as “atypical” from other work by Texas artists of the same time period.<sup>13</sup> In “The Texas Landscape,” she writes:

The Gulf itself held an almost mystical appeal for Bess. His house, a ramshackle barge turned upside down and covered with tar and shells, was located on a spit of land reachable only by boat on the Intercoastal Waterway.

Bess’s highly charged, enigmatic paintings were atypical of the majority of works produced in Texas during the 1950s and 1960s. The oddly beautiful works are powerful symbols derived from the land and sea Bess encountered while fishing for his meagre livelihood.<sup>14</sup>

In this quotation, Kalil describes the importance of the Gulf of Mexico to Bess and how the landscape helped to define Bess’s inner life. The Texas landscape became part of his rich symbolic imagery signifying both the inner and outer life of Bess.

Finally, Alison de Lima Greene describes Bess’s 1958 *Untitled (11A)* (fig. 1) as both “transcendental aspirations” and connected to the Texas landscape.<sup>15</sup> She suggests a parallel between the work of Bess and Georgia O’Keeffe, stating: “Only Georgia O’Keeffe, during her early years in Canyon, Texas, had found such liberating inspiration in the Texas landscape.”<sup>16</sup> Bess himself wrote of the painting: “I felt it had something to do with a lonely beach. . . . The sharp pointed shapes brought to mind driftwood—the silhouette of driftwood on a beach.”<sup>17</sup> He links the work to his own experiences of the red sky, grassy shorelines, and open seas of the Texas coast.



Fig. 1. Forrest Bess, *Untitled (11A)*, 1958. Oil on canvas, 17 3/4 × 24 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum purchase funded by Duke Energy, 88.66

For Elliott, Kalil, Greene, and other art historians, Bess is defined by Texas. These writers position Bess as part of an art-historical lineage—rooted in region (and possibly regionalism) but transcending such tropes through his adaptation of a form of avant-garde modernism popularized by O’Keeffe. His use of abstraction to picture the Texas landscape firmly positioned him within a familiar modernist narrative. Indeed, Katie Robinson Edwards, in *Midcentury Modern Art in Texas*, asserts Bess as “one of Texas’s finest modernist painters.”<sup>18</sup> Until the 1980s, Bess was “well known” in Houston but was mainly considered “a regional artist” in Texas.<sup>19</sup>

In *Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art*, Miranda Lash offers a useful framework to address whether art can be Southern. She states, “Because of the slipperiness of what ‘the South’ is and means, and the conflicting emotions it provokes, the region remains a recurring and politically potent concept.”<sup>20</sup> According to Lash, artists

who identify as Southern are often excluded from mainstream contemporary art exhibitions, citing the 2014 Whitney Biennial as one example.<sup>21</sup> She describes how when the South enters into art-historical essays and museums, it is through classifications such as "self-taught," "visionary," or otherwise "naïve," terms reminiscent of Cooke's use of outlier.<sup>22</sup> As Trevor Schoonmaker elaborates, the South is not a "monolith" to those who live there, although it is often discussed in such terms by those who do not.<sup>23</sup> The question of a monolithic South gets more complicated with regard to Texas. Schoonmaker writes:

The question isn't, for example, whether Texas, pushing the conversation westward, is part of the South or not. A better question is how much of the South is in Texas? For instance, I think Southeast Texan Robert Rauschenberg, San Antonian Dario Robleto, and Dallasite Erykah Badu have demonstrated considerable southernness in their work. And Houstonian Beyoncé has recently displayed her own credentials with the release of "Formation." But that doesn't mean all of Texas has a southern flavor, or that all Texans identify as southerners.<sup>24</sup>

Schoonmaker provocatively argues that "several giants of mid-twentieth century American art" were "all southerners," including Romare Bearden, Cy Twombly, Jasper Johns, and Rauschenberg.<sup>25</sup> Schoonmaker discusses the influence on Rauschenberg of the reuse of materials in Southern culture in his connection to later self-taught African American artists, such as Thornton Dial. Schoonmaker looks to how African American vernacular artists influenced contemporary African American artists who address the historical and present experiences of the South in their work.<sup>26</sup>

