

Central South  
*Revisited*  
1966 – 1983

In early 1966, the Parthenon entered a partnership with an artist group known as the Tennessee Art League to establish the Central South Art Competition. It would become a premiere southern art event, featuring an opening gala and juried exhibition held at the Parthenon each spring for over three decades. Artists of the “Central South,” an area defined as Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Virginia, and anywhere within a 300-mile radius of Nashville, were invited to submit work for consideration. Art experts traveled to Nashville from around the country to make their selections from sometimes over 600 entries. Central South’s best of show prize from 1966 to 1976 was the “Parthenon Purchase Award.” This included a \$1000 dollar purse and the distinction of having the work added to the Parthenon’s permanent holdings as part of the “Central South Collection.”

Today, the Parthenon’s Central South Collection consists of over thirty artworks acquired between 1966 and 1983, and is a colorful expression of art and culture in twentieth century Nashville. Containing numerous stylistically diverse pieces, the collection documents trends such as Expressionism and Minimalism in the 1960s and 70s, as well as a return to traditional landscapes by the early 1980s. Featuring selected Parthenon Award Winners dating back to 1966, as well as significant runner ups and stand outs, *Central South Revisited* celebrates the artists and artwork of this historic, but sometimes overlooked collection of art.



Presented by the Nashville Parthenon  
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Walter H. Stevens (1927-1980)

*Windows II*

Acrylic on canvas

1966

66.I.01

From upstate New York, Walter Hollis Stevens was one of the first faculty members at the University of Tennessee's new Department of Art in 1957.<sup>1</sup> Around that time he began showing work in Nashville, Knoxville, and in New York City.<sup>2</sup> At the inaugural 1966 Central South Art Exhibition, Stevens was awarded the top \$1000 Parthenon Purchase Award for *Windows II*, a definitive example of his Expressionist styled work. A few years earlier, Stevens eloquently reflected,

*We often are wonderfully aware that we are actually a meaningful part of that which we view, and that it in turn is an integral part of us. The moment of 'becoming' is magnificent, no matter how brief, for we are strangely assured that our lives are immeasurably enriched even though this enrichment is intangible.<sup>3</sup>*



On Sunday, May 1, 1966, *The Nashville Tennessean* featured a photo spread of Central South winners including this image of Stevens's *Windows II*.

<sup>1</sup>Walter Hollis (Holly) Stevens." askart.com, Accessed August 11, 2021. [https://www.askart.com/artist/Walter\\_Hollis\\_Holly\\_Stevens/131070/Walter\\_Hollis\\_Holly\\_Stevens.aspx](https://www.askart.com/artist/Walter_Hollis_Holly_Stevens/131070/Walter_Hollis_Holly_Stevens.aspx).

<sup>2</sup>LeQuire, Louise. "Fourth Annual Festival May 8-15 at Parthenon." *Nashville Banner*, April 8, 1960, p.27.

<sup>3</sup>Franklin, Corinne. "Knoxville artists featured among February opening." *Nashville Banner*, January 27, 1961, p. 16.



Evelyn Lee-Sissom (1934-)

*Pine Grove*

Oil on canvas

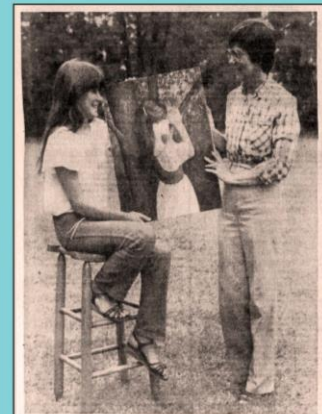
c. 1978

78.I.03

In 1978 Evelyn Lee-Sissom of Cookeville, Tennessee was awarded first place at Central South for her painting *Tools of the Trade*.<sup>1</sup> That same year, this striking landscape by her was added to the Parthenon's permanent collection.<sup>2</sup>

A prolific painter with work in national level exhibitions, Lee-Sissom enjoyed scenes of Middle Tennessee. She told a journalist in 1981,

*I have been painting the Upper Cumberland region for about 15 years, since moving back from Atlanta and Houston. I have a great appreciation for the 'uniqueness' of this area. The struggle of the people who once lived here is evident, and its rounded hills and deep hollows are unsurpassed in beauty.*<sup>3</sup>



Artist Evelyn Lee-Sissom, right, has a one-man show opening today at the Parthenon. Cindy Besson, left, was the model for the painting, *I2 Going on 20*, in Mrs. Lee-Sissom's series of seven paintings titled *Tennessee's Children*.

