

PREVIEW EXCERPT



DO YOU REALLY

BELIEVE THAT?

# DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT?

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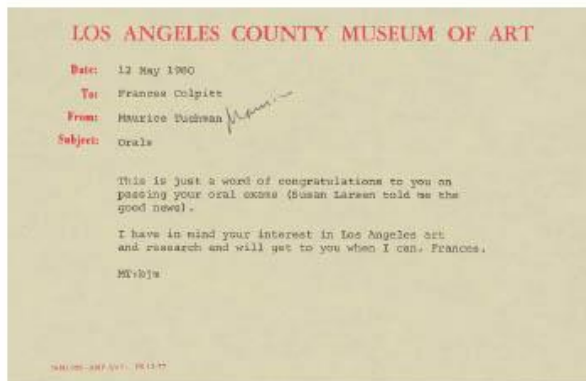
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# DR. FRANCES COLPITT (1952 - 2022)

Frances Jean Colpitt was born and raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The eldest of four, she gravitated towards the arts earning a BFA in painting at the University of Tulsa. While her abstract paintings, influenced by the work of Judy Chicago, showed promise, Colpitt shifted her focus to art history and philosophy. She received her MA in Humanities with a thesis on Élisabeth Vigée LeBrun and a brief history of French female artists and the French Academy. Although Colpitt was a bit of a Francophile, she headed west to study with Professor Susan Larsen, a specialist on modernism in the U.S., at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. There, she completed her PhD in Art History (1982) with a dissertation on the critical issues of Minimalism and began lecturing at Art Center College of Design and the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Together with her partner (and later husband) Donald Walton, Colpitt embraced the evolving LA art scene. Initially writing for *Artweek* and *Journal*, published by the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art [LAICA], she soon joined LAICA's editorial advisory committee and became a correspondent for *Art in America*. Colpitt then spent a year in upstate New York as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Cornell University (1985-86), before returning to California as Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of California,



Telegram on May 12, 1980 congratulating Frances Colpitt on her PhD orals from legendary curator and director Maurice Tuchman, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Courtesy Frances Colpitt papers, 1952-2022, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Santa Barbara. There she became an active member of the Visual Arts Committee and worked closely with curator Phyllis Plous of the University Art Museum (now Art, Design & Architecture Museum). Plous was both mentor and collaborator with the two mounting the exhibitions *Abstract Options* (1989) and *Knowledge: Aspects of Conceptual Art* (1992) at the University Art Museum.



Photograph of Frances Colpitt sitting in the room reprising Kazimir Malevich's 0,10 (1915) in the exhibition *The Avant-Garde in Russia: 1910-1930* at LACMA (1980), photographed by friend and fellow USC student John Eden, who was on assignment documenting the exhibition © John Eden.

Back at her alma mater, Colpitt taught for two years as a Visiting Assistant Professor at USC, with one of her graduate seminars producing the exhibition and catalogue *Finish Fetish: LA's Cool School* (1991), the first of many graduate student collaborations. She continued to write and develop critical relationships with artists such as John McCracken, Edith Baumann, John M. Miller, John Eden, and James Hayward, all of whom she and her husband began collecting. Her dissertation, comprehensive research, and interviews with pivotal artists of the time evolved into the critically lauded *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (UMI Research Press, 1990) and remains an essential work in the field.

While a big portion of her heart remained in LA, where she continued to be active throughout her career, including a visiting professorship at the University of California, Los Angeles (1999) and the curatorial advisory committee for *Under the Big Black Sun: California Art 1974-1981* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2008-2011), the Texas art community gained a discerning, fiery gift when Colpitt accepted a professorship at the



Frances Colpitt and Linda Pace at an opening reception in the Hudson Showroom at Artpace (1996). Courtesy of Artpace.



Frances Colpitt, Laurence Miller, and Annette Lawrence at Lawrence's opening in the Hudson Showroom, Artpace opening (1995). Courtesy of Artpace.

