

INSIDE: COFFEE GOES UPTOWN...8 MINING THE ARTS AND EATS TREASURES OF LONGVIEW...10



See!

From Dark into Light—  
The Unseen Treasures of  
The Citadelle Vault

## The Citadelle in Canadian

A landmark church-turned-mansion-turned-museum sows the seeds of public art Text by **MARY O. PARKER**

**W**HEN A LOCAL RANCHER told me that hidden within an historic, oak-lined Canadian neighborhood awaited a 1910 structure with dozens of sculptures, a collection of art and rare antiques, and formal gardens, I thought he was pulling my leg. I'd come to this small town in the Panhandle to view its famous lesser prairie-chickens, not art. But upon discovering that The Citadelle Art Foundation provides sanctuary to several works by 18th-Century

European artists, as well as works by such well-known American painters as Robert Reid, Peter Hurd, and Norman Rockwell, I knew I'd stumbled onto something special.

Purchasing Norman Rockwell's *First Day of School* in 1972 set Therese and Malouf Abraham on the path to becoming art collectors. Today, the painting graces the walls of the red-brick, Colonial-style building that originally housed the First Baptist Church of Canadian. Therese, mayor of Canadian from 1982 to 1992, and

her husband, Malouf, a retired physician, purchased the 8,000-square-foot landmark in 1977, and during the next nine months, transformed it into their home. They dubbed it "The Citadelle" to pay homage to their love of French culture.

Over the years, they made other renovations and purchased nine adjoining properties. In 2007,

A pair of bronzes, *Universal Man and Woman* by Dean Howell, faces two salvaged marble caryatids in The Citadelle's exhibition gallery.



the Abrahams announced another transformation: They were donating the entire complex, along with millions of dollars in artworks and a new exhibition wing, for a public art museum that would encompass almost a full city block.

Deciding the prairie-chickens can wait, I pay a visit to check out the exhibits, collections, and gardens. First up, in a viewing area just inside the visitor's center: a lively HGTV video from 2006 that reveals how the Abrahams converted the church's nave into their living room and the overall care they took in transforming the building into their home. (They lived here until November 2008.)

Next, I pick up a TourMate (a listening device loaded with narration that correlates to various points on the tour) at the front desk. Today's docents include the foundation's director, Wendie Cook; when I ask if she'll accompany me, she agrees. As we head toward the main building (sometimes called the Mansion), she tells me, "We encourage questions here. We want people to learn about the art."

This approach correlates with what Gaye Greever McElwain, formerly with the Texas Commission on the Arts,

later tells me about Malouf Abraham, who was appointed an Arts Commissioner in 1995: "He believes in increasing access to the arts for everyone."

Cook prompts me to listen to my TourMate occasionally so that I don't miss some of the entertaining tales narrated personally by the Abrahams. The stories prove not only fascinating, but often funny, too. One of my favorites revolves around the 1930s John Broadwood & Sons piano in the living room. Malouf's practically breathless voice tells how the Smithsonian has three such pianos, but none in working condition: "The Citadelle's piano not only plays beautifully, but is, at seven feet, nine inches long, larger than even the Queen's at Buckingham Palace!"

A painting by Rockwell's idol, J.C. Leyendecker, who actually generated more *Saturday Evening Post* covers than

Rockwell, mesmerizes me. I find the glamorous shimmer of *Couple Descending Staircase* perplexing, and Cook takes a moment to teach me about Leyendecker's skill at illusion, which involved omitting white and certain colors and hinting at shapes.

My docent next puts me before *Louise Brooks Reclining*, co-created by William J. Potter, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Marsden Hartley. The seductive painting ranks high with viewers, many of whom enjoy searching for the spot where O'Keeffe's palette knife left its imprint.

The Citadelle's diverse mix even includes a piece of prow that came from a boat in southern India, adding both warmth and abstraction to the fireplace mantel overlooking the living room. However, the largest concentration of art is on the third floor. There, I discover *Silk Crewel Work on Satin*, early-1900s handiwork from Malouf's Lebanese family, and a watercolor by Malouf titled *Smoke Rising*, a portrait of a woman against a smoky background.