*The Tennessean*, Wednesday, May 6, 1981.

<sup>1</sup>Hieronimus, Clara. "Rural scene captures Central South prize." *The Tennessean*, May 7, 1978, P.89.

<sup>2</sup>78.I.03. Accession file, The Parthenon Museum.

<sup>3</sup>Hieronimus, Clara. "Italian Street Fair Buzzes with Activity." *The Tennessean*, September 6, 1981, P.83.

Elizabeth Sanford (1954-)

*Alcazar*

Watercolor

1980

81.11.03

Nashville native Elizabeth Sanford has been a respected artist and educator for over 30 years. With artwork collected by universities including Emory, Johns Hopkins, and Vanderbilt, Sanford's medium of choice is watercolor.<sup>1</sup> Early in her career, she entered *Alcazar* in the 1981 Central South Art Exhibition. While the piece was apparently unawarded, it was purchased for the Parthenon's permanent collection.<sup>2</sup>

During that time, Sanford offered this insight to her creative process,

*In all my work there is a constant interplay between careful control and a more passive role. I direct up to a point, then watch what develops as the materials interact. . . Many interpretations are possible, a painting may have several meanings of equal validity. Each is a visual adventure and I hope it will be seen by the viewer that way.”<sup>3</sup>*



*The Tennessean*, Sunday,  
November 13, 1983.

<sup>1</sup>“About.” Elizabethsanford.com. Accessed August 13, 2021. <https://www.elizabethsanford.com/about/>.

<sup>2</sup>81.11.03. Accession file, The Parthenon Museum.

<sup>3</sup>Hieronimus, Clara. “Two-Man Art Show Encounters the Unknown.” *The Tennessean*, April 29, 1981, P.21.



Michelle Crusier

*Straw Market*

Watercolor

1982

82.2.01

Scant information is available about Michelle Crusier, but her title *Straw Market* could refer to the famous outdoor exchange in the Bahamas. One year after *Straw Market* appeared at Central South, Crusier opened a new show of paintings at the Parthenon.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Metro Parks Schedule Variety of Activities." *The Tennessean*, July 15, 1983, P.45.

Margo Sebelist (1928-2011)

*No Hunting*

Watercolor

c.1977

77.I.04



A native of Germany, Margarete “Margo” Sebelist studied Russian and worked as a Russian-German interpreter in Berlin before emigrating to the United States in 1956.<sup>1</sup> During the 1960s she began studying painting in Philadelphia, and by the time of *No Hunting* she and her family resided near Nashville. An award-winning artist in oil, acrylic, and etching, her favorite medium was watercolor.<sup>2</sup>

*No Hunting* was unawarded at Central South, but work by Sebelist was featured in exhibitions across the south-east with Parthenon shows in 1976, 1977, 1978, and 1982.<sup>3</sup> She said, “To me painting is not just fun, it is hard work. It is a challenge to produce a painting that completely satisfies me.”<sup>4</sup>



Margo Sebelist, Hendersonville artist, holds the silver watercolor she won for Best of Show in Madison Art Festival at Rivergate Mall. Her "Gathering Storm" won first in watercolors and Best of Show.

*The Tennessean*, Thursday, May 5, 1977. Margo Sebelist poses with a loving cup won at an art festival in Madison, Tennessee.

<sup>1</sup>Hieronymus, Clara. "Another New Artist." *The Tennessean*, December 10, 1972, P.86.

<sup>2</sup>Hieronymus, Clara. "Margo Sebelist Show Opens at Parthenon." *The Tennessean*, August 1, 1982, P.71.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Hieronymus, Clara. "Four Art Exhibits Offer Something for Everyone." *The Tennessean*, February 28, 1981, P.29.



Jerry Watson (1936-2014)

*Still Broom*

Acrylic on canvas

c.1980

80.2.03



Jerry Watson was a beloved artist in Paducah, Kentucky<sup>1</sup> who received Central South awards in 1974, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, and 1985.<sup>2</sup>

His painting entitled *A Still Broom Gathers No Dust* was runner up in 1977.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, this playful and deftly executed work was added to the Parthenon's collection.<sup>4</sup>



In 2018, a gallery sale of Watson's work entitled 'For the Love of Jerry' was held at Paducah's Yeiser Art Center. All proceeds from the sale benefited the Yeiser, an arts organization Jerry Watson was a founding member and active supporter of.