University of Texas at San Antonio in 1990. In addition to teaching modern and contemporary art history, Colpitt served as Chair of Graduate Studies in Art History (1996-2002) and Chair of the Department of Art and Art History (2002-2005). She advised and consulted with Linda Pace (1945-2007) in the early years of the Artpace residency program and its publications, joined the Board of Directors at Blue Star Art Space (now Contemporary at Blue Star), and was a founding member of the McNay Contemporary Collectors Forum with MaLin Wilson-Powell, then Curator of Exhibitions and Art after 1945 at the McNay Museum of Art. Independently, and with graduate students, Colpitt produced numerous critical exhibitions and catalogues at the UTSA Main Art Gallery and inaugurated the UTSA Satellite Space as a working project space for graduate students in the San Antonio arts district. Pursuing her long interest in abstraction, she published the highly regarded *Abstract Art in the Late Twentieth Century* with Cambridge University Press (2002), historically situating and critically examining pivotal essays on the subject from 1960-2000.

After fifteen years at UTSA, Colpitt accepted the Deedie Potter Rose Chair, an endowed professorship in contemporary art history, at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth where she continued to teach until retiring as Professor Emeritus in 2022. In collaboration with her colleagues, Colpitt also helped initiate the opening of Fort Worth Contemporary Arts as a satellite space for TCU graduate students and



Frances Colpitt with Gregory Ruppe at The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (2018). Photo by Hiroe Watanabe.

contemporary exhibitions. There, she organized shows with her students as well as her own, beginning with *Material Culture* (2008). Aided by proximity, Colpitt nurtured important relationships, among many, art dealer Barry Whistler, writing essays on gallery artists such as John Wilcox and Andrea Rosenberg, artist and scholar Michael Corris, whose critical *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) she contributed a touchstone essay (see pp. 24-35), and artist Vernon Fisher, writing the introduction to his monograph (University of Texas Press, 2010). Working with artist and education curator Terri Thornton, whom Colpitt collaborated with at testsite in Austin (2008, see pp. 152-163), she embraced the opportunity to reflect on exhibitions such as Fisher's or the importance of Bruce Nauman's films and videos, or her own scholarship at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.



Exhibition announcement for *Donald Judd: 3 Works*, Blue Star Art Space, February 7-March 22, 1992. Courtesy Judd Foundation Archives, Marfa, Texas.

During her tenure in Texas, Colpitt amplified numerous artists in essays and talks from Francesca Fuchs to Scot Heywood, Odita Donald Odili to Sarah Morris, to the writings of Donald Judd. Judd, among many, was an important artist and critic for Colpitt. She gave the keynote address at the first Judd Estate Conservation Symposium and was a founding advisor with the Judd Foundation's International Advisory Council. With respect and admiration, Colpitt reflected upon his work throughout her career in print and in person often with the Chinati and Judd Foundations. Presenting artists near and far, she curated many exhibitions including *Alicia Beach and Constance*

*Low*: *Double Vision* at the Phoenix Art Museum (2004) and the traveling exhibitions *Glow: Aspects of Light in Contemporary American Art* (2002) and *Chromaform: Color in Sculpture* (1998). In addition to the panel rounds over the years, such as “Feminism and Conceptualism: 1965–75” (2009) at Centraltrak, UT Dallas’ former artist residency, or moderating panels, like “Writing About Art: A Closer Look at Art Criticism with Arthur Danto, Peter Plagens, and Libby Lumpkin” at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (1998), Colpitt was also a returning visiting critic at the Glassell School of Art’s Core Residency Program in Houston, a mentor with the Oklahoma Visual Arts Commission, and an invited lecturer at many universities and institutions.

As a specialist in contemporary art, theory, and criticism, Colpitt explored a breadth of issues throughout her career in teaching, exhibitions, and writing, from her expertise in Minimalism, Conceptual art, and abstraction to theories of beholding, color, feminism, mapping, or boredom. Her research and writing embraced new developments, such as an expansive work in progress on abstraction as a philosophical language, while continuing to revisit artists and themes from new perspectives as with Doug Wheeler’s Encasements, or the innovations of Craig Kauffman, Donald Judd, and Robert Morris (see pp. 36-50). Alongside her own research, scholarship, and teaching, Colpitt was a corresponding editor and writer with *Art in America* for over thirty-five years, and a frequent contributor to, among others, *Art Lies*, *artUS*, and *Artillery*. Through these various avenues of engagement, Colpitt critically influenced and supported generations of artists and arts professionals who have gone on to become active curators, writers, and artists in Texas, California, and further afield as evidenced in this exhibition and catalogue.

Compiled by the curatorial advisory team based on Dr. Colpitt’s most recent curriculum vitae, narrative biography, and papers.