As for Bess, Texas figures into the scholarly appraisals and popular imaginings of Rauschenberg. Katie Robinson Edwards describes how:

When Milton Rauschenberg was boarding a bus in Kansas City bound for New York, he shed his given name and attempted to shed his Texas accent. Yet there is a large kernel of truth in the stereotypes that metaphorically connect Rauschenberg's grand-manner art to the grand state of his youth. The independence, freedom, and brashness of his art match the stubbornness, drunken antics, openness, and genuine friendliness of his personality.<sup>27</sup>

While Rauschenberg attempts to leave the state and the name Milton behind in this anecdote, Edwards ties Rauschenberg's personality and art to the state's reputation. Rauschenberg's attempted erasure of his Texan roots seems to cause problems for those art historians who want to claim him for Texas. Elsewhere, Edwards has written how, "of all the artists to ever hail from Texas, a Port Arthur native made the greatest, longest-lasting impact on the international art world. Robert Rauschenberg . . . broke through artistic and social barriers repeatedly throughout his life."<sup>28</sup> In *The Art of Texas: 250 Years*, meant to celebrate Texas, Edwards cites Rauschenberg, working mainly outside the state, as one of its most important artists.

Rauschenberg's origins take on quasi-mythic meaning in a different way in scholarship not focused on Texas. Calvin Tomkins, in *The Bride and The Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art*, states: "Artists have, of course, come from every conceivable sort of background, but not many have grown up in an environment that would appear to be less conducive to aesthetic development than the small Gulf Coast refinery town of Port Arthur,

Texas, where Rauschenberg spent his first eighteen years.”<sup>29</sup> In this frame, Port Arthur and Texas become almost mythic in how almost inconceivable it is that an artist such as Rauschenberg was able to succeed despite coming from such origins. Similarly, in *Robert Rauschenberg*, Catherine Craft includes a chapter titled “The Early Years—From Texas to New York,” albeit with little attention to those years in Texas.<sup>30</sup> Texas is positioned as a mere starting point for Rauschenberg, one with little meaning later. Mary Lynn Kotz gives the most attention to Rauschenberg’s connections to Texas in her 1990 volume *Rauschenberg/Art and Life*, writing that “Although he gave up the idea of a religious calling while still a teenager, Rauschenberg’s life and work have been shaped by the values and experiences deeply rooted in his Texas childhood. The key to understanding his art is to be found there.”<sup>31</sup> Significantly, Kotz tries to assign biographical and generative meaning to Texas in Rauschenberg’s career. Finally, Paul Schimmel also defines Texas as foundational to Rauschenberg’s oeuvre. In describing echoes of Texas in an untitled 1954 work (Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles), Schimmel writes, “The yellow crocheted curtain collaged in the lower right quadrant of the pictorial surface is a type of material that would reemerge in the Combines as a reference to American home decoration of the 1940s and to Rauschenberg’s upbringing in Texas.”<sup>32</sup> Rauschenberg himself described how he had no exposure to art or any art training while in Port Arthur, Texas.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, when asked if “there is anything in your art of Port Arthur, Texas?,” he responded, “Oh, there has to be.”<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 2. Robert Rauschenberg, *Rodeo Palace (Spread)*, 1975–76. Solvent transfer, fabric, cardboard, acrylic, and graphite on cardboard on wood panels with objects, 144 x 192 x 40 3/8 inches; depth variable. Lyn and Norman Lear Collection, Los Angeles. ©Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, RRF Registration# 76.001

A handful of later works, such as his *Rodeo Palace* (1975–76) (fig. 2), more definitively link Rauschenberg with the state of Texas. From his *Spread* series, *Rodeo Palace* was commissioned by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth to illustrate the theme of “the Great American Rodeo” for its celebration of the national bicentennial.<sup>35</sup> While other participating artists are listed in the corresponding exhibition catalogue as from Texas or other states, Rauschenberg’s Texas roots are left out, and he is described as “painter Robert Rauschenberg”<sup>36</sup> and “an American master of intuitive and poetic art.”<sup>37</sup> Kotz describes the work and Texas within the context of the West:

