

# DEEP POCKETS IN *Texas*

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**HOW PHILANTHROPISTS AND MAVERICK DEVELOPERS  
HAVE BOOTED DALLAS AND FORT WORTH INTO  
THE CULTURAL STRATOSPHERE. BY SUSAN SKELLY**

**T**here's a herd of happy blue elephants swaggering by the old Brake & Clutch Warehouse at 3601 Main Street in the Dallas enclave of Deep Ellum. True, the day began with a pale ale at BrainDead Brewing up the road, but this is no delusion. *Deep Ellumphants* was the first cab off the rank in what would become known as the 42 Murals Project.

Local realtor Scott Rohrman started buying up properties in the neighbourhood in 2012, closing out at 50. Keen to drive more traffic to the 'hood, he invited Texan artists to paint the walls of his buildings. About 250 applied, 42 were selected for the first round; some well-known, others not at all.

Artist Adrian Torres is in the former camp. He is Spanish not Texan, but just happened to be in Dallas at the time and agreed to paint pachyderms. His majestic creatures would headline an urban gallery depicting musicians, sportsmen, abstracts and animals.

Rohrman is a proprietorial tour guide, greeting just about everyone by name and pointing out a vibrant mural, *Cosmic Journey*, by the project's curator, Lesli Marshall, along with others by Jorge Gutierrez, Dan Colcer, Rebecca Butler, Sarah Reyes, and Daniel Driensky whose mural *The Devil and Robert Johnson* nods to Deep Ellum's past as a blues music hub in the 1920s and '30s.

"Vacant buildings attract negative things," says the entrepreneurial landlord. "Eyes on the street keep things safe. I didn't want to change the Deep Ellum ethos, but I wanted

the art to signal 'edgy and eclectic' not 'dangerous and dirty'."

With the murals has come a boom in music venues, bars, nightclubs, and cool restaurants like Revolver Taco Lounge and Pecan Lodge. There are bike shops and homewares, vintage clothes, records and toys, artisan cheeses and pizzas as large as coffee tables.

Hard hats and witches hats point to Deep Ellum's continuing evolution. The city's first hostel has recently opened and a mixed-use tower complex, dubbed the Epic, is due to open in 2019, as is the boutique Pittman Hotel.

"It's about letting a community live the way it wants to live," says Rohrman. "Not about just trying to make money. I'd like to think that in 20 years' time, these murals and their successors will tell us something about these times."

## **Wandering down Inspiration Alley**

Fifty kilometres away, 32-year-old twin sisters Jessica Miller Worman and Susan Miller Gruppi have spent US\$60 million (AUD\$79 million) buying properties in Fort Worth, in particular in The Foundry District where murals have turned the streets into another urban gallery.

Their company, M2G Ventures, is known for makeovers of outdated or forgotten buildings. Says Worman, "We use public art in all of our projects, which gives each of them a unique personality and perspective."

Inspiration Alley, on Weisenberger Street, east of Carroll Street, resonates with artworks from the likes of Whereon, Drigo, Girls in Tarrant, Nathan Madrid and Katie Murray.





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This rehabilitated industrial development – part of Fort Worth's West Side in the Cultural District and near to the Museum District – is promising restaurants, retailers, offices for creatives, and alternative event venues.

## The pride of lions

There's no pride of place as fierce as a Texan's, and while all eyes are on disruptor realtors, philanthropists remain the movers and shakers. There are 50-odd billionaires in Texas, with 23 of them spread between Dallas and Fort Worth.

**Opening image:** Mega Zee mural by Sanah Brown, part of 42 Murals.

**Clockwise from above:** Deep Ellumphants; Sundance Square Plaza; Conjoined by Roxy Paine at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

Phillip Jones, President and CEO of the Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau, says: "Pretty much every building in our arts district is a result of philanthropic donations in the billions of dollars. The Nasher Sculpture Center, Winspear Opera House, Wylly Theatre, Crow Collection of Asian Art, Dallas Museum of Art.