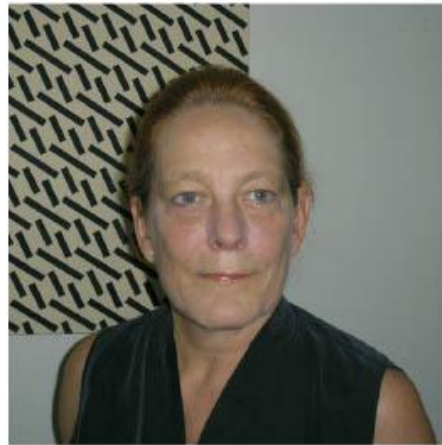
TCU MA field trip to The Chinati Foundation and the Judd Foundation, Marfa (2006), from L-R: Stefanie Ball, Angela Kepler, Frances Colpitt, Elizabeth James, and Sarah Hymes. Photo by Alison Hearst.



Frances Colpitt and Phyllis Plous studio visit with John M. Miller, Los Angeles (May 1994). Photo by Jack Robbins.

# INTRODUCTION DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT?

Dr. Frances Jean Colpitt (1952–2022) was a tenacious, committed, inspiring art historian, critic, curator, writer, and professor. A specialist in American art since 1960, much of Colpitt’s scholarship throughout her career centered on Minimalism and abstraction as in her landmark publication *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (UMI Research Press, 1990) and the critically regarded *Abstract Art in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). However, she is perhaps most memorable in the hearts and minds



Frances Colpitt in front of a John M. Miller painting in her home (c. 2009).

of those who engaged with and learned from her, aka “Fran Fans,” who remember her generous and caring commitment, and her ineffable ability to motivate one to think more critically. In this regard, she was particularly renowned for using the phrase “Do you really believe that?” and iterations thereof. So many of Colpitt’s students and mentees recall being challenged with the question she posed not as an attempt to disparage or mock, but rather from a position of genuine curiosity and as a means to galvanize critical thinking and conversation in the classroom or studio.

It is with such energy and gratitude that we present the exhibition and catalogue *Do you really believe that?* in honor and celebration of Colpitt, her critical scholarship, pedagogy and unyielding commitment to teaching, and her respect for artists, their work, and critics alike. What began as a casual but earnest conversation between “Fran fans” in late 2022 evolved into a collaborative exhibition-making process with a small curatorial advisory

team. Many artists, curators, students, and friends of Colpitt contributed to discussions at timely moments as the project developed with rigor and consideration. Each knew Colpitt in different ways and in varying depths which allowed for critical objectivity, questioning, and rethinking of ideas within the overarching subjectivity of the show’s trajectory. It is important to say that this exhibition is not definitive in scope. People, location, and resources mean that another curatorial team could make a very different show with alternative thematic inflections and artworks. For now, the exhibition situates itself in Texas, conceptually and materially, where Colpitt was celebrated and tenured at Texas Christian University and the University of Texas at San Antonio.

*Do you really believe that?* reflects a dynamic, collapsing, Venn diagram of connections with Colpitt at its heart. Philosophically the exhibition is guided by themes coalesced from Colpitt’s work over the course of her career with a focus on abstraction, Minimalism, and Conceptual art, featuring a selection of works by artists she followed and supported. These are artists she worked with in academia, including former students and mentees, together with artists she presented in exhibitions as part of her curatorial practice or wrote about in essays and reviews, and artists she and her husband Donald Walton collected. In all, the curatorial advisory team considered nearly a hundred key artists before alighting on the final twenty-six that comprise *Do you really believe that?* and whose work materially manifests the significant impact and enduring legacy of Colpitt’s mentorship.

Terry Allen, Jesse Amado, Edith Baumann, Richie Budd, Jerry Cabrera, John Eden, Sharon Engelstein, Vernon Fisher, Tommy Fitzpatrick, Thomas Glassford, James Hayward, Felice Koenig, Casey Leone, Constance Lowe, John M. Miller, Yunhee Min, Aaron Parazette, John Pomara, Chuck Ramirez, Hector A. Ramirez, Susie Rosmarin, Chris Sauter, Cameron Schoepp, Hills Snyder, Terri Thornton, and John Wilcox

The exhibition also features a selection of ephemera and documentary items that give context to Colpitt’s practice and further highlight critical influences and essential relationships she nurtured for decades. Such items include correspondence with artists Donald Judd and John McCracken, audio interviews with artists Anne Truitt and David Novros, and Colpitt’s personal copy of Ed Ruscha’s artist book *Every Building on Sunset Strip* (1966).