Downstairs, a red-walled room off of the former nave beckons. Just inside, we turn and peer out toward the living room, which affords a view of an inscription over the Mansion's front doors: "It is not always

An inscription over the entrance to The Citadelle's main building—the Abrahams' former home—reads, "The truth is mighty and it shall prevail."



## Art on Fire

*Crayon sculptures highlight destructive nature of wildfires*

### A STRIKING, OUTDOOR ART INSTALLATION

at the National Ranching Heritage Center in Lubbock called *Unwanted Visitor: Portrait of Wildfire* seeks to raise the public's awareness of wildfire.

Using crayons as his medium, Tennessee sculptor Herb Williams has constructed multiple freestanding, three-dimensional sculptures—some of them eight feet tall—in NRHC's Proctor Park. Each sculpture represents a wildfire. "Because the sculptures are made of wax, they're melting and changing shape in the unpredictable outdoor conditions," says Emily Arellano, NRHC manager of education. "And they will continue to be altered by blowing wind and dry conditions, like those that affect the intensity and duration of real wildfires."

The exhibit, which runs through February, includes corresponding programs about the causes of wildfire and its effect on the environment. Call 806/742-0498; [www.nrhc.ttu.edu](http://www.nrhc.ttu.edu).

—Nola McKey



TOP PHOTO: MICHAEL AMADOR; LEFT PHOTO: ASHTON THORNHILL, COURTESY NATIONAL RANCHING HERITAGE CENTER



1993 \* 20th Anniversary \* 2012

# MARDI GRAS

SOUTHEAST TEXAS



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"Longneck Roads"  
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Featured Accordion Master  
"The Joel Martin Project" "Geno Delafosse French Rockin' Boogie"  
in concert Thursday, February 16th



Featured Entertainer  
"Geno Delafosse French Rockin' Boogie"  
in concert Friday, February 17th



Featured Texas Music Artist  
"Kevin Fowler"  
in concert Friday, February 17th



Featured Zydeco Artist  
"Leroy Thomas & the Zydeco Roadrunners"  
in concert Saturday, February 18th



Featured Texas Music Artist  
"Stoney Larue"  
in concert Saturday, February 18th



Featured Zydeco Artist  
"Wayne Toups and Zydecojazz"  
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granted to the sower to see the harvest." In the other direction, large windows frame the courtyard-style Four Seasons Garden, one of four *jardines à la française* designed by Malouf. Mossy bricks, overgrown with ivy, wall in the garden. Dappled light and a gurgling fountain give this space—guarded by four English lead sculptures (cherubic nods to each season)—an intimate appeal.

The Pavilion Garden, where Corinthian columns support a crested roof, reflects Malouf's time at NYC's Institute for the Study of Classical Architecture. Next, we head to the Hathoot Garden, a favorite for weddings and concerts. Inspiration for its central sunken meadow came from Malouf's studies at France's Château de La Napoule. Then, we venture into the Sculpture Garden, dominated by *Coming of Winter: The Forerunner* by William Pochial. The large bronze—a graceful figure, somewhat off-balance and shielding his eyes—portrays the artist's concern with environmental balance in the modern world.

The Foundation opened its doors in June 2009 by highlighting J.C. Leyendecker's contribution to American art. Since then, shows have included a Mary Cassatt exhibition and the Smithsonian's *In Focus: National Geographic Greatest Portraits* (with Canadian the only Texas stop). During my visit, there is an exhibit featuring the work of safari wildlife artist Craig Bone, a native of Rhodesia who infuses his wildlife with breathtaking vitality. One of the works on display—*Evening Chase*—depicts cheetahs so lifelike that they appear to bound off the canvas.

We return to the visitor's center, where the gift shop beckons with its own *objets d'art*, and as I browse, I smile, thinking that this impulsive sojourn has revealed a cache of unexpected treasures. **TH**

### The Citadelle Art Foundation

is at 520 E. Nelson Ave., in Canadian.  
For details, call 806/323-8899; [www.thecitadelle.org](http://www.thecitadelle.org).



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