



EL RANCHO
CREATIVES
2023 TASA CONFERENCE

TASA Annual Conference 2023 in
Kingsville, TX,
October 19-21, 2023
in partnership with Texas A&M
Kingsville

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF ART

TASA ENVISION

KEY SPEAKERS FROM THE 2023 TASA CONFERENCE



Paul Hanna Speaker

Prince Varughese Thomas

The Spectacle Unveiled: Exploring the Intersection of Art, Politics, and Social Media



Keynote Speaker

Claudia Zapata in Conversation with Jesus De La Rosa:

A Rasquache Guide to the Art World



Excellence in the Field Speakers

HER.MOSA Collective: Alexandria Canchola, Monica Lugo, and Samantha Rawls

Unlocking the Power of Collaboration: A Case Study of Transformative Murals

Drawing Water/ Printing Solar

Carol Flueckiger

By Linda Fawcett

Flueckiger's inspiring presentation began with slides of her current work that focuses on cyanotypes, a photo-process that can use the sun to cause a light-sensitive bluish emulsion to stick to paper, in conjunction with objects and/or contact negatives to variously block the light, and water to wash away the emulsion from unexposed areas. Bicycle shapes are her image link, but she says her work these days is mostly about the weather, and how it intersects with non-art venues focused on environmental concerns. Flueckiger showed examples of other eco-artists, such as Anna Macleod based in Ireland, whose projects explore the connections between landscape, science and technology, culture and geopolitics. Collaboration is the key, with artists, scientists, cultural geographers, activists, engineers and local historians. (<http://www.annamacleod.com/>) Flueckiger also spoke of American eco-artist Xaria Forman, who makes beautifully rendered, photo-real drawings to convey the urgency of climate change (<https://oceanic.global/zaria-forman/>). Forman travels all over the world, often as the resident artist on a scientific expedition. Also mentioned were projects by Solar Punk and Red Cloud Renewable. Regarding her own work, Flueckiger explained her new interpretation of negative space. Instead of being only a design element, negative space could correspond with the air/atmosphere that surrounds us and the sun as source of light and nourishment. Made crystal clear by climate change and population increases

in the Llano Estacado and Ogallala aquifer region (humans out of balance with their surroundings), renewable energy and water conservation practices have become important subjects for regional eco-artists.

Texas Tech now has a sustainability minor, and the Art Dept. has created a new course: Art Environment Sustainability, that teaches art and non-art majors first and foremost to become hyper-aware of one's natural surroundings, followed by how artworks and art-actions can work to highlight and help preserve natural resources. Flueckiger has taken her art students on field trips to learn about the restoration of the playa lakes and wetlands and conversion of monoculture to the growth of native grasses to recharge the dwindling aquifer. A side benefit of returning land to its natural state are

the sounds, sights and smells of wildlife. In contrast, monoculture only produces silence.

As a workshop exercise, Flueckiger handed out paper negatives of native plants and asked everyone to draw on them with a continuous line to emulate the connection between everything in nature – playa, grasslands, the aquifer, etc. Meanwhile she asked everyone, one by one, to say “Who their partner was” and how it feeds their art. Responses were heart-felt and varied and collectively revealed the importance of recognizing connections between life and art.



Chat GPT: AI in Art (panel discussion)

Robert Peña, Dr. Ayush Goyal, Dr. Brian Robinson, Pindar Van Arman, Emmanuel Sanchez & representative(s)

By Todd Lucas

The session organized and lead by Robert Pena was chalked full of information about AI and what to look for on the horizon. The panel drew from a diverse group of individuals with varying backgrounds. Pena and Sanchez are both adjunct instructors for Texas A&M University Kingsville (TAMUK). Pena teaches sculpture, ceramics, and digital arts. Sanchez teaches painting and drawing and is a high school teacher by day for the Premont ISD. Goyal is an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at TAMUK.

Robinson is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at TAMUK. Van Arman is an artist based out of Washington DC who known for his work with AI and robotics to paintings.

The session was full of discussion among the panelists. Presented were several different and similar opinions on a wide variety of topics. Some of the topics were: How do you define Art Intent vs. Tool; Ethical implications- AI is trained with predominately white images, AI is developed through racial tension, Should the artist be compensated for training AI with their images; Can AI be used as the artist spark to get over artist block; Will AI become art; Will AI be looked at as a new style or as a tool to change styles; should artist be in the Blockchain and Crypto Art; Will the economics surpass the ethics of using AI to create Art.

