



# FrontRow

A DAILY REVIEW OF THE DALLAS ARTS

## Why Dallas-Fort Worth Art ‘Rocks’ Houston

By Peter Simek, December 13, 2010

Last week, [The Dallas Observer devoted its cover story](#) to a critical consideration of the local dining scene, prompting [a long and occasionally neurotic \(and likely necessary\) episode of self-reflection](#) over on D’s Sidedish blog. It’s one of the things that comes with being a new city, a Sun Belt city, and a Texas city: we’re always making progress and we’re always provincial. Reading Hanna Raskin’s critique felt like I was back in the heat of Christina Rees’ [takedown](#) of the Dallas art scene from early 2009.

However, just as it is productive to challenge our standing as a proprietor of any cultural activity, it is also nice to sometimes get some positive reinforcement. That is why I enjoyed reading [Pedro Vélez’s dispatch from his recent trip to Dallas on Artnet](#). The Chicagoan took in some sights from around the state, and this takeaway tickled:

So, what’s in Texas, you might ask? Money, baby, enough to burn. Banking, technology, defense contracting, hospital tourism, oil and the Bush family move the economy. Texas is immense, Houston being the largest city in the state (fourth largest in the United States), followed by Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, El Paso and Austin.

However, it is the combination of Dallas / Fort Worth that really rocks.

What’s up Houston? Jump for self-congratulatory highlights.

First off, my favorite part of the piece, from Vélez’s retelling of the Amtrak journey south:

Then there are the people on the train. The ones who dare speak to you aboard this archaic clunker are like serpents, sniffing every part of your body with their forked tongues. One dude, a disgruntled 50 something Tea Partier — imagine Henry Fonda desperately trying to score weed — charmed a couple of skinny-jean hipsters with fantastic stories about his rich brother, a Chicago businessman who tried to kill him once. He talked for hours about his successful career tattooing movie stars, life on parole and his loving wife and daughter. “Got a Mexican and a Filipina woman waiting to service me, free of charge, once I get to Texas,” he whispered, laughing perversely. Good thing the dude got off the train in St. Louis.

Near the top of his list of highlights were two surprises (for the writer): the Meadows contains one of the largest collections of Spanish art outside of Spain and Goss-Michael Foundation contains one of the largest vBa collections in the States. These two institutions do deserve some high-fives for their strong 2010s, and their mention here reinforces how they contribute to rounding out the area's offerings, realigning – if ever so slightly – the perception of our city.

A nod to the Rachofsky House, Fort Worth's museums, as well as Dallas "attentive and happy" people follows before Vélez hits some galleries. He starts at 500x, which is a good choice if the goal is to get visitors to toss off their expectations of Dallas' plastic image. Then he visits a list of notables: Barry Whistler, The Public Trust, Holly Johnson, Mighty Fine Arts, and Cris Worley. Plush's rebirth gets a visit, and there's even some pining for ol' And / Or, thanks to CJ Davis, who helped chauffeur around the writer. A recurring theme in the piece is just how reasonable Vélez finds the prices at local galleries, considering the quality of the work. That's the kind of reaction Dallas gallerists will surely be happy to have floating about the interwebs, and it is a nice reminder for locals as well.

The piece ends with a wink at the Big D reputation: CJ Davis explains that the Cowboys Stadium art won't have much of an impact because Cowboys games are too expensive to go to (he either hasn't been following the season or hasn't heard that they offer tours). That said, Vélez's experience is so unrelentingly positive that I began to argue against it, muttering a number of "buts" and asides to myself. But for now, especially after a year of giant artistic happenings – from the Performing Arts Center to Cowboys Stadium – it's just nice to see some of finer aspects of "small d" recognized for what they are. It's probably very provincial for me to even take notice, but oh well.