



STEP BY STEP

DOUBLE DECADES FOR LAURA RATHE FINE ART

“ROME WAS NOT BUILT IN A DAY”

— so said 16th-century British playwright John Heywood. The second part of Heywood's line is less well known but equally applicable to Laura Rathe Fine Art — “but they were laying bricks every hour.”

As so, half a millennium later, Houston and Dallas gallerist Laura Rathe's mantra, “step by step,” seems particularly fitting as to understanding how Rathe founded, created, and runs her gallery as it marks a milestone in the art world — celebrating 20 years this fall.

Interweaving a commitment to artists, clients, and staff, this Texas art dealer directs three Texas locations — a pair of galleries in Houston, enviably sited on Gallery Row and the Uptown/Calleria area; and in Dallas, in the heart of the booming Design District. Most significantly, Rathe's roster encompasses a quintet who intersect art history; George Krause, Steve McCurry, Tony Magar, Hunt Slonem, and Retna.

It seems like just yesterday that Laura and I were standing on the docks on the north side of downtown where her first gallery was located, doors from one of Houston's principal alternative spaces, DiverseWorks. The occasion was FotoFest, back in the 2000s, and I was beckoned to investigate the nascent Laura Rathe Fine Art by a major talent in the photographic realm — Steve McCurry, the lensman who had documented the Afghan culture and its people so unforgettably with his portrait, Afghan Girl, which graced the June 1985 cover of National Geographic.

Another talent to single out in the Laura Rathe Fine Art stable is also a photographer — the first to win the Rome Prize in that medium, George Krause. Krause, whose image-making is often startling, produces a visceral reaction in his viewer. The founder of the University of Houston photography program debuted his light box works at LRFA on Colquitt one summer in a show where portraits of each subject bathed in white light were close to revealing the sitter's soul.

One must also talk about Tony Magar, one of the last living links to the Ab Ex movement. The former Manhattan painter, now residing along the South Texas coast, depicts landscape, seascape, and sky in vaporous scumbles of pigment upon canvas that stand between the titans of post-war painting and today.

Then Hunt Slonem — preservationist, painter, and wizard of interiors — links his passion for flora and fauna to a grand decorating scheme that is baroque, over-the-top, wildly imaginative, and a direct link to the florid exuberance of late 19th century Victoriana.

Finally, Retna's just jumped into the creative mix at Laura Rathe Fine Art. Instantly recognizable for his text-based, hermetic enamel paint upon canvases, he's both a street artist and a brand innovator for Louis Vuitton and Nike, among others, as well as the leader of the graffiti scene in L.A.

Considering Texans in LRFA's stable, the Guerilla Girls have no need to complain: Karen Hawkins, Meredith Pardue, and Lucrecia Waggoner, respectively, reference printed pages and the lore of old books rendered in sculpture and collage-based works on paper; rocks and stream beds and the stars, in acrylics on canvases; and the plant kingdom, from fungi to lichen, depicted in porcelain, often tipped in gold leaf.

From a gritty dock-side space to three polished temples to Texas, national, and international artists, Laura Rathe Fine Art's next decades promise to build upon the mantra of its sure-footed, pragmatic, and can-do founder — “step by step.”

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When all stands still, let your pure
energy reveal infinite possibility,
expression, creativity, and
most of all,
mystery.