Photo by Bruce Leonard/Courtesy of Paducah Sun

<sup>1</sup>Leonard, Bruce. "Yeiser shows love for Jerry Watson." *The Paducah Sun*, February 14, 2018. Accessed August 13, 2021. [https://www.paducahsun.com/news/local/yeiser-shows-love-for-jerry-watson/article\\_79adb3b2-fb95-52fa-ae5b-f033508docie.html](https://www.paducahsun.com/news/local/yeiser-shows-love-for-jerry-watson/article_79adb3b2-fb95-52fa-ae5b-f033508docie.html).

<sup>2</sup>Hieronimus, Clara. "Regional Art on Display in Central South Exhibit." *The Tennessean*, June 2, 1985, P.85.

<sup>3</sup>"Central South Show Up at Parthenon." *The Tennessean*, May 8, 1977, P.90.

<sup>4</sup>80.2.03. Accession file, The Parthenon Museum.

Sharon Yavis (1938-2011)

*Morning*

Acrylic on canvas

c.1975

75.1

An acclaimed local artist from near Montgomery, Alabama, Sharon Yavis is known for bold colorful paintings that are at once primitive and modern. Her signature use of cross hatching lines across the surface lends a gentle optical vibration to the work. In 1975, a group of three jurors awarded *Morning* first prize at the tenth annual Central South Exhibition.<sup>1</sup>



Staff colorphoto by Frank Emson. The three-man panel of jurors for the Central South Exhibition at the Parthenon walked, stooped, and squatted to view the 843 works of art entered in this 10th annual competition at the Parthenon. From left, the jurors are Karl Voster, Ft. Lauderdale; John D. Kehoe, University of Georgia at Athens; and Verne K. Shelton, University of Western Kentucky at Bowling Green. The show opens at the Parthenon Sunday.

*The Tennessean*, Friday, April 25, 1975.

<sup>1</sup>Hieronimus, Clara. "Exhibit Features 200 Works." *The Tennessean*, April 25, 1975, P.51.



Alvin Beyer (1947-)

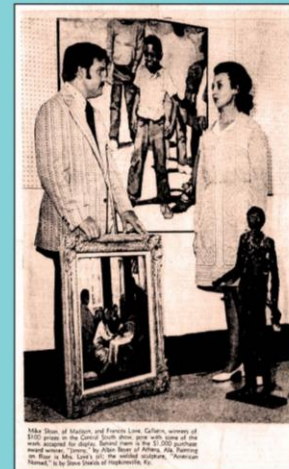
*Jimmy*

Oil on canvas

c.1972

72.I.01

Alvin Beyer studied art at Columbia University, and earned his Master of Fine Arts at the University of Arizona.<sup>1</sup> In early 1972 he was in his first teaching position at Athens State College in Alabama when he entered *Jimmy* in Nashville's Central South exhibition. The portrait of an African American youngster was awarded first place in late April 1972.<sup>2</sup> With professed influences from Dutch Baroque to Jackson Pollock, Beyer relocated to Aiken, South Carolina in 1981 where he painted and taught studio classes for over thirty years at the University of South Carolina, Aiken.<sup>3</sup>



The Show of Master and Masters from the Gallery, winner of 1972 prize in the Central South exhibition, one of the most important in the history of the art world. It is the only award ever given. "Jimmy," by Alvin Beyer of Athens, Ala., winning the prize in late April 1972, is the central sculpture, "American Dream," by Steve Strain of Indianapolis, Ind.

*The Tennessean*, April 30, 1972. Although Alvin Beyer is not pictured here, his top prize winner *Jimmy* is seen on the wall of the Parthenon's old lower level gallery.



Alvin Beyer in 2018 upon his retirement from teaching. photo courtesy of *Aiken Standard*

<sup>1</sup>Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art. "Al Beyer: Landscapes." Accessed August 11, 2021. Al Beyer: Landscapes | Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art (ghia.org).

<sup>2</sup>Hieronymus, Clara. "Sunday in the Park." *The Tennessean*, April 30, 1972, p.61.

<sup>3</sup>Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art. "Al Beyer: Landscapes." Accessed August 11, 2021. Al Beyer: Landscapes | Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art (ghia.org).