In the end this was a session that could go on for hours as the panel explore and push ideas back and forth, sometimes all in agreement and other times not agreeing but standing on different sides of a similar idea or question. Overall, the panel provided a thought-provoking and informative discussion on the intersection of AI and art. It shed light on both the potential and ethical implications of incorporating AI.



A Rasquache Guide to the Art World

Claudia Zapata in Conversation with Jesus de la Rosa

By Dr. Kristy Masten

In this keynote address for the TASA Conference, artist Jesus de la Rosa engaged Dr. Claudia Zapata in a question-and-answer presentation where they explored a “Rasquache Guide to the Art World.” Defining a ‘rasquache’ approach as where one learns to navigate and survive in the world by working in alternate ways and using what you have, Dr Zapatista offered advice for students pursuing the arts as undergraduates and graduate students as well as how to engage with arts in rural settings. Doing research on programs and careers, thinking long-term, and being willing to learn all aspects of museum management (not

only the highly coveted curatorial roles) were important takeaways for students. In addition, Dr. Zapata highlighted the importance of seeking out art experiences where you are yet also being willing to travel for those once in-a-lifetime museum exhibitions.

Concerning the work of teacher-artists, Dr. Zapata spoke to the significance of helping students and young people navigate their political activism and social justice agendas by asking them difficult and challenging questions such as: Are you okay with an employer seeing this type of political activity online? Where do you want to exhibit your political artwork? Are you okay with getting arrested? Dr. Zapata also addressed the ins and outs for artists to know about the acquisition processes by museums, highlighting the importance of an updated and easy-to-navigate artist website, active participation in solo shows outside your

local area, and building strong relationships with curators. Concerning the current state of museums and Latinx work, Dr. Zapata discussed the changing landscape with more mainstream art museums creating curator positions focused on Latinx collecting and exhibitions, the expansion of digital works within these museum contexts, and significant Texas Latinx artists who have previously been overlooked but who are now enjoying institutional successes. Overall, attendees were engaged by de la Rosa’s insightful questions and Dr. Zapata’s discussion of the state of the arts in Texas, particularly for those institutions, curators, artists, and students working from the rasquache perspective.



Frida and Diego: Take a Lover Who Looks at You Like Maybe You Are Magic

By Rachael M Bower

TASA conference attendees were invited to attend the original theatrical production, *Frida and Diego: Take a Lover Who Looks at You Like Maybe You Are Magic*. The script was created by the faculty and staff in the Department of Art, Communication and Theatre at Texas A & M University Kingsville. An excerpt from the program reads 'When Frida and Diego speak, what you will hear will be their own words, not the words of the playwright. The only original dialogue is that spoken by the narrator.' Script was written by Patrick Flaherty, who also directed the production. Frida was brought to life by Kevinah K. Botello, who served as the research assistant for the script. Gage Roberts took on the role of Diego and the narrator was played by Omar J. Moreno. The room darkened and the actors emerged. The experience of this play was immersive, as the audience and actors were on stage together. The performance transported us through the script, a few costume changes, and two chairs that made up the set. The narrator created segues between scenes and connected moments in the play to the artwork that was printed in the program. The dialogue of Frida and Diego was sourced from their own letters and diary entries. This was powerful and brought primary resources to life in a way I have never experienced before. Details of their lives emerged detailing artistic inspiration, physical pain, emotional trauma, love, loss, and reconciliation. Throughout the production, in times of happiness and



pain, Frida returned to the line 'Take a Lover Who Looks at You Like Maybe You Are Magic.' The actors exited, the lights brightened, and we were transported back to our seats in the Little Theater. Thank you to the students, faculty, and staff that made this special viewing possible.

