

100 Dallas Creatives: No. 74 Original Talent Celia Eberle

By Lauren Smart



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Mixmaster presents "100 Creatives," in which we feature cultural entrepreneurs of Dallas in random order. Know an artistic mind who deserves a little bit of blog love? Email lauren.smart@dallasobserver.com with the who's and whys.

Celia Eberle's work as an artist knows no restrictions. A lifetime Texas resident, Eberle considers herself a product of the "pine curtain," a reference to growing up in Longview. For the past 25 years, she's shown her work in and around Dallas, building an oeuvre that's imaginative, surreal and occasionally creepy. Many times, one of her mixed media sculptures has sent an unconscious tingle down my spine.

It's not often that a brilliant talent like Eberle's flourishes in Dallas waters, which tend to ebb and flow when it comes to financial and artistic support. But Eberle docked herself in this mid-country art outpost -- or actually just outside it, in a little town named Ennis -- where she's seen the tide go out and come back in. We're lucky she stuck around, because it's lifetime artists like Eberle who buoy up the city's reputation and keep the local scene lively.

If you remember it, what was your first encounter with art?

It was probably in Monterrey, Mexico. We traveled there a lot on vacations when I was a child, and we would visit upscale shops that sold modern furnishings and art. My parents were in love with Mexican modernist architecture and design.

Have you lived your whole life as an artist or was there a first/alternate career?

I started thinking that I was an artist when I was about 6. When I completed my BFA, I went to work as a graphic artist for a commercial printing company. In those years, only the typesetting was done on the computer. Most of what I did was called paste-up, but I also learned to airbrush for illustration and photo retouching, and draw mechanical illustrations. Most of the work was for large East Texas industries. I did a lot of logo design using typefaces, and I learned that visual information should be as simple and direct as possible to be effective.

What is your creative process? i.e. where do your ideas come from and how do you execute them?

My theory is that the basic nature of the human experience is essentially unchanged since we became aware enough to try to make sense of things and to write explanatory myths. For this reason, we are always attracted to certain timeless imagery and ideas. I try to tap into this vast reservoir of meaning that we have created, in an effort to understand why we can't truly evolve. Why must our lizard brain always guide us?

Did you make your name in Texas? And how'd you do it?

I've lived in Texas all my life, and I have been showing my work "professionally" for over 25 years. I don't think about whether or not I have a name. I don't think that's a productive way to think about it. I want to touch you through the work, to make you think, or feel, or at least laugh. I am constantly striving to make something that's better than the last thing I made. Perversely, it's the lizard brain desire for objects that keeps me making things.

You technically live outside of Dallas, does that put some distance between you and the arts scene? If you were taking the scene's temperature, what's your read?

I used to feel very isolated, until I moved closer to Dallas. I have always felt

that Texas cities have very different art scenes -- that what works in one place doesn't always translate well in another. I would say Dallas is hot and might be getting hotter. This was true in the '80s as well, so I temper my enthusiasm, but we do seem to have a much stronger base than ever before. The cities, the state and nation as a whole have serious issues that need to be addressed, and we all know it. So we should keep our thinking caps on and the party hats put away.

Who are the artists in Dallas you admire? Outside of Dallas?

I think Texas artists try harder. I admire all my friends who are striving to do the best they can do every day. The real heroes are people like Karen Weiner, Carolyn Sortor, Heyd Fontenot and Darryl Ratcliff, whose efforts make the community so much stronger. Outside of Dallas, I immediately think of Bill Davenport and Francesca Fuchs. Francesca has a truly radical approach to painting. As an artist and critic, Bill has one of the most penetrating minds in the art world.

You're in Dallas for an opening reception for your work at Cris Worley Gallery or elsewhere, do you stick around and treat yourself to a glass of wine or a dinner? Where do you go?

I think one sign of a world-class city is good food. There are lots of good places at all price levels in Dallas. It's great that the area on Singleton Boulevard is so convenient to the Design District. I've been to several places there, and I haven't been disappointed. I go early, though. It's hard to find a spot later.