As a testament to Colpitt’s personal and professional relationships, several attendant projects developed in conversation with the exhibition *Do you really believe that?* In Fort Worth, Colpitt’s empty office at Texas Christian University presented a moment for reflection and intervention; an opportunity explored in standalone installations by artists Gregory Ruppe and Terri Thornton. In San Antonio, *Songs for Fran and Donny* at Artpace (January 16 - June 26,

2025; see p. 164) showcases work by Artpace affiliated artists responding to or spirited by their connections to Colpitt and her husband Donald Walton. *Synthesis & Subversion Redux* at Studio at Ruby City Studio (February 15 - September 28, 2025; see p. 186) curated by Ruby City director Elyce Gonzalez and Mia Lopez, curator of Latinx Art at the McNay Art Museum, responds to one of Colpitt's early San Antonio exhibitions—*Synthesis & Subversion: A Latino Direction in Contemporary Art*—with new perspectives presenting the work of artists Juan Carlos Escobedo, Jenelle Esparza, Bárbara Miñarro, Angeles Salinas, and José Villalobos. *Fran Colpitt: A Legacy* at Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas (September 7 - October 5, 2024), featured works by James Hayward, Michael Miller, David Novros, John Pomara, Andrea Rosenberg, Allison V. Smith, Ann Stautberg, Lorraine Tady, John Wilcox, and Robert Wilhite. The ten artists had previously been shown in various exhibitions at the gallery and Colpitt wrote about all of them. Similarly, *For Fran* at Ruiz-Healy Art in San Antonio (February 6 - March 29, 2025), curated by Hills Snyder, includes artists Jesse Amado, Ricky Armendariz, Nate Cassie, Bill Davenport, Alejandro Diaz, Constance Lowe, Jack Massing, Katie Pell, Chuck Ramirez, Riley Robinson, Ethel Shipton, and Kate Terrell. Collectively, these companion projects indicate an admiration and respect for Colpitt's practice and a desire to contribute to a widening dialogue about her impact across Texas.

Following the research and discussion that propelled our development of the exhibition *Do you really believe that?* and its attendant projects, this publication became an opportunity to present Colpitt's influence in words, dialogues, and reflections alongside artworks. New, commissioned texts and the reprinting of some of Colpitt's publications intellectually scaffold the exhibition and effectively introduce her ideas and scholarship to new audiences together with biographical and bibliographic overviews. Significantly, and in the spirit of Colpitt's curatorial projects which often involved her students, many of the catalogue entries have been written by her former students and recent graduates from Texas Christian University and the University of Texas at San Antonio. From this position, readers can explore the exhibition and catalogue with a sense of Colpitt's approach and overlapping relational threads. With this in mind, our publication begins with an acknowledgment on the impossibility of encapsulating Colpitt's impact and influence. "Evolving Index," an essay by Dr. Jennifer Hope Davy, essentially prefaces what follows as a lovingly compiled and yet "incomplete picture" that aims to celebrate Colpitt's legacy as an advocate, scholar, mentor, and friend.

**CURATORIAL ADVISORY TEAM**  
**NOVEMBER 2024**

materials express artist's CONCEPTION,  
 rather than manual skills  
 (Gk notion of *techné* = craft, technique)  
 expediency ← industrial fabrication  
 + perfection of form

McC #7/905

Brings us to curious notion of Mac's  
 hand-made obj's.

His technical expertise, craftsmanship  
 = most admired

(How did he do that?)

He maintains (+ we agree) - couldn't be  
 fabricated

(would be somehow different)

1 AR Blue ptg 1960-66

When questioned about the anonymity of his  
 Blue ptg, AR said "Some one else  
 who would make his ptg would be making  
 his ptg."

Mac's process ≠ self-expressive  
 = SELF-EFFACING

- sculpts himself out of the object

So that, as I suggested in beginning, our

not the ARTIST that we desire.