Additional production members

Costumer + Poster Curator: Cristine Suarez-Machuca
Make-up: Taryn Mosqueda
Photographer: Brian Loflin
Poster Pre-Show Presentation: Liz Kim
Lights: Gage Roberts
Light Operator: Cobi Kovar
Sound Operator: Hardik Patel
Dresser: Kambria Jayde
Special Thanks to: Todd Lucas, Patsy Rios, Cristina Suarez-Machuca

Ceramic Tile Workshop

Fulden Wissinger and Robert Pena

By Anonymous Board Member

At the TASA conference, attendees delved into the world of tile decoration through a lively and interactive workshop featuring the use of underglaze as the artistic medium. Led by the dynamic duo of Texas A&M - Kingsville Faculty, Fulden Wissinger and Robert Pena, participants explored the vibrant potential of underglaze, a color powerhouse that maintains its vivid hues from bottle to tile.

With a plethora of supplies at their fingertips, from small to large tiles and an array of underglaze colors, attendees

had the freedom to unleash their creativity through freehand drawing or take advantage of provided stencils. Pena showed his artistic process to the group via a video system projected onto a large screen, offering a close-up view of the magic in the making.

Meanwhile, Fulden played the roles of artist, coach and DJ, infusing the workshop with rhythmic beats that transformed the studio into a dance-worthy playground. The convergence of art and music created a lively atmosphere where participants could leave their worries at the door and immerse themselves in the joy of creation. The tangible outcomes showcased the collective talent of the art professional and student attend-

ees. This workshop was a memorable and colorful experience on the studio playground.





Arts & Sciences Research Experience for Undergraduates

Gina Palacios with Participating Students

By Dr. Kristy Masten

Gina Palacios's presentation at the TASA conference offered a remarkable exploration of the "Research Experience for Undergraduates at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley." Co-presenting with program mentor, Ivan Davila, and three REU alumni, Gina provided a comprehensive overview of this innovative program that integrates scientific research experiences with the arts. The panel discussion

illuminated the vital importance of collaboration, hands-on learning, field trips, and research presentations to enhance participants' success and growth. Collaborative engagement is an integral aspect of the program in terms of students working with both peers and mentors. Collaboration fosters a sense of community, empowerment, and experimentation as evidenced by the student presentations offered by Cecilia Sierra, Clarissa Sifuentes, and Josue Rubio. The inclusion of hands-on experiences and field trips within the REU brings a dynamic and interactive element to the learning process, making it more engaging and impactful. As one of the

only REU programs across the country to incorporate an arts experience, UTRGV offers a unique and creative experience for a small cohort of art students and supports their inquiry experiences with a \$6000 stipend, which helps to remove economic barriers. Overall, Gina's presentation highlighted the significance and opportunities of an REU program that incorporates arts experiences for both arts students and the science students who participate and provides a model for other college and university REUs with the potential to pursue creative arts inquiry within their scientific research programs.

HER.MOSA Collective: Unlocking the Power of Col- laboration: A Case Study of Transformative Murals

Alexandria Canchola, Monica Lugo, and
Samantha Rawls



By Josh Rose

The 2023 winners of the Excellence in
the Field award, the HER.MOSA collective

presented an enlightening and practical
overview of their collaborative and interac-
tive mural process and oeuvre. Beyond
just public art, the collective's murals
embody their philosophy of sisterhood as
a paramount component to community
and artistry.

Artists Monica Lugo, Sam Rawls, and
Alexandra Canchola have combined their
talents and varying stylistic approaches
to create innovative murals that perfectly
merge Lugo and Canchola's design work

with Rawls' figurative approach. Most
impressive with their presentation was the
combination of their ideological approach
with practical recommendations. The spirit
of fellowship imbues all of their murals
thus far, with multiple elongated abstract
figures engaging with one another. Hearing
how a collective is able to collaborate
both remotely and respectfully was
particularly informative, while they also
reiterated when to know too many projects
are being taken on as a group.

EXCELLENCE *In The Field*



Now and Then: Use of Machine Cut Stencils in Traditional Practice

Jason Bly

By Dan Sorensen

Participants were treated to an exploration of Jason Bly's multidisciplinary approach to his artistic process. Jason demonstrated how he blends traditional oil painting techniques with collage and digital technologies, harnessing the power of Photoshop and vector graphics to create stunning works of art that transcend conventional boundaries.

Jason showed how his students have been using vinyl cut techniques to expand their artistic horizons with a fusion of classical techniques combined with cutting-edge technology that allows them to open new frontiers in their creative endeavors.

Attendees were given the opportunity to roll up their sleeves and experiment with the vinyl cut process, unleashing their own creative potential. Jason's workshop served as an inspiring and transformative experience, providing valuable insights and hands-on artistic experimentation.