For Rauschenberg, at the age of fifty, *Rodeo Palace* was a breakthrough, celebrating his roots in images as straightforward and homely as those in the old combines. The references to the West include horses, cactus, and an oil derrick. At the top of the painting’s six panels, on a surface painted in opalescent peach, is a picture of an ordinary bucket, like the kind used to water horses. In the end, Rauschenberg did not just confine *Rodeo Palace* to rodeos or the old West. Through his joyous, random-order imagery, Rauschenberg once again became the reporter of past and present.<sup>38</sup>

While *Rodeo Palace* is described as inspired by Texas, the work is placed, through its association with the rodeo, as participating in the American West, not the American South.<sup>39</sup>

*Rodeo Palace* features heavily in later Rauschenberg retrospectives, where it is alternately defined as either about Texas or about Rauschenberg’s biography. The work was included in the Smithsonian Institution’s Rauschenberg retrospective, an exhibition for a living American artist as a celebration of the nation’s bicentennial.<sup>40</sup> Benjamin Forgey, in his *ARTnews* review of the 1977 retrospective, wrote: “*Rodeo Palace*, the most recent painting on view, is a huge compendium piece, like a travelogue of Rauschenberg’s own amazing journey.”<sup>41</sup> As the most recent work in the exhibition produced by the artist, *Rodeo Palace* functioned, perhaps not by the will of the artist, as an encapsulation of Rauschenberg’s career through his Texas beginnings. Likewise, for a 1997 retrospective, Joan Young positions *Rodeo Palace* as “one of Rauschenberg’s first artworks postdating the Combines to include references to his Texan roots.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, William H. Goetzmann describes the work as “a sincere tribute to Texas nostalgia” that “evokes the sense of the shabby Texas farmhouse and rural poverty amidst plenty as well as any work of its time.”<sup>43</sup> Finally, Walter Hopps notes how “it’s as though he’s gone back to the special waters and flowerings of his roots on the Gulf Coast, but in a new and triumphant way.”<sup>44</sup> These various quotations demonstrate how both national and local writers responded to *Rodeo Palace* as specific to Texas and Rauschenberg’s biography.



Fig. 3. Robert Rauschenberg, *Whistle Stop (Spread)*, 1977. Solvent transfer, fabric, and paper on wood panels with objects and train signal light, 84 x 180 x 9 inches. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; Museum purchase and commission, The Benjamin J. Tiller Memorial Trust. ©Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, RRF Registration# 77.002

Another work in the series, *Whistle Stop* of 1977 (fig. 3), makes reference to Texas and, through those connections, to Rauschenberg’s childhood. The series name, *Spread* (1975–

83), makes associations with Texas, as "a term used to describe a wide expanse of land, as well as a fabric covering; it also refers to the large scale of these particular artworks. Paint and solvent transfer are applied to wood panels and often to fabric collage, while found objects, mirrored Plexiglas, and electric lights are commonly included."<sup>45</sup> *Whistle Stop*, also commissioned by the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (and in that collection), holds significant personal associations to Texas and is dedicated to Rauschenberg's father. In the work, Rauschenberg uses images that reference his mother, "the yellow rose of Texas," a ship with "Gulf" on it, and the Southern "shotgun" house, similar to Rauschenberg's father's childhood home.<sup>46</sup> As Kotz explains, "the dominant object in *Whistle Stop* is a small red lantern, similar to ones on the caboose of Port Arthur-to-Beaumont trains in use long ago."<sup>47</sup> The lantern, which blinks and focuses the viewer's attention, is the most visible aspect of the work and makes a connection to Texas.

In conclusion, in art-historical scholarship, Forrest Bess and Robert Rauschenberg seem to occupy a space within Texas when it suits the art historian. Connections to Texas within their work alternately become a tool for either camouflaging or expressing Texas; for representing them as either a geographic anomaly or an outlier. While sometimes that subject position is not necessarily specific to Texas, and Texas stands in for anywhere outside the center, on other occasions it is Texas, and not the American South, that determines an outlier status. For Bess, his life spent in Texas amplifies his status as an outsider to the mainstream art world. In contrast, for Rauschenberg, Texas is described by scholars with wonder—how did he get from there to here? These artists both challenged and conformed to scholars' and audiences' ideas of what a Texas avant-garde artist might look like; one who stayed mostly in Texas and one who left. Through this historiography of art-historical writing on Bess and Rauschenberg, I hope to raise questions about the place of Texas in postwar American art and, by extension, ask where the South might be located within such art. Through these art-historical references, Texas becomes a site of almost mythic origins for Rauschenberg's rise in the art world and the space in which Bess (mostly) remained unknown.

