

foreword



by Ron Tyler

Texas has not always been – and some would say still isn't – a hospitable place for the fine arts. Few itinerant painters had more than momentary success during the nineteenth century, and native-born artists like Seymour Thomas had to go elsewhere to study and prosper. That situation began to change at the turn of the twentieth century because of pioneer painters and teachers Frank Reaugh in Dallas and Robert Onderdonk and his family in Dallas and San Antonio, who made it possible for Texas-born artists like Jerry Bywaters of Paris to study and practice in their own state.

When I first met Jerry Bywaters in 1971, he was one of the dominant figures in Texas art. He was chairman of the Fine Arts Division at Southern Methodist University, and I was a young curator at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, in the process of installing a major exhibition of "Texas Painting and Sculpture: The Twentieth Century," which he had organized with Martha Utterback of San Antonio. I did not know of his distinguished career as artist, critic, teacher, and museum administrator, which Francine Carraro so ably documents in this study, and would not have learned it from his quiet and easy-going manner. But Jerry Bywaters and his generation – artists and teachers like Everett Spruce, Alexandre Hogue, Otis Dozier, and Harry Carnohan – grew up with the arts in Texas and forever changed the cultural climate in our state.

As Carraro explains, Bywaters matured with the Regionalist movement, which suggested that the only true American arts were the indigenous creations that sprang from the heart of the country and further encouraged him and his fellow students to focus on their native Southwest. Bywaters contributed greatly to the movement initially as art critic of the *Dallas Morning News*, then as a teacher at the Dallas Art Institute and Southern Methodist University, and, in 1943, as director of the Dallas Museum of Art, a key position he held for more than twenty years.

By the time I met Bywaters again, about two years later, I was aware of his distinguished career because I had tried my hand at an essay on Texas art,

and asked for his critique. My novice effort well deserved its unpublished state, and his gentle and perceptive comments allowed me to set it aside pending a great deal more research on the complex years in which he played so vital a part. Not only was he a member of the group of artists known as the “Dallas Nine,” for example, but he reviewed their work regularly. As director of the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts during the tumultuous decade of the 1950s, he and others refused to give in to the conservative attack on modern art. His thorough knowledge of the region and the personalities made him the perfect person to direct the Smithsonian Institution’s Archives of American Art project to document art in Texas in 1974.

My final collaboration with Bywaters occurred in 1982 as I gathered paintings to include in a book on the Big Bend region of Texas. Bywaters was one of the first persons I consulted, first to solicit his own work for the book, and second for his recommendation as to who else should be included. The result was *Pecos to Rio Grande: Interpretations of Far West Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1983), which includes the work of eighteen artists. A detail of his *Century Plant – Big Bend*, which graces the cover of the book, evokes the raw character of the Big Bend as well as Jerry Bywaters’ love of his native southwest.