Infusing Narrative Design and Creative Storytelling in Senior Design Classrooms

Dr. Jing Zhang

By Jason Bly

Dr. Jing Zhang, Assistant Professor of Graphic Design at Methodist University, led attendees through a slideshow of her research with her students and community-based works. In this session, Dr. Zhang spoke about the role of social practice in graphic illustration and animation. In classroom exercises, her students explore both personally driven stories and global issues through uniquely developed iconography and formal approaches. The workshop began with a question she asks her students with a seemingly abstract design on the screen. “What is this?” Answers varied from a topographical view of glaciers, to plant life, to studies of the human body. None were correct though, as the mark actually came from an elephant’s footprint. Like this warm-up exercise, each viewer translates visual information differently.

Zhang’s studies in Expressive Art Therapy (EAT) encourages emotive works outside of literal meanings to engage in healing, conversation, and discovery. Zhang explains, “I bring in both narrative design methodologies and creative storytelling techniques, to help my students have better deliveries of most aspects of their designs, as well as gain meaningful engagements with their audiences.” She references engaging storytelling found in video games, augmented realities, and product design, all specifically created to bring in viewers as active participants. Zhang introduced several past student works. One project utilized existing stories, such as “Little Red Riding Hood” where the student opted for an animated interpretation that played alongside Radiohead’s “A Wolf at the Door”. Using a paired down colors palette and silhouettes, the result is a highly stylized reinvention of a well-recognized story. In a later project, her students delve into personal stories showing a “Day in the Life”. One example depicted the life of a student: touching keyboards, drawing, working as a barista, all the while only showing the hands while the rest of the

identity of the artist dissolves into the background space. Another student took a humorous approach, showing her combat training through repetition, surprise, and comedic timing. Notable to both was how the form of the work matched the tone, capturing both the story as well as the emotional center of each. Several of the examples promoted “anti-stigma” practice in their themes. One student’s project was a full campaign with animation, sticker designs, game, and printed posters for “Menstrual Equity”, while another student created a comic about Alzheimer’s with “Don’t Forget: The Battle with the Memory Eaters”. Another student detailed struggles with Dyscalculia and the impact it has on learning basic arithmetic. While the majority of student projects were graphic design centered, community outreach is an extension of Dr. Zhang’s research in narrative construction and therapy. Her work with children and murals on site at hospitals and non-profit centers mirrors this sensibility where stories are allowed to thrive while visitors find themselves living within them.



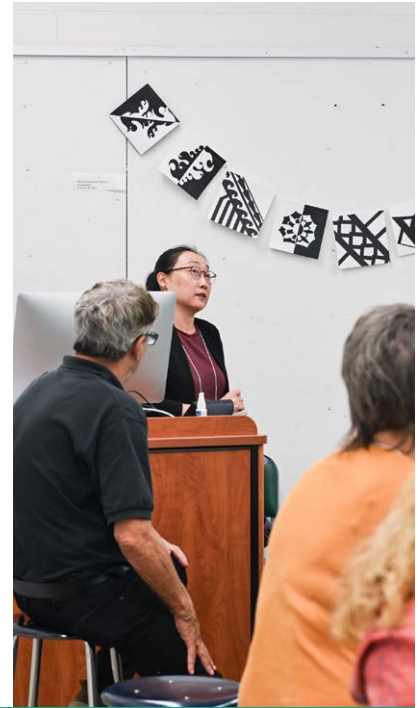
Practical Aspects of Working with Magazines

Presented by Dr. Liz Kim

By Josh Rose

This workshop was a great introduction to getting started and pitching ideas of art criticism and, broadly, art writing to journals, magazines, and online publications such as Glasstire. Dr. Kim pulled from her own expertise in writing criticism and publishing more generally to provide grounded information while encouraging more arts professionals to become engaged in art criticism itself.