Frances Colpitt's handwritten notes on John McCracken's work presumably for her talk "Reading Minimalism" in conjunction with the exhibition *John McCracken: Heroic Stance* at the Newport Harbor Art Museum (1987). Courtesy Frances Colpitt papers, 1952-2022, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

EVOLVING INDEX (AUGUST 2024)

The sound of a cigarette lighter, a porcelain cup finding its place in its saucer, a young discerning voice posing a question and the well seated voice of modernist art critic Clement Greenberg<sup>1</sup> answering between drags. One of twenty tightly packed audio cassettes found in an old dusty white gift box, the recording was part of a series of interviews Frances Colpitt conducted, mostly with artists, for her dissertation research on Minimal art. It is uncanny to hear these voices together knowing how the critic had loomed large in Fran’s early days as a young student and scholar. Not more than ten minutes into Side 1, the two are discussing the discrepancies around the history of “Formalism.” Greenberg hates the term and they move from his stance that “Formalist criticism, so-called, ... isn’t a question of relating part-to-part,” and how “unity is not something you can point to,” to how “the work of art doesn’t exist without the viewer,” how he doesn’t make a distinction between form and content, and how the latter, “content[,] is ineffable.”<sup>2</sup>

I recalled how a fellow grad student, after hearing I’d studied with Frances Colpitt, questioned whether I was a Formalist—a rather “formalist” question that assumes one can’t teach outside a box or that formalism is a box. I was in-situ. I shared the question with an arts professional friend who also knew Fran, her rebuttal proffered Fran a humanist. I’d say she was a feminist, not simply because she shared as much or that I’d come across a VHS tape labeled “Vigée Le Brun & A History of French Women Artists” from 1977—a historical feminist homage and her master’s thesis—but because that’s how I knew her.

Issues with “ists” and “isms” were echoed in many of Fran’s interviews, from Anne Truitt—who, if she had to choose, identified with the intuitive nature of Luminists—to David Novros, whose banter on jargon is determined. He

continues towards the nature of perception in which he suggests artists can’t escape illusion and that it is a “false issue to make a separation between illusionism and reality.” Accordingly, Novros isn’t doing abstraction; otherwise, their discussion follows: “everything has to be abstract or nothing is abstract; it is not a question of style, it is a question of perception.”<sup>3</sup>



One of two sets of drawings given to Frances Colpitt by David Novros, *Untitled (Boathouse study)*, (c. 1996-2003), oil pastel & ink on paper, 9½ x 26¼” (framed), Collection and courtesy of Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California Santa Barbara © David Novros/Artists Rights Society (ARS).

In another box and format, a CD holds a talk from 2011 between Fran and Michael Corris at The Reading Room in Dallas on the occasion of the latter’s show. After citing how his work “brings together axes of the personal, theoretical, and art historical,” Fran asks Corris, “Where are you? ... Are you rejecting the ‘Death of the Author’ [Barthes] ... and it’s all pointing back to you?”

Corris: “Well, the ‘you’ is interesting because I don’t believe that there is any unmediated art—it’s all mediated. ... as an artist ... where I am in a sense is there, because that’s my position; where I am as an individual may be in terms of what it is that compels me to deal with certain kinds of issues in the art world, but beyond that I don’t know where else I could be.”

Colpitt: That makes perfect sense, that these axes ... are you, that you’re where these various axes meet.”

Where are you? Reader? Where am I (part transcriber, part author here)? Where is Frances Colpitt? As she and Corris discussed, one can be found, in part, amidst pieces and fragments; arrayed together they create or suggest an index, an indexical archive that forms a sketch of sorts.<sup>4</sup> While the index is not the story, it creates generative axes as Colpitt and Corris note, just as this exhibition and catalogue endeavor. Embracing all the imperfect complexities of an archival impulse, the desire is to highlight such figure ground relationships to punctuate the ineffable impact Fran had on so many—including me, who ended up in Fort Worth soon after Fran passed to help compile such an “index” of artworks, books, and papers.

Having been her student years earlier and having considered her a mentor with lasting aftereffect (though I foraged a very different path as an artist and

writer), it was an honor and a privilege to be tasked with such intimacy and responsibility. It was also another meeting, another way to spend time and learn more about her in the margins, notes, collections, and ephemera. A brilliant snapshot of a young Fran and her mentor Phyllis Plous—who guided

her through the first years as a university professor and “taught me how to be a curator.”<sup>5</sup> The two mounted the well-received exhibitions *Abstract Options* (1989) and *Knowledge: Aspects of Conceptual Art* (1992) both at the then University Art Museum (now, Art, Design & Architecture Museum) of the University of California, Santa Barbara.



Snapshot of Frances Colpitt and Phyllis Plous c. 1985. Courtesy Mary Colpitt, Executor Frances Jean Colpitt Estate.