By asking questions about how Texas fits within the work of Bess and Rauschenberg, I hope to expand the scholarship on Southern art and the canon of American modernism. Both artists, identified as Texans by art historians within and outside of the state borders, at times depicted the idea of Texas in abstract terms in their work. Bess, whose paintings abstracted the landscape of Texas, and Rauschenberg, who may have abstracted the idea of what Texas meant to him in his work, provide a way of looking at an already abstract concept—Texas, a state, a region, or a place that holds meaning.<sup>48</sup> The state of Texas is expansive and does not signify one unified or fixed meaning and/or identity; attempts to define Texas are arbitrary and confining. Bess's and Rauschenberg's Texas origins show the ways Texas is written in and out of their careers in art history. Further studies might look more closely at historical and contemporary artists in Texas through a more inclusive lens. New studies, specifically focusing on silenced, unknown artists, those who express an intersectional identity, or who have been ignored by the mainstream art establishment due to their work in a geographic periphery, are necessary to expand how these structures impact historical and contemporary artistic practices and art history. The question of Texas, then, begs us to consider the work of Chicana and African American artists and of the place of Texas itself, which was once a part of Mexico, in histories of the art of the United States of America. Bess and Rauschenberg, both fixed into the canon of postwar art as either outlier or avant-garde master, offer a place to start.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Bess attended the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (now Texas A&M University) and transferred to the University of Texas. See Clare Elliott, "Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible," *Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible*, exh. cat. (Houston: Menil Foundation, distributed by Yale University Press, 2013), 12. Rauschenberg attended the University of Texas, Austin (briefly) studying pharmacology. See Catherine Craft, "Chronology," *Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Phaidon, 2013), 142.
- <sup>2</sup> Elliott, "Forrest Bess," 13. Elliott describes Bess's early life, 12–13.
- <sup>3</sup> Craft, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 142.
- <sup>4</sup> Additionally, the queer identities of both men is a subject explored by scholars such as David J. Getsy and Jonathan Katz, which also may have placed them outside of mainstream postwar American culture. Bess's position outside of heteronormative society in the postwar period, his gay identity (one that was met with homophobic violence), his painterly symbols and codex, his visions, and his focus on hermaphroditism and medical theories are important aspects of scholarship on Bess that have been addressed by other scholars but are outside the scope of this essay. Getsy states: "Such work by artists contributed to the larger, but as yet inadequately acknowledged, history of gender's mutability and multiplicity in the postwar decades. One could look to the recent wave of interest in the remarkable work and life of Forrest Bess, whose abstract paintings visualized hybrid genders and hermaphroditism through ideographs." See David J. Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 23–24. Getsy's inclusion of Bess points toward what possible future scholarship may hold on Bess. K. Robinson Edwards cites Bess as an "outsider" due to his subject position that "contrasted strongly with consensus era values in America." See K[atie]. Robinson Edwards, "Liberty and Lone Star Modernism" in Ron Tyler, ed., *The Art of Texas: 250 Years* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 2019), 367. Additionally, see Edwards's overview and analysis of Bess's career using his code of symbols in addition to addressing how previous scholars have attempted to discuss Bess. Katie Robinson Edwards, *Midcentury Modern Art in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 104–13. For further information and analysis of Bess's career, identity, and artistic practice, see Elliott, "Forrest Bess," 11–23. The Menil Collection exhibition catalogue that features Elliott's essay also includes a "Primer of Basic Primordial Symbolism," a system of the codes that appear in Bess's work. See also Robert Gober's essay in the same catalogue, "The Man That Got Away," which offers a brief overview of Bess's biography and identity through letters to Meyer Schapiro, Betty Parsons, and John Money, with attention to Bess's attempts to exhibit his work and medical theories together. Gober, "The Man That Got Away," 91–99. Additionally, see Chuck Smith's *Forrest Bess: Key to the Riddle* (Brooklyn: powerHouse Books, 2013). Scholarly attention to the intersection of Rauschenberg and queer theory is also pivotal to scholarly interventions in art-historical analysis of his work. See Jonathan Katz, "The Art of the Code: Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg," in *Significant Others*, ed. Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 189–207. Craft states about Rauschenberg, after his separation from Susan Weil in 1951, "although he never defined himself as gay, Rauschenberg would thereafter form his most significant relationships with other men." Craft, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 10.
- <sup>5</sup> Lynne Cooke, "Boundary Trouble: Navigating Margin and Mainstream," *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*, exh. cat. (Washington: National Gallery of Art in association with The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 23.
- <sup>6</sup> Cooke, "Boundary Trouble," 4.
- <sup>7</sup> Cooke, "Boundary Trouble," 23–24. Cooke describes Robert Gober's inclusion of Bess in the 2012 Whitney Biennial as an act of the vanguard including the "periphery," particularly as Bess's paintings were shown alongside Bess's writings about hermaphroditism.
- <sup>8</sup> Amy Cappellazzo and Charlotte Perrottey, "My painting is tomorrow's painting. Watch and see." *Forrest Bess Including works from the Harry Burkhart Collection* (New York: Christie's, 2012), 104–5 (accessed online March 6, 2020, <https://www.christies.com/privatesales/forrest-bess#about-section>). Additionally, Robert Storr's catalogue essay in the Christie's catalogue, "From the Back of Beyond," addresses Bess's outsider status to New York's art world.
- <sup>9</sup> Cappellazzo and Perrottey, "My painting is tomorrow's painting," 112–13.
- <sup>10</sup> Elliott, "Forrest Bess," 15.
- <sup>11</sup> Elliott, "Forrest Bess," 15.
- <sup>12</sup> *Chinquapin* appears in Cappellazzo and Perrottey, "My painting is tomorrow's painting," 102–3. The work was highlighted in Roberta Smith's "A New Vision of a Visionary Fisherman," *New York Times*, March 22, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/arts/design/forrest-bess-paintings-at-christies-and-whitney-biennial.html>.



