

The Grand Champion winner in 2009, "A Mother's Love," is a colored drawing by Renee Zhan of the Katy ISD and sold at auction for \$155,000.
All images courtesy of Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

Rodeo Art: More than One Way to Show a Cow

by Debbie Z. Harwell

In October 1963, two Houston women met for lunch at the Sir Robert's Club in the Tower's Hotel. They talked and, on the back of a napkin, sketched an outline for a new competition at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, one that would allow students who could not raise an animal the chance to take part. From that inauspicious beginning came one of the rodeo's most lucrative events—The School Art Program—which in 2008 reached a record \$1.6 million in sales.¹

Lynne Chesnar, a former graduate student at the University of Houston and a staff member at the Lloyd Gregory Advertising firm, which handled the rodeo advertising, first expressed the idea “to form a program where children who did not have an opportunity to raise animals and exhibit them . . . could still participate through the creative endeavor of a school art program.” She presented the idea to Houston Independent School District (HISD) Deputy Superintendent for Art Education, Grace Smith, who liked the concept of tying art to the study of western heritage but had concerns about the

increased work load for teachers. Within a week, the two met at the restaurant again. Teachers had shown an overwhelmingly positive response to the idea, and so the pair devised some basic rules.²

With little lead time before the event, they chose to make the first year's program very informal—a Go Texan Poster Contest—with three divisions for elementary, junior, and senior high students. Not expecting to receive many entries initially, they decided that the competition pieces would be dropped off in the parking lot at the Lloyd Gregory Advertising offices. To their surprise over 700 pieces of art were turned in between noon and 5:00 p.m. The large number of entries also meant they needed a bigger space to display the pieces for judging. R. A. “Al” Parker of Al Parker Buick volunteered his showroom, and the art filled every available space. Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo officials showed their support with rancher Ray K. Bullock agreeing to purchase rodeo tickets for the winners, and restaurateur G. D. “Sonny” Look hosting an awards ceremony at his restaurant.³

Tyler Mitchan of Giddings ISD was awarded the 2009 Reserve Class Champion Sculpture for his work entitled “How the West Was Won, Bible, Fist, and Gun.”



Over time, the School Art Program expanded tremendously and the rules were refined. In 1969, five school districts participated, and judging moved to the individual districts. The program, under the Go Texan Committee, grew so large that it eventually became a separate committee. Their mission statement reads, “The mission of the School Art Committee is to provide students the opportunity to be a part of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo through their artistic abilities, encourage the education and appreciation of their Western heritage, and to provide art workshops and scholarships.”⁴

Dave Morris, the general manager of KNUZ-AM and KQUE-FM, became the first chairman. Original members still serving on the committee forty years later include, Jim Glass, Delores Lang, Carole Look, and Pam Potter. Carole Look expressed this sentiment about their efforts, “I am so proud of what it means to the kids who don’t live on a farm and cannot raise an animal to exhibit or even visit the country to see what it is like [to live there]. They are learning Texas history and their agricultural heritage through art.”⁵



Julia Mason’s sculpture “Jack” was the 2008 High School Champion in the non-auction category. The non-auction class consists of students that do not wish to auction their artwork and, therefore, are not eligible to compete for the Grand Champion or Reserve Champion prizes. Instead, they compete against other non-auction participants.



Jewell Chang from Lamar Consolidated ISD won the Quick Draw Portrait competition in 2008 and received \$1,000.



The monochromatic drawing “Cute Companions” by Stephanie Hasenleder of Dickinson ISD was Reserve Class Champion in 2008.



The colored drawing, “Exploring New Trails,” by Trenton Mendez of Lamar Consolidated ISD was the Grand Champion at the first art auction held in 1996.