Cataloguing John McCracken’s brilliant black resin rectangular block with a cut corner, coming across his handwritten invoice, Fran’s copious handwritten notes on his work, and their correspondence was discovering their close, warm, and intellectual friendship. James Hayward’s numerous works with playful and loving inscriptions echoed their long friendship and comradeship, which, on paper, played out in laughter and painting debates. Novros’ handwritten letters, inches deep, reveal their mutual respect and intellectual exchange over decades. A collection of relations, her menthol tobacco scented papers, most noted on yellow legal pad, point to her ways of relating and thinking through—Edith Baumann’s complex colors—or literally drawing it out on paper—Doug Wheeler’s mechanics. Seeing Fran through these paper lenses, focuses her process, her dedication, and the connections she cultivated.



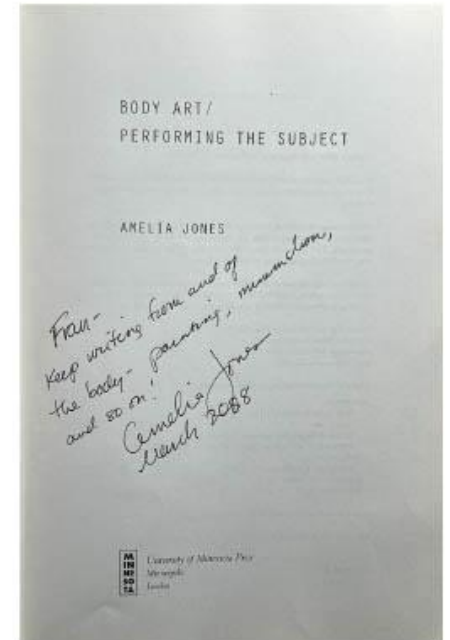
From L-R: Alan Wayne, Frances Colpitt, Ed Moses, John M. Miller, Darcy Huebler, James Hayward, Edith Baumann, Scot Heywood (San Antonio, 1994), Courtesy Mary Colpitt, Executor Frances Jean Colpitt Estate.

The same tall, putty colored metal filing cabinet I recalled from her office at UTSA stood in her home office, adorned with the same magnet frame holding a photograph of Alan Wayne, (Fran), Ed Moses, John M. Miller, Darcy Huebler, James Hayward, Edith Baumann, and Scot Heywood in Fran and her husband Donny’s San Antonio backyard. They were in from LA for the exhibition *In Plain Sight: Abstract Painting in Los Angeles* (1994) that Fran curated for Blue Star Art

Space (now, Contemporary at Blue Star). Here the cabinet housed folders of lectures and seminars, most in longhand on legal pad paper. Tightly fitted front to back, each drawer covered a myriad of issues from Deskilling & Marx, Abstract Mapping Process, Frederic Jameson & Postmodernism to Problems of the Postmodern Medium, The Post-Modern Body, Feminism to LA: Film & Color Organs, Photography In/As/Not As Art, Art in the Age of Entertainment, and so on.

In tracing such trajectories time collapses and expands: A 1980 telegram sent by then LACMA director Maurice Tuchman congratulating Fran on completing her orals; folders of thank you notes spanning years 1980 to 2022, from students echoing profound gratitude toward new ways of thinking. The echo resounds the impact of this confident yet humble professor who early on found guidance in leaving the ego at the back door from Thomas Merton’s *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948), which Fran read around the time she began to publish.

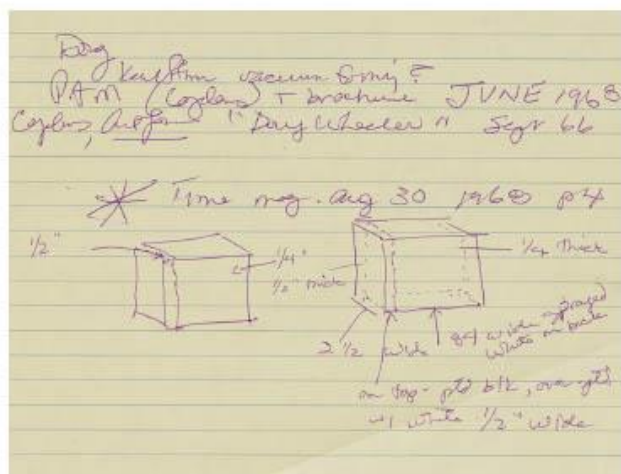
Her writing is influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology to which she garnered perception as synthetic and embodied. The corporeal experience is foundational as Amelia Jones inscribed to Fran on the cover page of *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (1998): “Fran – Keep writing from and of the body – painting, minimalism, and so on!” On the “surface,” they may appear an unlikely pair, while the inscription’s subject, “writing from and of the body,” is their primary index. It follows across five glossy white pages found in an unassuming large white envelope. Titled “ETHER” it contained a namesake essay by Fran with a reproduction of Terri Thornton’s *ETHER (condensed gold)*—a small edition from the 2008 collaborative project between the two.