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- <sup>13</sup> Susie Kalil, *The Texas Landscape, 1900–1986*, exh. cat. (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1986), 38–39.
- <sup>14</sup> Susie Kalil, “The Texas Landscape,” in *The Art of Texas*, 86.
- <sup>15</sup> Alison de Lima Greene, *Texas: 150 Works from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), 44. Edwards addresses Greene’s analysis in relation to Bess’s lexicon. Edwards, *Midcentury Modern Art in Texas*, 110.
- <sup>16</sup> Greene, *Texas*, 44.
- <sup>17</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, “Forrest Bess; *Untitled (11A)*,” accessed March 9, 2020, <https://emuseum.mfah.org/objects/11821/untitled-11a?ctx=cdb79fae3243f1ba6888e5a8b89dc1b1f94a4ea&idx=3>.
- <sup>18</sup> Edwards, *Midcentury Modern Art in Texas*, 10.
- <sup>19</sup> Elliott, “Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible,” 23n29.
- <sup>20</sup> Miranda Lash, “What Do We Envision When We Talk About the South?,” in *Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art*, exh. cat., ed. Miranda Lash and Trevor Schoonmaker (Durham: Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University, 2016): 19.
- <sup>21</sup> Lash, “What Do We Envision When We Talk About the South?,” 20.
- <sup>22</sup> Lash, “What Do We Envision When We Talk About the South?,” 20.
- <sup>23</sup> Trevor Schoonmaker, “Southern Accent: The Sound of Seeing,” in *Southern Accent*, 55.
- <sup>24</sup> Schoonmaker, “Southern Accent,” 56.
- <sup>25</sup> Schoonmaker, “Southern Accent,” 63.
- <sup>26</sup> Schoonmaker, “Southern Accent,” 63–65.
- <sup>27</sup> Edwards, *Midcentury Modern Art in Texas*, 252. Edwards makes a connection between Forrest Bess and Jasper Johns based on formal aspects of their works and upon their identity. She states, “Both Bess and Johns, unmarried and interested in men as sexual partners, lived lives outside the dominant heterosexual society of the 1950s. Both men found, nearly contemporaneously, a vocabulary of painting with a symbolic or hermetic language that helped them to transmute their personal experiences into art” (111).
- <sup>28</sup> Edwards, “Liberty and Lone Star Modernism,” 381.
- <sup>29</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and The Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art* (New York: Viking, 1965), 195.
- <sup>30</sup> Craft, *Robert Rauschenberg*.
- <sup>31</sup> Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg/Art and Life*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2018), 41. Rauschenberg was seemingly identified with Texas by Andy Warhol. Warhol’s silkscreen portrait of Robert Rauschenberg, titled *Texan* (1962), makes Rauschenberg’s origins in Texas interchangeable with his name for the portrait. The work, in the Museum Ludwig collection, is identified by Georg Frei and Neil Printz as being titled by Rainer Crone. There are other works featuring Rauschenberg and his family (from photographs given to Warhol by Rauschenberg), but none of the others are titled *Texan*, according to the Andy Warhol catalogue raisonné. See Georg Frei and Neil Printz, *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 1, *Paintings and Sculpture 1961–1963* (New York: Phaidon, 2002), 266–67. Some other works from the series are titled *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Rauschenberg Family)*, clearly tying the work to Walker Evans, which, as Frei and Printz point out, connects the work to the South (257). In most cases, it appears that none of these works were titled by Warhol, but it remains pertinent that art historians and others titled the works making these associations with Texas and the South.
- <sup>32</sup> Paul Schimmel, “Autobiography and Self-Portraiture in Rauschenberg’s Combines,” *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in association with Steidl Verlag, 2005), 212.
- <sup>33</sup> Barbara Rose, *Rauschenberg: An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg by Barbara Rose* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 9.
- <sup>34</sup> Rose, *Rauschenberg*, 11. He draws his answer out slightly with a joke but clearly states the viability of the question within his work.
- <sup>35</sup> Kotz, *Rauschenberg/Art and Life*, 209. The museum was then known as the Fort Worth Art Museum.

