

ART

# Lone Star State shines contemporary light

By Molly Glentzer

**R**OAM into art spaces just about anywhere across Texas this fall, and you're likely to see natives.

Eighty art venues are focusing on Lone Star talent during the Texas 13 Biennial, whose primary event is a growing, independent survey of contemporary art being produced around the state.

## Texas 13 Biennial

**When:** noon-6 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays, noon-8 p.m. Thursdays, Sept. 5-Nov. 9

**Where:** Blue Star Contemporary Art Center, 116 Blue Star, San Antonio

**Tickets:** \$3-\$5; 210-227-6960, bluestarart.org; complete schedule at texasbiennial.org

The biennial is celebrating its fifth anniversary, but if you're not familiar with it yet, don't panic.

It was founded in 2005 by a group of Austin artists and a young gallery owner who now manage the open-call survey show, a gallery and Austin studio tours through their nonprofit, Big Medium.

After splitting the first three biennials among a handful of Austin galleries, they found a saint in arts adviser and attorney Virginia Rutledge, who took on the project as a pro-bono



Adela Andea

**The Texas 13 Biennial includes Adela Andea's "Primordial Garden," an installation of flex neon, cold cathode fluorescent lights, LEDs, various plastics and other components.**

labor of love.

A former Los Angeles County Museum of Art curator, Rutledge carries a big Rolodex and doesn't mind using it. She sent some of the 2011 survey to Houston's Box 13 ArtSpace and San Antonio's Blue Star Contemporary Art Center, also roping in dozens of other partners whose institutions could

mount their own exhibits.

"It really wasn't a struggle to agree it would be a good thing for everybody," Rutledge said. "People are pretty collaborative in Texas."

With more awareness came a flood of entries — about 4,000 for the 2013 Biennial — so Rutledge recruited a team of 10 curators to select this year's survey. They've

chosen works by 69 artists for the exhibit, which opens Sept. 5 at Blue Star. The curators selected so much, the museum had to create an annex to accommodate it all.

Rutledge and Michael Duncan have also curated two anniversary shows of recent work by previous biennial participants — including "New and

Greatest Hits" at Big Medium in Austin and "Texas Biennial Invitational" at Houston's Lawndale Art Center, which opens Friday.

The Lawndale show features four artists who work with abstraction: video and performance artist Christie Blizzard, painter Marcelyn McNeil, and sculptors Tom Orr and Brad Tucker.

McNeil and Tucker were also selected for the Blue Star exhibit.

Also under the official biennial umbrella, Ballroom Marfa has commissioned a project from Dallas artist Michael Corris and CentralTrak in Dallas will present performances.

The partner events occupy 17 venues in Houston alone.

If there is such a thing as a Texas identity in contemporary art, this should help define it.

Contemporary Arts Museum Houston director Bill Arning, one of the biennial's curators, said museum professionals across Texas have observed Los Angeles' recent major effort to promote its art history. The J. Paul Getty museum launched a collaborative effort among 60 institutions there to produce the buzzy "Pacific Standard Time" in 2011 and 2012.

Arning and others wonder if an equivalent narrative exists here. Four years into his job, he has a good command of who's working in Houston, and he recently visited studios in San Antonio. For the biennial, he saw work by 170 artists from other parts of the state.

"It was a lot of work but it's the part I like best," he said. "I love seeing what's happening with emerging artists."

Texas does have its own art history, Arning added, driven in part by strong university art programs. "There's a tradition of who-taught-whom," he said.

The biennial entries he saw were diverse and politically charged, he added. "On the national stage, Texas is a battleground state, and it's emblematic of the larger debates."

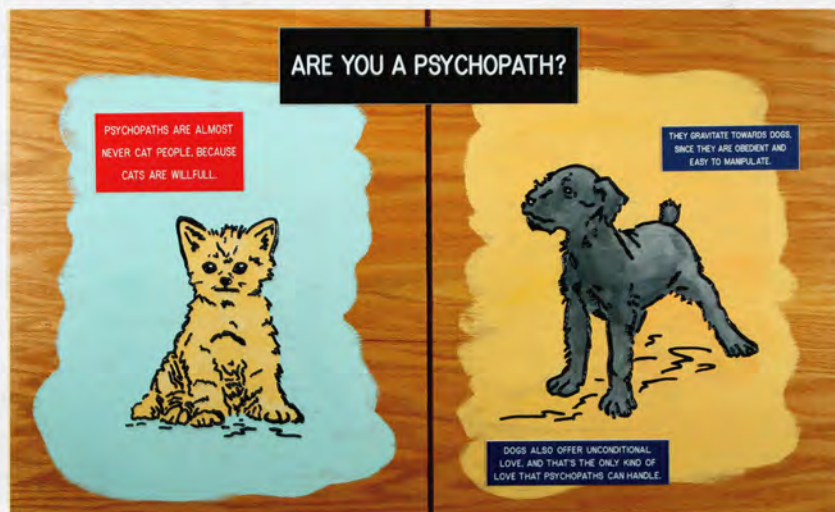
Rutledge, who lives in New York and Austin, also noted the excellence of Texas art schools, although self-taught artists proliferate, too. "There are so many artists participating at such a high level," she said.

While she doesn't see a regional aesthetic in terms of subject matter, she does think many Texas artists convey



Gregory Ruppe

**Gregory Ruppe contributed "Bigfoot," a 58-minute high-definition video.**



Gary Sweeney

**San Antonio artist Gary Sweeney, who helped design elements of the Navigation Boulevard Esplanade (See story, page H4), contributed "Are You a Psychopath?" to the exhibit.**

a powerful sense that comes from living close to agricultural landscapes. "It happens in other places too but not in New York or Los Angeles," she said.

Arning expects he'll be surprised once he sees everything in the biennial. "I don't know if even the principals will be able to predict everything that's going to come out of

the show," he said.

"The idea of looking statewide captures peoples' imaginations," Rutledge said. She'd like to see the biennial rotate to other cities in the future.

"The more it moves around, the better," she said. "We're serious about making it statewide."

[molly.glentzer@chron.com](mailto:molly.glentzer@chron.com)



**Texas 13 Biennial artist Geoff Hippenstiel's untitled work features his trademark lush layering of paint.**

Geoff Hippenstiel



**Michael Bise's "Uncle Corky" is a graphite-on-paper work.**

Michael Bise