Frances Colpitt’s copy of Amelia Jones’ *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (1998) with the author’s inscription. Courtesy Mary Colpitt, Executor of Estate of Frances Jean Colpitt.

In the first paragraph, Fran reasserts the phenomenological position: “language is no substitute for the work’s unique presence in time and space and the phenomenological experience that washes over the viewer. This effect can be circled around and around with words but can never be fully communicated.” This aporia emerges again in a talk with Vernon Fisher on the occasion of his exhibition *K-mart Conceptualism* (2010) at the Modern

Art Museum of Fort Worth. “I never feel like I’m getting it in language” she shares, to which they both agree on the long-standing impossibility that one can only write around or point to “it” from varying directions.



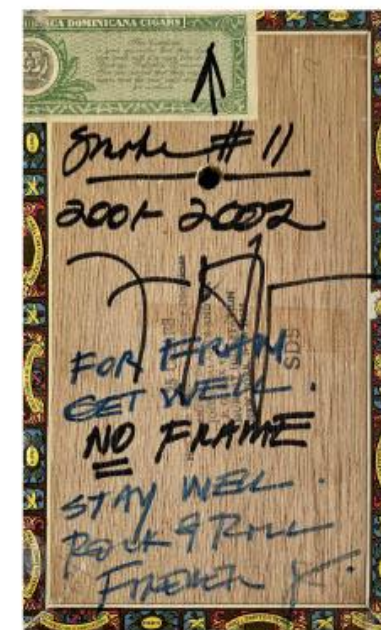
Frances Colpitt’s research notes (c. 2016) on Doug Wheeler’s work presumably for an essay on the artist’s Encasements for a David Zwirner Gallery catalogue that never came to fruition. Courtesy Frances Colpitt papers, 1932-2022, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

In another talk at The Modern, “Problems and Possibilities for Abstract Painting in Postmodernism,” delivered in 2011, Fran illuminates the beginnings of what remained a work in progress on contemporary abstraction. From a late postmodern lens, following Marx, Mandel, and Jameson, the “progressive atomization of form” Fran argues is “analogous to the development of abstraction.” Abstraction as a philosophy rather than an art historical period or style of the 20th century, she renders it forward as the language for the 21st century. During the Q&A, Fran identifies as a “modernist” at work trying to be a “post-modernist.” As we circle our subject in so many words and pieces, we’ll never communicate her full effect, but how fitting our circling of fragments is a beautiful abstraction. What follows is an incomplete picture; nevertheless, a very full and fulfilling one. An evolving index.

1 In the former Texas quarterly art journal *Art Lies*, Frances Colpitt provides a concise book review of *Art Czar: The Rise and Fall of Clement Greenberg* (2006), by Alice Goldfarb Marquis underwriting the importance of Marquis’ detailing the “cultural relativism” beginning in the sixties “replac[ing] elitist patriarchal hegemony and along with it, Clement Greenberg himself,” acknowledging his controversial status and recommends “Greenberg’s writings of the 1940s and fifties” as sources of modern art, (Summer 2006): 123.  
 2 Clement Greenberg in conversation with Frances Colpitt, audio interview, November 11, 1980, Frances Colpitt papers 1952-2022, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
 3 David Novros in conversation with Frances Colpitt, audio interview, c. 1980-1982, Frances Colpitt papers 1952-2022, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.  
 4 There is of course a long history of the archive, which is and will be forever fraught. In theory and in practice, it is fraught from the start. The archive and the archivist have enormous responsibility; they also have enormous power and the converse depending on the narrative culled.  
 5 Frances Colpitt, presentation notes for an emerging arts writers and curators workshop with the Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition [OVAC] in 2010, Frances Colpitt papers 1952-2022, Archives of American Art, Washington D.C.