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- <sup>36</sup> Richard Koshalek, "Introduction," *The Great American Rodeo*, exh. cat. (Fort Worth: The Fort Worth Art Museum and The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 15–16. In the catalogue biographies, Rauschenberg's birthplace of Port Arthur, Texas, is noted. See "Biographies," in *The Great American Rodeo*, 76.
- <sup>37</sup> Jay Belloli, "American Realism and 'The Great American Rodeo,'" in *The Great American Rodeo*, 23.
- <sup>38</sup> Kotz, *Rauschenberg/Art and Life*, 209.
- <sup>39</sup> Belloli, "American Realism and 'The Great American Rodeo,'" 23.
- <sup>40</sup> Kotz, *Rauschenberg/Art and Life*, 209.
- <sup>41</sup> Benjamin Forgey, "An Artist for All Decades," *ARTnews* 76 (January 1977): 36.
- <sup>42</sup> Joan Young, "Large-Scale Paintings and Sculpture, 1975–Present" in Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson, eds. *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1997), 392. A later series, Gluts, has roots in Rauschenberg's 1985 visit to the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. See Andrianna Campbell, "'Souvenirs Without Nostalgia': Gluts in Present Time," in Leah Dickerman and Achim Borhardt-Hume, eds. *Robert Rauschenberg*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2016), 326.
- <sup>43</sup> William H. Goetzmann, "Images of Texas" in *Texas Images & Visions*, exh. cat. (Austin: Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, 1983), 40.
- <sup>44</sup> Hopps is quoted in Kotz, *Rauschenberg/Art and Life*, 210.
- <sup>45</sup> The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, "Spread (1975–83)," accessed September 14, 2018, <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/series/spread>.
- <sup>46</sup> Kotz, *Rauschenberg/Art and Life*, 45.
- <sup>47</sup> Kotz, *Rauschenberg/Art and Life*, 45.
- <sup>48</sup> Edwards describes how modernist Texas artists related to "the physical and metaphorical landscape and space of Texas" through representation and abstraction. Edwards, *Midcentury Modern Art in Texas*, 10–11.