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## Dallas/Fort Worth: In the Art of Texas

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The tortilla soup brought me back to the heart of Texas.

Before that, a trek through museums had taken me around the world. Gazing at a colorful, ancient figurine of a horse at the Crow Collection, I was suddenly somewhere in 8th-century China. Next door at the Dallas Museum of Art, a spectacular display of Yoruba masks transported me to an East African village. Finally, the Henry Moore, Alexander Calder and other sculptures in the grandly landscaped garden of the Nasher Sculpture Center made me feel as if I were in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Then came a late afternoon lunch in the Nasher's sun-splattered cafeteria: a gigantic bowl of spicy broth, with avocados and crunchy tortillas. Sure, you can get tortilla soup in restaurants everywhere from Boston to Mexico City, but only in one place I know do they dish out a version this tasty.

Yeah, y'all, this was Dallas.

But oh, what a far cry from the backdrop of TV's J.R.-vs.-Sue Ellen tiffs and the center of everything supersized, from stretch limos to surgically enhanced body parts. "If you come looking for big hair or Stetson hats, you're in for a letdown," said Martha Tiller, a public relations specialist and former social secretary to Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson. "My Lord, that is so old millennium."

In more recent years, the neighboring cities of Dallas and Fort Worth have turned themselves into a sprawling showcase of first-rate paintings, sculptures and architecture. Both Southwestern urban areas boast art "theme parks" spread over dozens of acres; between the two cities, there are seven museums that aficionados rank among the best in the United States, and at least a dozen other worthy repositories of paintings and sculpture.

Fort Worth grabbed the lead in the transformation of this corner of northeast Texas into a major arts destination two years ago with the opening of its boldly designed Modern Art Museum. This spectacular display of post-1940s works by international artists is the anchor of a trio of art buildings clustered on the edge of the city. Next door is the Kimbell Art Museum, featuring European art up to the early 20th century and works from Asia and other regions. Next to that is the Amon Carter Museum, one of the best places in the country to view the works of Frederic Remington and other artists of the American West.

Not willing to take this cultural comeuppance easily from the dusty cow town 33 miles down the Tom Landry Highway, Dallas a year ago opened the Nasher, an alluring space designed by famed architect Renzo Piano (creator of Paris's Pompidou Centre, among other high-profile arts venues). The building, which stretches the length of a city block, houses one of the world's largest private collections of sculptures. It's the latest addition to a multi-structure downtown Dallas museum scene.

The Dallas Museum of Art, a few steps away, has an impressive array of works by impressionists and other European painters, as well as one of the most extensive collections of African art in the United States. The Trammell & Margaret Crow Collection, the only museum specializing in Asian art and artifacts in the Southwest, is just down the street. Fair Park, the site of Texas's 1936 centennial celebration, has one of the largest concentrations of art deco exposition buildings in the world.

Although they have begun crafting cooperative arts tours, officials from the two cities have a hard time masking the traditional Dallas-Fort Worth rivalry. Historically, Dallas has been considered the faster-paced and more urbane place, a modern commercial and business center. Fort Worth, a 40-minute drive away, thinks of itself as an overgrown family-friendly town with a distinctly western outlook.

"Dallas has heaps to offer," said Doug Harmon, the cowboy-boot-wearing president of the Fort Worth Convention and Visitors Bureau. "But, of course, folks can come to Fort Worth and get all the culture they want without worrying about the problems of big urban areas."

Naturally, the Dallas camp's view was different. "Anybody interested in art would be foolish not to visit both places," said Phillip Jones, Harmon's counterpart in Dallas. "If they're looking for the whole arts package, though, including first-class hotels and fine dining, they could hardly do better than Dallas."

Art fans can reap the fruits of the competition. With so many venues featuring such a variety of visual arts, a visitor could easily take in the best of both cities -- starting out surrounded by impressionist paintings in Dallas, ending with postmodernists in Fort Worth and taking in a marvelously preserved collection of Asian masterpieces in between. I devoted the first day and a half of a long weekend exploring the Dallas scene, then hopped a commuter train to Fort Worth for a day-long tour of its art venues.

Dallas is a city of 1.2 million residents an easy 2 1/2-hour plane ride from Washington. The stylish entertainment and lodging scene make a suitable base for an arts getaway. Hotel ZaZa, the Mediterranean-themed boutique property where I based myself, is a work of art all its own. The hallways are covered with

photographs of film stars, and my Texas-size bedroom was fashioned in the over-the-top style of Gianni Versace.

