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Intimate Modernism: Fort Worth Circle Artists in the 1940s. By Scott Grant Barker and Jane Myers. College Station: Texas A&M University

Press, and Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 2008. 205 pp. Photographs, color and black-and-white plates, bibliography. $39.95.

This stunning catalogue investigates the adventurous accomplishments of a too-little-known group that became known as the Fort Worth Circle. These artists shunned the typical Texas "bluebonnet school" styles of late impressionism and landscapes. Instead, they looked to European modernism for form—and inward for subject matter. The two essays—by cultural historian Scott Grant Barker and Jane Myers, Amon Carter Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings—are wonderfully paired. Barker offers a thoroughly researched account of the origins and exhibition history of these forward-thinking artists, rich with anecdote and archival research. His expertise in the Circle is perhaps unparalleled. Myers delves into the players' artistic accomplishments, providing salient formal analysis and more tales.

She identifies five thematic categories that dictate the plates' arrangement. The first, "Regionalism and Beyond," follows the Circle's shift away from the regionalism that characterized Texas in the 1930s. As artist Bror Utter put it, "We thought regionalism was old hat." "The Energy of Escape: Art, Theater and Dance" focuses on the vital influence of drama and music on the group. (Dickson and Flora Reeder founded a school of theater and design for children in 1945.) "Modern Portraits" includes thirteen striking portraits, the standouts of which are Dickson Reeder's evocative image of artist Bill Bomar (wisely used as the catalogue's cover) and his Giorgio de Chirico-esque portrayal of artist Sara Shannon. The paintings in "Reasonable Unreality" (a 1944 critic's term) include the most adventuresome themes and styles, especially the mystical *Aquarist* and *Collector* by Kelly Fearing, Veronica Helfensteller's dark, often moralizing, animalia scenes, and Bror Utter's elegant surrealistic gouaches of forms that seem to be offspring of geometric creatures and modernist furniture. It is a divine section. Palpable influences on these artists are Surrealism, with the strong flavor of Joan Miró, Amadeo Modigliani, and Paul Klee. Yet the works are seldom purely derivative.

The catalogue and exhibition (which closed in 2008) make a colorful treasure trove. Yet the catalogue's most alluring images are in black and white: "Considering the time and place," Myers maintains, "the Circle's printmaking was nothing short of revolutionary." Three Circle members transported their insights from Stanley William Hayter's Paris studio to late-night stints in Fort Worth at Helfensteller's studio. They worked in intaglio, bypassing a trend toward lithography at the time, creating small editions from zinc plates, using aquatint and sometimes chiffon for texture. The Circle's printmaking endeavors were previously addressed in 1992, but Jane Myers treats them here with a sage hand.

Two absences in the catalogue, however, are worth noting. First, the authors refer to the "liberated" lifestyle of the Circle, but at least a few were homosexual. Second, it would be edifying to see the Circle's works contextualized more within the specter of World War II. But these are minor points: a wide audience should read *Intimate Modernism*. Barker and Myers make it clear that this vibrant community still has much to offer.

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