### An Impressive Variety:

This was the comment of Miss Diane Waldman, assistant to the director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York when she came to the Parthenon last

—Staff photo by J. T. Phillips  
week to jury the first Central South Art Exhibition sponsored by the Tennessee Art League and the Parthenon. Assisting her is Art League president, Anton Weiss. Her selections will go on display in May.

George Dombek (1944-)

*Two Barn Window*

Watercolor

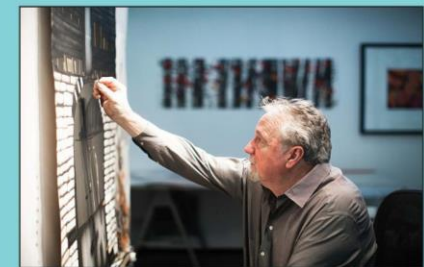
c.1983

83.I.02

George Dombek became fascinated by rural structures while studying art and architecture at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. From the 1970s on he traveled the southeast looking for buildings –especially tobacco barns– in which he could render the unique light and geometry found there.<sup>1</sup> *Two Barn Window* is prime example of Dombek's twentieth century work in terms of subject, medium, and style.

Today, Dombek's structural watercolors have appeared in more than 800 collections and in over 100 exhibitions internationally.<sup>2</sup>

When asked why he painted the same subject over and over, Dombek replied, "Isn't this what most artists do? You don't tell someone you love them once. You tell them time and time again."<sup>2</sup>



George Dombek in 2015

Photo courtesy of *Arkansas Life*

<sup>1</sup> The University of Arkansas Press. "George Dombek: Barns and Portrait Paintings." Accessed August 12, 2021. <https://www.uapress.com/product/barns-and-portrait-paintings/>.

<sup>2</sup> Radmin, J. "A Barn in Every County." *Arkansas Living*, September 23, 2018. Accessed August 12, 2021. <https://arkansalivingmagazine.com/article/a-barn-in-every-county/>.

Mitchell Bryant  
*Horizon Series 2 –Study 10*  
Oil on canvas

1973

74.I.OI

Information about 1974 Parthenon Purchase Award winner Mitchell Bryant is scarce but we do know he was once a resident of Cadiz, Kentucky. The title of his Minimalist styled painting, *Horizon Series 2 –Study 10* suggests it was once among several related pieces. That fact, and the stark simplicity of Bryant's work may have attracted juror George Zoretich. In a Nashville interview of the time, Zoretich encouraged artists to:

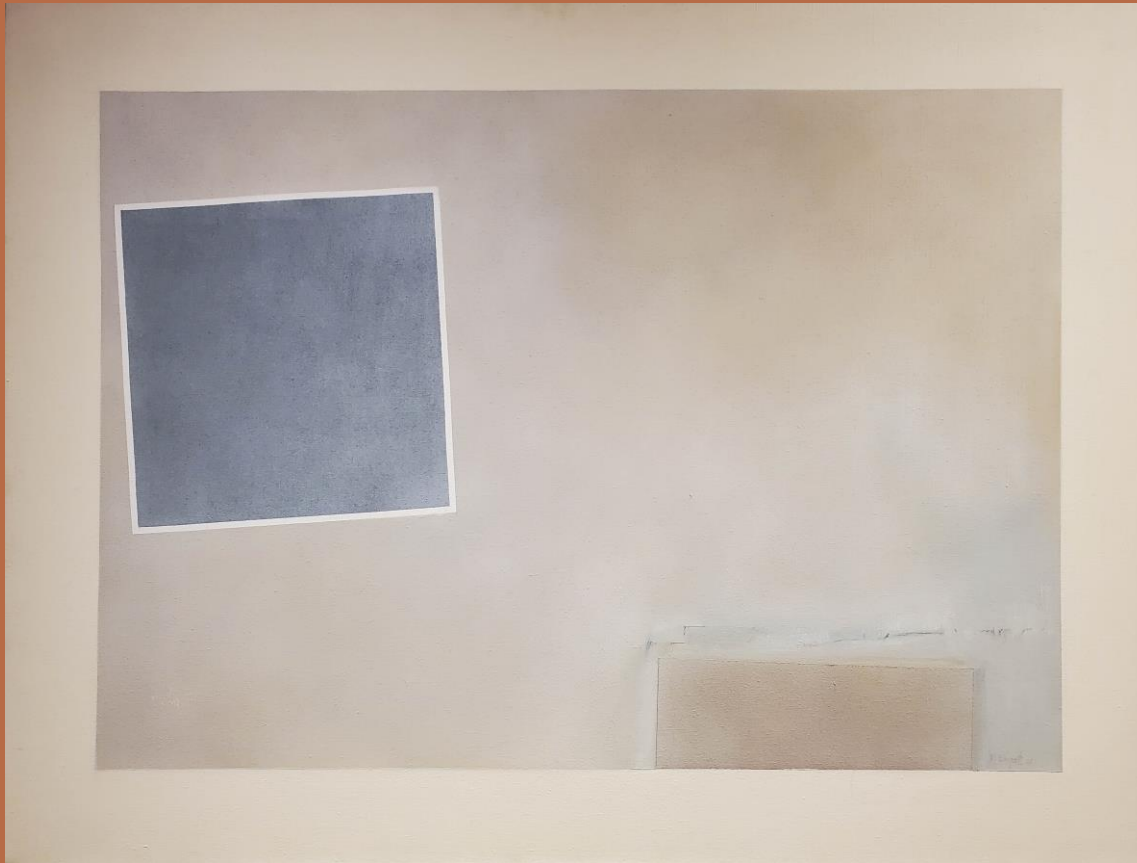
*Paint the ordinary thing; invent from it; translate from that over-and-over again. Have whole group of things: 15, 20, or 30 works. Spread them around the room –you can be your own jury. You can decide where you are going.<sup>1</sup>*