My first outing was a swing through Fair Park to see the facades of the art deco buildings. The site of the state fairground, it's a vast setting of 233 acres, 10 minutes from downtown by car. Scattered about it are 25 buildings constructed in the high European building style between the world wars. Architecture fans could spend a whole day going gaga over the bounty here. For this novice, there were three standouts. The front of the Hall of State is covered with a bas relief depicting six marching soldiers. The Magnolia Lounge, designed by architect William Lescaze, has a solid volumetric massing supplanted by floating planes and adorned by slender metal piers. The Women's Museum, with its stucco exterior, features a sculpture of a woman rising out of cactus -- classic deco.

Later, at the Crow Collection, I found one of the most extensive, well-preserved assortments of Asian art and artifacts I have seen outside of Washington's Freer Gallery. There were breathtaking works from across Asia: intricately painted scrolls and screens from Japan; carved Buddhas and other religious sculptures from India; and a spectacular display of jade objects, including hairpins, carved animals, bowls and jewelry from China.

The gallery is best known for its China collection, and a couple of the dozens of pieces in this section dazzled me. One was a wonderfully preserved collection of jade vases from the Qing dynasty. The other was "Caparisoned Horse," a brightly colored glazed figurine dating to the 8th century in the Tang dynasty, meant to be used by the departed in the afterlife.

Across the street at the Nasher, I lost myself in sculptures. This private collection of local real estate developer Raymond Nasher is home to some captivating pieces. Among them: Matisse's breathtaking "Large Seated Nude," David Smith's "The Forest" and three busts Alberto Giacometti did of his brother, Diego. But for me, the most stirring piece in the two-acre garden was "Bronze Crowd," a work of 36 bronze headless figures by Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz. As I gazed at it, a guide pointed out Nasher, the 82-year-old founder of the gallery.

"Howdy," he drawled as I approached. "How can I help you?" And for the next 20 minutes he ambled along with me, explaining how he and his late wife had started collecting sculptures to display in their Dallas home. They eventually met and befriended many of the artists who produced them, including Henry Moore, Abakanowicz and Mark di Suvero.

"We never bought anything just to collect it," he said. "We only took home works that we loved."

In this city with more star-studded restaurants than New Orleans, meals provided a welcome break between museum visits. My favorite dinner began with lobster

shooters, a more tasty takeoff on oyster shooters, and continued with wood-grilled shrimp. The setting was Abacus, one of Dallas's most-beloved eating spots. For after-dinner cocktails, I tromped off to Nikita, a bar with the kind of buzz I would have expected to find in New York's SoHo. The walls were covered with nesting dolls and other Russian paraphernalia, and the bartenders served every possible brand of vodka mixed with every imaginable mixer.

In Fort Worth, I headed straight from the train station to a public bus for the 10-minute ride to the Modern Art Museum. With a 40-foot-high glass facade surrounded by a 1 1/2 -acre pond, the Modern is a place that Japanese architect Tadao Ando visualized as a swan floating on water. Although I couldn't quite grasp that image as I looked over the exterior, its sheer beauty left me awed. The bounty inside -- Andy Warhols, Jackson Pollocks and other works from the mid-20th century to the present -- is even more impressive.

Many of these paintings and sculptures are oversized, and the stark, spacious rooms provide the kind of space they need to breathe. It's hard to imagine "Vortex," the 233-ton rust-colored sculpture by American artist Richard Serra that occupies a prominent space in front of the museum, at home anywhere else.

As I walked between rooms, the art almost begged me to pick a favorite. With so much to see, that was not easy. Robert Motherwell's "Elegy to the Spanish Republic"? Warhol's self-portrait? They would awe the most jaded viewer. But Martin Puryear's "Ladder for Booker T. Washington," a sculpture depicting a ladder disappearing toward the ceiling of a narrow, boxy room, was one piece I would make a trip back here to see.

After 2 1/2 hours of viewing Motherwells, Anselm Kiefers and other bold works, I felt drained. But it seemed a shame to come all this way without looking next door in the Kimbell. One step inside and I was glad I'd made the effort.

I started with an exhibition devoted to works depicting Venice by British painter J.M.W. Turner, then browsed rococo drawings by French 18th-century artist Francois Boucher. Both shows were finely curated, offering a glimpse of Old World masters that was in perfect counterpoint to the bare, contemporary feel of the Modern.

*Gary Lee will be online Monday at 2 p.m. to discuss this story during the Travel section's regular weekly chat on [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).*