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## Review of *Painting Texas History to 1900* By Sam DeShong Ratcliffe

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*Painting Texas History to 1900.* By Sam DeShong Ratcliffe. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993. Introduction, conclusion, notes, selected bibliography, index, photographs, illustrations. xlviii + 192 pp. \$29.95.

In 1900, a hurricane destroyed much of Galveston, ending the island city's significance as an international cotton port, and in 1901, the oil deposit that became famous as "Spindletop" was discovered in a southeast Texas salt dome, signalling a new economy for twentieth-century Texas. These two events mark the transition of Texas from an agricultural state to one rich in oil and an urban commerce generated by oil. For Ratcliffe, head of special collections at the Hamon Art Library of Southern Methodist University, these events also coincide with the demise of historical narrative painting and the rise of film and of avant-garde art forms concerned with such modern phenomena as urbanization, industrialization, and alienation.

Because Ratcliffe is interested in depictions of Texas before Texas became a "media-made mental map," he studies historical narrative paintings about the region produced both in and out of the area from the undetermined time of Indian rock paintings through the year 1900. The fifty color plates and seventy-six black-and-white figures included in Ratcliffe's study portray the hunting and gathering of Indians, the ranching, farming, and surveying of European immigrants, and the major military events of the Texas Revolution of 1836.

One of the most interesting facets of the relationship between Texas history and the painting of it illuminated by Ratcliffe is that not until the 1880s, fifty years after the Texan defeat at the Alamo and Sam Houston's subsequent victory over Santa Anna at San Jacinto, did painters make the 1836 war a concern. This delayed interest resulted from the lack of demand for cultural artifacts among the small number of educated and affluent people within Texas at the time and, outside of Texas, the stigma of slavery associated with the state. But by the 1880s, Anglo Texans had

begun to react against the humiliations of both the Civil War and Reconstruction. The Texan victory over Mexico in 1836 and the period of the Texas Republic became symbols by which Anglo Texans could recreate and celebrate themselves as members of a proud, independent society.

In discussing paintings about the Texas Revolution, Ratcliffe is at his most analytic. Generally, his text is more descriptive than analytic, reading much like an exhibit guide on a museum wall. Still, the work is interesting and informative, and it provides a basis for more comprehensive and critical studies of the relation between a particular period of Texas history and its art.

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