JUROR: George Zoretich, professor of art at Pennsylvania State University, served as juror of selection and awards for the Central South Exhibition opening today at the Parthenon.

*The Tennessean*, Sunday, April 28, 1974.

<sup>1</sup>Hieronymus, Clara. "Central South Exhibition Winners Are Named." *The Tennessean*, April 28, 1974. P.73.



Lassie McDonald Crowder (1941-)

*Pond Willows*

1983

Oil on canvas

83.1.02



Lassie McDonald Crowder is a Murfreesboro artist who was awarded first place at the Central South Art Exhibition in 1988 and 1995.<sup>1</sup> In 1998 she received Central South's new Mary Hawkins Edwards Memorial Award for best traditional painting.<sup>2</sup> Known for her detailed landscapes, she described a bit of her creative process and art philosophy in 1982:

*The next best thing to painting is walking in the country seeing good things to paint. I take along a camera and make slides. . . a slide serves mainly as a good color reminder when held up to daylight. . . More claptrap is written by and about artists than anyone except, possibly, movie directors, so I won't add much to it."<sup>3</sup>*

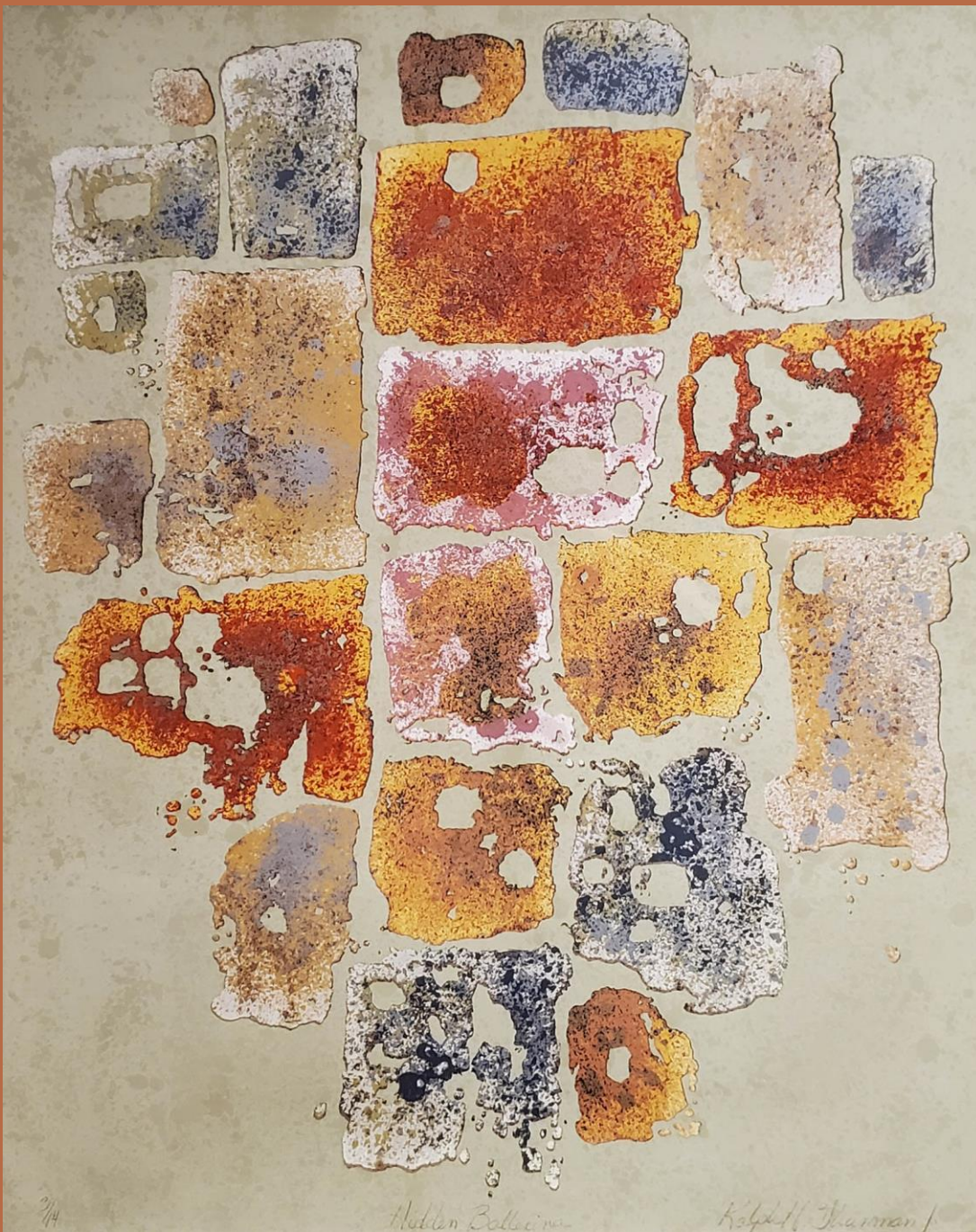


*The Morning Press*, Tuesday, July 13, 1982.

<sup>1</sup> "Native's artwork spotlighted in exhibit." *The Daily News-Journal*, November 9, 1995, P.21.

<sup>2</sup> Bostick, Alan. "Central South Art Exhibition displays Diversity." *The Tennessean*, June 7, 1998, P.146.

<sup>3</sup> Adkerson, Michelle D. "Artist paints countryside of native Middle Tennessee." *The Morning Press*, July 13, 1982, P.6.



Ralph Thurman (1947-)  
*Hidden Ballerina* (#3/14)  
Serigraph  
c.1979  
79.I.05