We had a much larger group than Dr. Kim anticipated, which led to an engaging and robust discussion of art criticism itself, and the pros and cons of current trends in this practice. This corresponded well with Dr. Kim's focus on the need for more art criticism, especially dedicated to Texas artists and those outside the main hubs of Austin, San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas/Fort Worth. This encouragement was bolstered by the wonderfully practical information and suggestions she provided to the group, including how to best pitch ideas to publishers, how to format pitches and submissions, and how much to expect to be paid.



tccta

Texas Community College Teachers Association

Texas Senate Bills Impacting Higher Education: A Q&A With TCCTA

Presented by Vicki VanNest (Executive Director, TCCTA) and Beaman Floyd, TCCTA Lobbyist

By Josh Rose

VanNest and Floyd, of the Texas Community College Teachers Association (TCCTA) were invited to present via Zoom to answer attendees questions after providing an overview of the recent state bills impacting higher education, most notably SB16 (focusing on Critical Race Theory), SB17 (focusing on DEI), and SB18 (focusing on tenure).

In lieu of our regular session featuring a representative from the THECB, we thought this year it would be helpful to have a Q&A with TCCTA leadership, who were keeping a close eye on these bills as they made their way through the state Senate. In providing updates, Floyd and VanNest noted that SB16 did not pass; SB18 did pass, and they encouraged faculty at institutions with tenure to ask about this new language as it focuses on a summary dismissal framework; and, finally, SB17 did pass but with major revisions to the language and scope. SB17 stopped being focused on faculty and instead now focuses on administration, forcing a dismantling of DEI offices at higher education institutions. What was stressed

regarding SB17 is that it explicitly exempts DEI efforts as they relate to course content, course work, research, publication of research, performances, student organizations, and student recruitment. One question asked about these distinctions with SB17 was with faculty syllabi: Floyd noted that this was a grey area, since if the DEI relates to course content (learning objectives, course calendars, assignments, etc.) it was exempt, but could not include a university-derived DEI policy or statement. Ultimately, VanNest and Floyd emphasized that faculty must “be bold” and assert our academic freedom to avoid any chilling effects that might stem from SB17 and administration concerns about it.



The Value of a Steamroller

Omar Gonzalez



Written by Rachael Bower

Walking the halls of the art building at TAMUK campus, one is greeted by a wall of massive MDF blocks from past Steamroller Print events outside of the Printmaking lab. Omar Gonzalez led a studio lecture titled 'Value of a Steamroller,' detailing his experiences with this type of printmaking as a student (his first experience in print was carving the large block with his fellow printmakers), and how it is a vital part of his teaching now as an educator. Gonzalez's lecture detailed several values of hosting a steamroller print event with students:

1. Group Dynamics
2. Public Event
3. Traditional Art Using Nontraditional Means
4. Celebration
5. Educating the Community

We learned that the key to successful large-format print with steamrolling is collaborative creation, project management, and having fun! Defining everyone's role keeps the project on task and is a team effort from start to finish. This is a public event, and an opportunity to engage members of the public with printmaking. There is a performative aspect to the steamrolling that keeps people returning to see what comes hot off the block next. It is also rewarding and exciting for the printmakers to see their own work come off the blocks for the first

time with their community! He noted 'it's not practical, it's spectacle.' The Steamroller event has been a part of the Ranch Hand Festival in Kingsville, which is coming up again on Nov 18, 2023.

A few strategies were shared so that we may also learn from the collective knowledge: Seal your blocks with poly after carving, and use a very loose ink reduced with oil. Utilizing runners on either side of the block will help control the pressure during printing.

Omar concluded his breakout session by sharing a large collection of steamroller prints that left everyone inspired.

Follow Omar @OGPrints

PAUL HANNA

Award Speaker

The Spectacle Unveiled

Prince Varughese Thomas



by Jason Bly

Prince Varughese Thomas, Professor of Art at Lamar University, detailed various intersections between art, politics, and social media in his lecture, “The Spectacle Unveiled”. Thomas’ work in photography, digital media, and installation “deconstructs complex sociopolitical issues from the interstices in personally expressive ways that humanize his subjects”. Though having lived the majority of his life in the United States, the notion of ‘the Other’, surfaced during his teenage years in the U.S. and acted as a reminder that immigrant population is villainized during times when the U.S. is involved in various operations abroad. Echoing this sentiment is the shift in language between an American Citizen to an American Consumer. His work “Social Media is the Opiate of the Masses” features a neon sign in familiar colors and font, calls back to a phrase by Karl Marx, “religion is the opiate of the masses”. Thomas continues, noting a weaponization of social media, far surpassing the intended use of connecting old friends and relatives. Thomas’ work questions the various uses of social media, which has become a center for misinformation, narcissism, and consumer culture. He begins a conversation through Guy DeBord’s 1967