In 1976 the School Art Committee received 40,000 entries and had 2,000 volunteers working on forty-nine committees. The best of show and gold medal winners were displayed in the Astrohall at the Hayloft Gallery. Scholarship awards were based on the student's application and artwork, and professional artists served as judges. In the late 1970s, the committee began awarding scholarships to the Glassell School at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts Summer Workshop to select students. By 1983, the program received 200,000 entries from forty-nine districts. The following year, five seniors received scholarships to study at the Cowboy Artists of America Museum in Kerrville, Texas, in affiliation with Shreiner College. Later, students were given the option to attend the workshop or receive a \$2,000 scholarship to any Texas university. The committee added a photography category

in 1990. In 2007, a Quick Draw contest was incorporated with fifty contestants selected from approximately 400 high school student applications. Students are given fifty minutes to complete a drawing of either a still life or portrait/figurative display chosen by the committee. Five winners receive trophies and cash prizes.⁶

After twelve years of lobbying, the biggest change came in 1996, when the committee held the first auction of winning entries. Their records indicate: "Fifty pieces of high school art sold for a record \$254,600, with the Grand Champion selling for \$40,000 and the Reserve Grand Champion selling for \$26,000." The following year, the organizers held the first School Art Print reception, with 290 signed and numbered prints of the Grand Champion being offered for sale. The School Art Committee split in 2002 and formed the School Art Auction Committee, which has conducted the auctions since 2003. In 2009, the auction earned \$1,163,400 with the Grand Champion bringing in \$155,000 and the Reserve Grand Champion selling for \$145,000. The 250-member committee received 300,000 submissions from ninety-eight school districts and sixty private schools. The committee currently awards fifteen four-year college scholarships of \$15,000 each, thirty-four three-week scholarships to the summer workshops at the Western Art Academy for high school

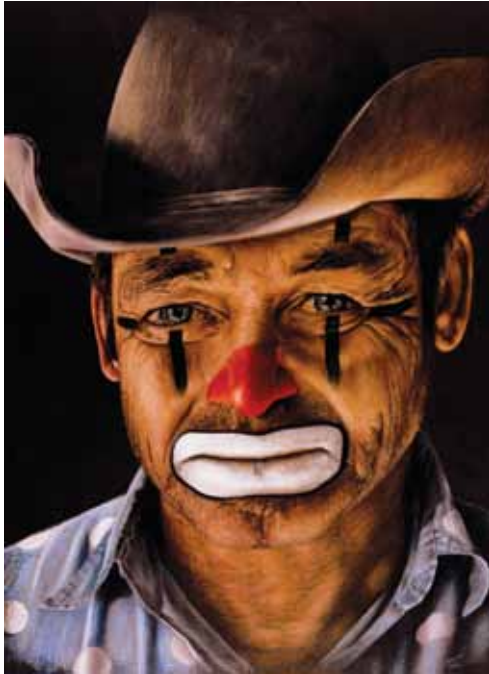


Giddings ISD student, Cayden Lehmann, won the prize for Class Champion in 2008 for the sculpture, "You Might be a Redneck."



Victoria ISD student Virginia Tejerina's "Los Cincos Amigos" was named Junior High Reserve Champion in 2008.

▶ *“Kickin’ Up Dirt”* by Tiffany Foote of Victoria ISD was the Class Champion for mixed medium in 2008.



▲ *“Humorous Hero,”* a colored drawing by Sherwin Ovid of Goose Creek ISD was the 1997 Grand Champion.



▼ Grant Messenger of Conroe ISD won as the 2008 Elementary Champion for his picture *“Peaceful Grazing.”*





students, and 120 summer workshops for kindergarten through twelfth grade students at the Glassell School. The Committee and the Glassell School provide awards for one high school student to participate in the Advanced Curriculum for Teens Program and ten teachers to attend the Glassell’s Professional Development Course for Visual Arts Teachers.⁷

Even though the program has grown exponentially since its inception, both in the number of participants and in revenues generated, former Committee Chairman Sally Woody reminds us that, “The purpose of the original program, first written on the back of a paper napkin in 1963, has remained intact—to provide students unable to exhibit animals at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo an opportunity to be a part of the Show through artistic abilities and the study of their Western heritage.”⁸

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The 2008 Grand Champion, “Packing Up,” is the creation of Jennifer Light of Spring ISD and sold for a record \$185,000.

Andrew Cherry of Huffman ISD received the Grand Champion Award in 2004 for his painting, “Beside Still Waters.”



Clear Creek ISD student Nika Cramer created this colored drawing entitled “Saddle Up” for the 2008 auction.