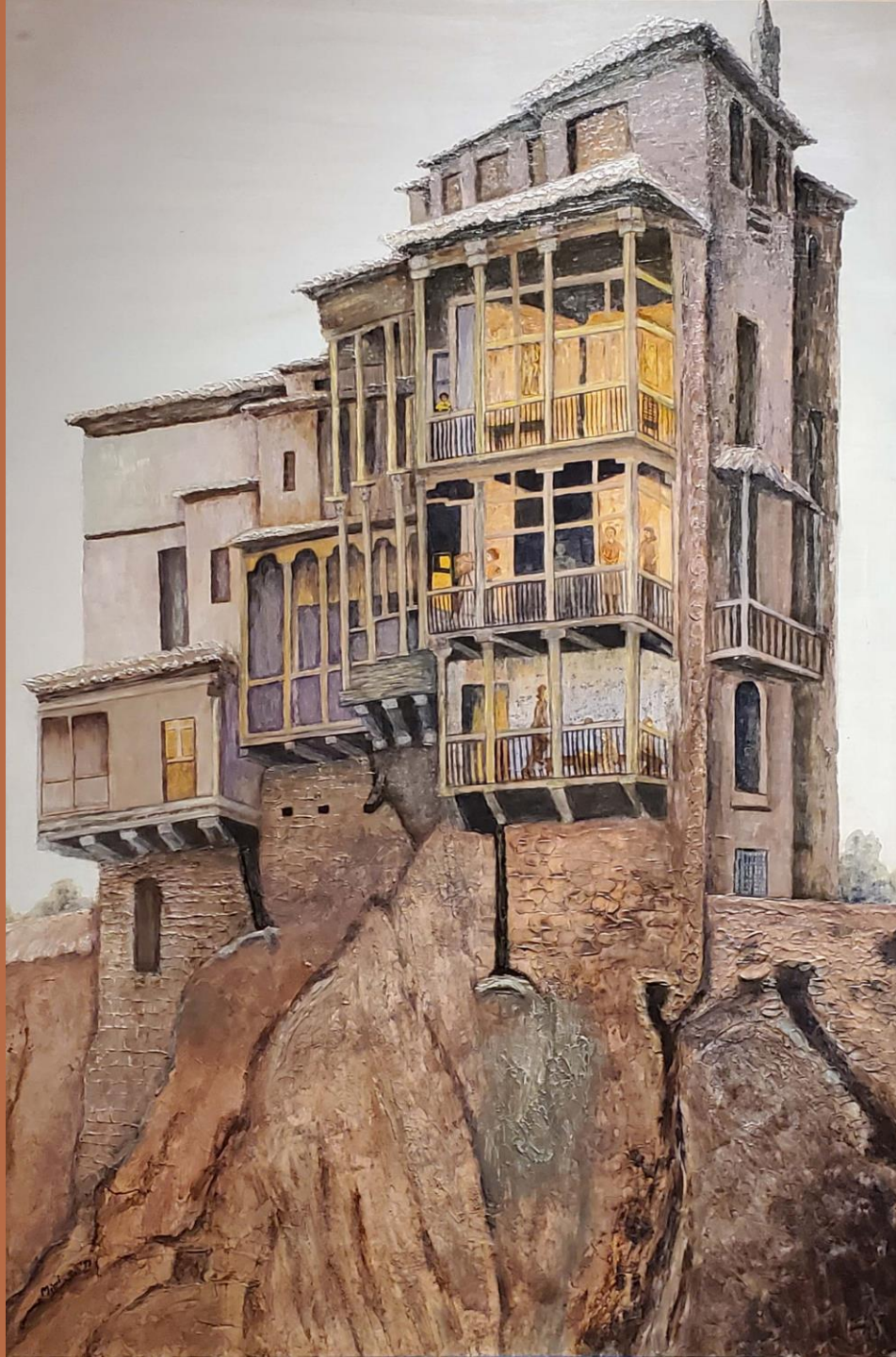
Ralph Thurman's serigraph print, *Hidden Ballerina* was an award winner at the 14th annual Central South Exhibition.<sup>1</sup> Serigraphy is a fine art term synonymous with silkscreen printing. The colorful organic pattern of this print (Number 3 of 14 in total) was created by pushing ink through a fabric screen onto the paper. Each individual color required a separate screen.

Ralph Thurman was a Professor of Art at Nashville's David Lipscomb College and later, Lipscomb University.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hieronimus, Clara. "Many Watercolors Featured in Central South Exhibit." *The Tennessean*, May 7, 1979, P.21.

<sup>2</sup>Bryant, Linda. "New art gallery set to open in summer." *The Tennessean*, May 5, 2003, P.60.





Mimi Bickley (1899-1974)

*Artist Colony*

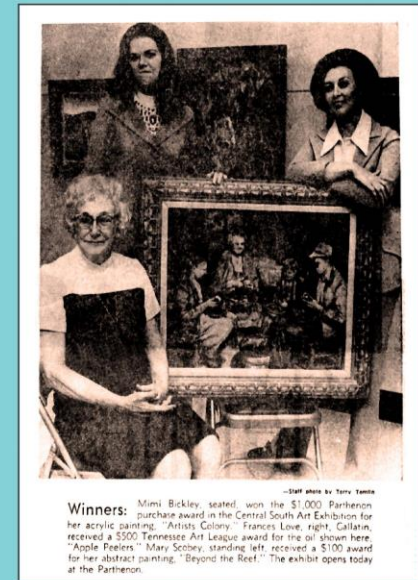
Acrylic on canvas

1973

73.1.01

A Nashville art instructor and administrator, Vallie “Mimi” Bickley was a woman of considerable talent and imagination, as seen in *Artist Colony*.<sup>1</sup> Her fantastic architectural vision was selected as the eighth Parthenon Purchase Award winner in April 1973.<sup>2</sup>

Following Bickley’s death in November 1974, the Parthenon held a memorial exhibition of her paintings, collages, and batiks.<sup>3</sup>



—Staff photo by Tony Tantis

**Winners:** Mimi Bickley, seated, won the \$1,000 Parthenon purchase award in the Central South Art Exhibition for her acrylic painting, “Artist Colony.” Frances Love, right, Gallatin, received a \$500 Tennessee Art League award for the oil shown here, “Apple Peelers.” Mary Scobey, standing left, received a \$100 award for her abstract painting, “Beyond the Reef.” The exhibit opens today at the Parthenon.