writing, “Society of the Spectacle” as background. Like DeBord, Thomas states that authentic, lived experiences has been traded for virtual exchanges built to merely mirror real connections. Instead of using technology for a greater purpose, various corporations have designed ‘wants’ that have become ‘needs’. This is due to a human need to find comfort within the in-crowd, rather than the other. Simply put, we consume according to how we wish to be perceived. In his series, “Masters of the Universe”, Thomas creates images of YouTube Content Creators, depicted through the imagined handling of Baroque old masters. While valid content exists, there is also a mass audience to consume others’ daily lives, which are carefully curated for the audience. More than a real person, the YouTube Creator becomes a brand. Similarly, political policy has been replaced with branding a persona. Thomas’ series, “What are Words” confronts this through recontextualizing phrases, sound-bites, and slogans into sleek charcoal drawings that reference William Morris wall paper designs. At times, the words are easily read while other times, they disappear into the patterns. Intersecting timelines and contracting elements run through Thomas’ work. His image, “Feminism in the Age of Belfies” contrasts an image of Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pitman Hughes (1971), made from hundreds of small images of



‘butt selfies’ found through social media, forming a sort of dot-matrix. His series “Trophy Shelf”, replaces the gold with 2.0 Black Paint, creating near-flat silhouettes, even in direct light. His video, “America the Beautiful” overlaps the familiar song with interruptions from voices sourced from reprehensible online commentary. Lastly, Thomas points to the art world itself, that in recent Museum shows have replaced the quiet introspection with attractions that mimic theme parks. Thomas’ questions the original intention of the artist and if they had ever saw their work as a mere backdrop for selfies, and if the work is viewed as an authentic experience or not. Thomas, like DeBord 50 years ago, questions the future. In a search for Truth, rests an interest in pulling back the curtain to the Alternative Facts being produced and consumed. “I have no answers for you, but my interests, like my art, lay in the questions.”

TASA Board Members 2023 - 2024



Todd Lucas
President
Texas A&M, Kingsville
Art, Communication, and
Theatre Arts
Todd.lucas@tamuk.edu



Josh Rose
Board Member
Dallas College: Brookhaven Campus
School of Creative Arts, Entertainment,
and Design
joshuarose@dcccd.edu



Felice House
Board Member
Texas A&M University Dept. of
Visualization
felicehouse@tamu.edu
www.felicehouse.com



Linda Fawcett
Executive Assistant/Registrar
Linda Fawcett
txschoolsofart@gmail.com
www.lindafawcett.com



Jason Bly
Board Member
Midwestern State University
The Juanita and Ralph Harvey
School of Visual Arts
Jason.bly@msutexas.edu



Dan Sorensen
Board Member
Odessa College
Department of Visual and
Performing Arts
Dsorensen@odessa.edu



Nancy Miller
Board Member/Webmaster
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi
Dept. of Art & Design
nancy.miller@tamucc.edu



Isadora Stowe
Board Member
El Paso Community College
Valle Verde Campus
Art Dept.
istowe@epcc.edu



Rachel Bower
Board Member
Northwest Vista College
Fine Arts Dept.
rbower3@alamo.edu



Nancy Hart
Board Member
University of Texas Permian Basin
Department of the Arts/ Art Program
hart_n@utpb.edu



Clara Hoag
Board Member
Houston Community College
Stafford Campus
Fine Arts Dept.
clara.hoag@hccs.edu



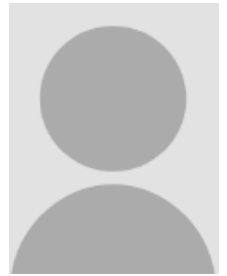
Gina Palacios
Board Member
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley
School of Art and Design
gina.palacios@utrgv.edu



Kristy Masten
Board Member
University of Texas at San Antonio
School of Art
kristy.masten@utsa.edu



Yousif Del Valle
Board Member
Austin Community College
Highland Campus
Department of Art
yousif.delvalle@austincc.edu



Brian Row
Staff Member: Historian
Texas State University - Retired
brianrow@anvilcom.com



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