"Then you can add in the Santiago Calatrava bridges – we have two now; the Klyde Warren Park, named after benefactor Kelcy Warren's son; and the Perot Museum of Nature and Science. We have the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum opening in 2019, and US\$60 million (AUD\$79 million) was raised privately for that."

In Texas, everything from galleries to garden beds, performance spaces to parklands bear the names of benefactors. Most of the institutions' annual operating budgets are raised via donations. Dallas's 27 ha Arboretum and Botanical Garden, which has a pecan tree planted in 1787, a US\$12 million (AUD\$15.8 million) herb garden and tasting centre, lakeside bike trails and more than 500,000 bulbs blooming in spring, needs US\$24 million (AUD\$31.65 million) a year. A major project like the Children's Playground, an upfront \$65 million (AUD\$84 million). But it's not just about money. Hundreds of locals volunteer to work there.

The wall of donors in the Dallas Museum of Art numbers close to 300. The museum has 22,000 works spanning 5000 years, among them Jackson Pollock and Mondrian. Its history is rich with bequests and gifts, with single donations ranging from US\$11 million to US\$20 million (AUD\$14.5 to AUD\$26 million).

The Nasher Sculpture Center, opened in 2003, was founded by businessman Raymond Nasher, one of the first developers to include art in commercial and retail buildings. With his wife, Patsy, Nasher collected pieces by minimalist and pop artists such as Donald Judd, Andy Warhol, Claes



Oldenburg and Roy Lichtenstein, as well as older masterpieces by Giacometti, Rodin and Picasso. He contributed US\$70 million (AUD\$92 million) towards the museum and sculpture garden that would house much of it, designed by Renzo Piano and landscape architect Peter Walker.

The Winspear Opera House, by Foster + Partners, was made possible in part by a US\$42 million (AUD\$55 million) gift from Margot and Bill Winspear. In 2008, the five children of Ross and Margot Perot announced a US\$50 million (AUD\$66 million) gift in honour of their parents for the Perot Museum of Nature and Science. There were several more multimillion-dollar donations ahead of its opening in 2012.

## Taming the Wild West

Fort Worth's Amon Carter was by all accounts quite a dude, a self-fashioned cowboy whose wealth came through media, oil and aviation. He admired the grit and determination of the Texan people and loved the depictions of pioneer spirit and Wild West by artists such as Frederic Remington and Charles M. Russell, amassing 590 of their works.

The provision in his will for the establishment of what would become Fort Worth's Philip Johnson-designed Amon Carter Museum of American Art was largely to house the collection and let people "experience what it took me years to acquire".

The building opened in 1961; it cost US\$1.5 million (AUD\$1.98 million) to build, small change compared to Wal-Mart heiress Alice Walton's gift of US\$20 million (AUD\$26 million) in 2017.



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Carter's daughter Ruth Carter Stevenson flagged her intention to pursue a more international reputation with the purchase in 1962 of work by British sculptor Henry Moore, and evolving the collection to include paintings by Stuart Davis, Thomas Eakins, Thomas Cole, John Singer Sargent and an archive of photography that now includes 50,782 exhibition prints and 129,013 negatives.

The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth opened in 2002 in a building designed by Japanese architect Tadao Ando, complete with a huge pond. The museum is 95 per cent privately funded.

A local foundation was formed to buy the land it sits on and a campaign launched to fund it. An endowment was set up by philanthropists for acquisitions. The collection includes paintings by Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Anselm Kiefer, Robert Motherwell and Francis Bacon. There are three exhibitions of emerging artists each year. The extraordinary human sculptures of Australian artist Ron Mueck were on show when we visited.

## The Bass ensemble

Crucial to Fort Worth's cultural evolution has been the Bass family. Perry R. Bass made his money in oil and inherited a small fortune from his oil tycoon uncle, Sid Richardson. His and Nancy-Lee's four children Sid, Edward, Robert and

Lee inherited their civic pride and the ability to make money grow. Last year, ExxonMobil bought 111,288 ha of the booming Permian Basin oil fields from the Bass family for US\$6.6 billion (AUD\$8.71 billion).

