

# Houston Works— The Present and Future State of the Visual Arts

by Gus Kopriva

Many in the Art world recognize Houston as a major center of the visual arts on the third coast of the United States. The current Houston art environment is strong and conducive to making great art. Houston is the site of important art schools, which include the University of Houston, Rice University, and the Core Program at the Glassell School of Art. Our city is also the proud and fortunate home of two world-class museums, the Menil Collection and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. We have six spaces for alternative art: the Station, the Art Car Museum, Aurora Picture Show, Lawndale, Diverse Works, and the Art League of Houston. The city also has more than 65 art spaces for art dealers. Houston is home to an important contemporary museum, The Contemporary Arts Museum, as well as numerous foundations that aggressively support the arts and supportive media for the arts.

Houston's increasing prominence in the art world has captured international attention providing a historic opportunity for Houston artists to participate in an exhibition at the Shanghai Art Museum. In early 2005, the Mayor of Shanghai led a delegation to Houston executing a protocol that established Houston and Shanghai as "Friendship Cities."

Shanghai, the largest city in China, with a population in excess of 18 million people, is China's most important business and commercial center and contains a well-developed artistic and cultural scene including many museums, a famous concert hall, many parks and public spaces, and the famous, historic Bund along the river. The Shanghai Art Museum, considered by many to be the most impor-



Banner in front of the Shanghai Art Museum announcing the Contemporary Art Houston exhibition.

All photos courtesy Suzanne Banning

tant art museum in China, agreed to be the venue for an exhibition of *Contemporary Art Houston* from July 23 through August 8, 2006.

Christopher Zhu, a well-known critic of Chinese art, and Gus Kopriva jointly selected the Houston artwork to be exhibited.

UH alum, Gus Kopriva, has served as curator for more than 50 international/national exhibitions, and is currently organizing international museum exhibitions focusing on Texas art. Trained as a professional engineer, Kopriva began his visual arts career as a board member of the original Lawndale Art Annex at the University of Houston working with director, James Surls. He is the owner of Redbud Gallery in the Houston Heights, and balances an active engineering career along with all of his many roles in the arts.





*Frank X. Tolbert and Suzanne Banning*



The exhibition included 72 works of art representing about 41 artists. Many of Houston's best-known artists were represented such as: The Art Guys, Harvey Bott, Mel Chin, Joe Havel, the late Luis Jimenez, Nancy Reddin Kienholz, Paul Kittelson, Sharon Kopriva, the late Lucas Johnson; Ernesto Leon, Al Souza, Richard Stout, and James Surls, among many other key Houston artists.

A top quality color catalogue accompanied the exhibition with contributions from Patricia Johnson, art critic of the Houston Chronicle, Alison de Lima Greene, Contemporary Art Curator from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston Mayor Bill White, Former President George H.W. Bush, Gus Kopriva, and Christopher Zhu.



*The Art Guys*





*Overview of one of the spaces.*

Throughout its history, Houston has been home to a vibrant and creative arts community. The historic invitation by the Shanghai Art Museum to hold the Contemporary Arts Exhibit from Houston conferred international recognition on the latest in a long list of Houston artists. 🎨

#### *Public Opening*