*The Tennessean*, Sunday, April 29, 1973.

<sup>1</sup>“Pen Women Begin Conference Today.” *The Tennessean*, January 31, 1974, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>Hieronymus, Clara. “The Central South’s Art.” *The Nashville Tennessean*, May 13, 1973, P.87.

<sup>3</sup>“What to see in the Nashville Area.” *The Tennessean*, December 15, 1974, p. 110.

Anton Weiss (1936-)

*City III*

Acrylic on canvas

c.1970

70.3.01



Born to Austrian parents, Anton Weiss grew up in Yugoslavia during World War II, enduring German and, later Russian, occupation of the country. At the age of 13, he and his mother escaped from a Russian concentration camp, reunited with his father, and emigrated to the United States. Here they were harbored by a family in Springfield, Tennessee.<sup>1</sup>

Determined to be an artist, Weiss found his way to Nashville and began attending Watkins Institute, the forerunner of Belmont University's Watkins College of Art. Upon discovering Abstract Expressionism, he relocated to New York in 1956 to study with seminal painter Hans Hoffman.<sup>2</sup>

In 1960 Anton Weiss returned triumphantly to Nashville where he became an early President of the Tennessee Art League, the Tennessee Watercolor Society, and was instrumental in establishing the Central South Art Exhibition at the Parthenon. After winning first place for *City III* at the fifth Central South in May 1970, Weiss never stopped working as an active and prolific Nashville artist. In 2009, *Nashville Arts* magazine declared him "a local icon."<sup>3</sup>



Central South Honors: Nashville Anton Weiss, left, won the \$1,000 Parthenon Purchase prize for his polymer painting, "City III," in the 1970 Central South exhibition. David Ikeda, also of Nashville, was winner of a special mention for a watercolor, "End of Summer." Winners were announced last night; the month-long exhibit opens today at the Parthenon.

*The Nashville Tennessean*, May 3, 1970. Anton Weiss (right) holds *City III* as he stands with fellow winner David Ikeda. Ikeda was a locally prominent Japanese American businessman and watercolor artist.

<sup>1</sup>Bennett Galleries Nashville. "Anton Weiss." Accessed August 11, 2021. <https://www.bennettgalleriesnashville.com/anton-weiss>.

<sup>2</sup>*Nashville Arts* "Anton Weiss Freedom of Expression.", Accessed August 11, 2021. <https://nashvillearts.com/2009/09/anton-weiss-freedom-of-expression/>.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



William M. Halsey (1915–1999)

*Table on Red*

Oil on canvas

c. 1967

67.I.01

Once described as “a pioneer of abstract painting in the South,” William Halsey was a celebrated artist and educator in his native Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>1</sup> During a career stretching from the 1940s through the 1990s, Halsey’s work was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1964, he was the first individual to teach a studio art course at the College of Charleston, and upon his retirement from there in 1984, the college art gallery was renamed the Halsey Institute in his honor.<sup>2</sup> *Table on Red* received the top Parthenon Purchase Award at the 1967 Central South Art Exhibition.



*The Nashville Tennessean*, Sunday, April 30, 1967.

<sup>1</sup>Hardaway, Connelly. “William Halsey and Otto Neumann works now on display at The George Gallery.” *Charleston City Paper*, July 3, 2018. Accessed August 11, 2021. <https://www.charlestoncitypaper.com/story/william-halsey-and-otto-neumann-works-now-on-display-at-the-george-gallery>.

<sup>2</sup>Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art at the College of Charleston. “Overview.” Accessed August 11, 2021. <https://halsey.cofc.edu/about/halsey-is/>.

<sup>3</sup>Hieronymus, Clara. “Central South Exhibit Lively, Contemporary.” *The Nashville Tennessean*, May 7, 1961, p. 37.



Staff colorphotos by  
Terry Tomlin

Dr. John LaGatta, juror of selection and awards for the Central South Art exhibition at the Parthenon, called his task "a bewildering one." There were 650 entries, from which he selected 200 paintings, graphics and sculptures for inclusion in the month-long show.

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