"If it wasn't for Ed Bass," says one local, "we'd still be stuck in the 1970s."

The elegant David Schwarz-designed Nancy Lee & Perry R. Bass Performance Hall – with its neo-classical interior and Art Deco exterior – houses the local symphony, opera, and ballet companies. Each has its own fundraising program.

With Nancy Lee, Perry Bass donated art to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth where the collection includes paintings by Van Gogh, Picasso, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Henri Matisse, Miró, Léger, Chagall and Rothko as well as sculptures by Rodin, Maillol and Segal.

Lee Bass's wife Ramona is the driving force behind the 26 ha Fort Worth Zoo, which was privatised in 1991. It has an operating budget of about US\$30 million (AUD\$39 million) a year.

The Basses are the largest donors and Ramona Bass is spearheading fundraising for the current US\$100 million (AUD\$131 million) four-phase expansion (the *African Savanna* exhibit opened on April 19). Her husband contributed the first US\$30 million (AUD\$39 million), in honor of her 30 years of service to the organisation. Ramona is also a hard-working volunteer and ambassador, who has even been known to help research and write animal graphics.

## The Sundance grid

It's not just cultural institutions that benefit from grand financial gestures. Sundance Square is one of the city's biggest civic projects and again the Bass family was key in getting it off the ground when it was just a concept in the 1970s.



**Clockwise from above:** View of the facade, looking south, Renzo Piano Pavilion, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas; Interior of the Bass Performance Hall.



Today it is the heartbeat of Downtown, encompassing 44 buildings in 35 blocks, and bringing restaurants, retail and nightlife to the area. The icing on the cake is the Sundance Square Plaza, which opened in 2013, its centrepiece a balletic fountain and the Chisholm Trail mural by Richard Haas, which pays homage to 19th century cattle drives.

## From horses to hoops

Under construction and due to open in November 2019 is Dickies Arena, a 14,000-seat stadium that will be home to the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo and host concerts, family shows and sporting events. Already locked in are national gymnastics championships and basketball rounds.

The project is a partnership between the City of Fort Worth and Event Facilities Fort Worth (EFFW), a not-for-profit organisation.

As of April 2018, the budget had been recalibrated to US\$540 million (AUD\$712 million, with the city's contribution capped at US\$225 million (AUD\$296 million) and the rest raised through sponsorships, public-private partnerships, naming rights, and gifts. Ed Bass, chairman of both the umbrella EFFW and the management company Trail Drive Management Corporation, has once again dug deep. The arena will be gifted back to the city upon completion.

As president and CEO of the Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau Phillip Jones says, "That's how things are done ... you have an idea, go out and raise the money. These generous individuals can hire the best architects – Philip Johnson,

Renzo Piano, Norman Foster, Rem Koolhaas, Santiago Calatrava – to build the most beautiful buildings, museums and structures in the country.

"It's very important to give back. Most of those donating millions of dollars made their fortunes here and are truly proud of that." •

*Photography by Susan Skelly and various establishments.*

## TRAVEL FACTS

### GETTING THERE

Qantas operates direct non-stop flights from Sydney to Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. [qantas.com.au](http://qantas.com.au)

### FURTHER INFORMATION

#### Fort Worth:

- Fort Worth: [fortworth.com](http://fortworth.com)
- Kimbell Art Museum: [kimbellart.org](http://kimbellart.org)
- Modern Museum of Fort Worth: [themodern.org](http://themodern.org)

#### Dallas:

- Visit Dallas: [visitdallas.com](http://visitdallas.com)
- Perot Museum of Nature and Science: [perotmuseum.org](http://perotmuseum.org)
- Dallas Arboretum and Botanic Garden: [dallasarboretum.org](http://dallasarboretum.org)
- Dallas Museum of Art: [dma.org](http://dma.org)
- 42 Murals Project: [42murals.com](http://42murals.com)

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