James Hayward’s *Smoke 11* (2002-2002), acrylic on cigar box, 10 x 6 inches. Courtesy Mary Colpitt, Executor Frances Jean Colpitt Estate.



Back of James Hayward’s *Smoke 11* (2002-2002), acrylic on cigar box, 10 x 6 inches. Courtesy Mary Colpitt, Executor Frances Jean Colpitt Estate.

DR. FRANCES COLPITT - LUNCHEON LECTURE - THURSDAY, JANUARY 13, 1983  
"AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE PERMANENT COLLECTION" 45 minutes

A 2nd Lewitt interview  
Nov 12, 1980  
117 Hester St NYC  
1st tape

A Bruce Mason interview  
Nov 13, 1980  
105 Bowery NYC

A NOUROS INTERVIEW  
14 DEC 1981

Toward Understanding of Issues in 20th C. Art-FRANCES COLPITT lecture: A New Viewpoint on Permanent Collection 6/83

A Lewitt interview Tape 2  
(Nov 15, 1980) side 1

A John McCreel 5.28.80

INDEX  
A NOUROS

Frances Colpitt Lecture 4/10/83  
Franz Stella: From the Black paintings to the Polish Village series  
1-2

A Peter Lodato - 703 S. Union LA 6.20.81

A Robert Murray interview  
Nov 15, 1980 - studio  
66 Canal Street - side 1

A Anne Truitt interview  
Washington DC  
2nd Nov 21, 1980  
Tape 1, side 1

Talk of South Texas: August Frances Colpitt - Curator, UTSA's "The Home Show"

INDEX  
Tape 2  
A Peter Lodato 703 S. Union LA. 6.20.81

A NOLAN side 1  
interview 11.14.80 1980  
edited by Nolan PIT

A Anne Truitt interview  
Nov 21, 1980  
Tape 2, side 1

A Clemon Greenberg interview  
Nov 11, 1980  
apt 205 Central Park West

A Post-managed interview Nov 15, 1980  
water cast

A Bill Nuros interview  
Nov 10, 1980  
433 Broadway NYC  
side 1

A William Tacker - interview  
Nov 10, 1980  
Studio 77 Commercial St  
Brooklyn NY

Collection of Frances Colpitt's audio cassettes, primarily artist interviews conducted for her dissertation research on Minimalism, museum lectures, and a radio interview for *The Home Show* at UTSA. Courtesy Mary Colpitt, Executor Frances Jean Colpitt Estate. Photo by Jennifer Hope Davy.

*Essays & Conversations* presents commissioned pieces reflecting Frances Colpitt's scholarship, critical writing, pedagogy, and advocacy of artists, together and in dialogue with a selection of Colpitt's writings. Art historian, artist, and writer **Michael Corris** presents an imagined conversation with Colpitt about her writing on art of the 1960s, using her published works as an insightful way to conjure her voice and the spirit of her scholarship. Following their lively dialogue is **Colpitt's** manuscript, "Intersections: Kauffman, Judd, and Morris" (2018). Originally commissioned by Frank Lloyd for *Crossroads: Kauffman, Judd and Morris* at Sprüth Magers, and published in its entirety here for the first time in the U.S., the essay traces these three ground-breaking artists' innovative and intersecting developments, their significant influence and continued relevance. **Kathryn Kanjo** shares her responses to hearing an audio recording of Colpitt as a young scholar delivering two lectures at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art in 1983. A former graduate student of Colpitt's at the University of Southern California in the late 1980s and currently the David C. Copley Director and CEO at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (formerly the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art), Kanjo is now steward to the very works that Colpitt discusses.

Two conversations—one between editors **Michael Delgado** and **Tulsa Kinney**, the other between editor, curator, and writer **Anjali Gupta** and curator **Annette DiMeo Carlozzi**—reveal their connection to Colpitt through collaboration, publishing, and friendship. From different perspectives, places, and timelines, their dialogues reconsider former regionalist attitudes and misnomers, reflect on generational camaraderie and intergenerational shifts, and highlight the importance Fran placed on visualizing the work and the clarity of her writing. Above all, each underscores her advocacy and support of artists and the critical impact her writing had particularly in California and Texas.

Between these two conversations are three reprinted articles by **Colpitt** referenced by the authors. The first, "Criticism Reconsidered" (Summer 2001) written for the former Texas art quarterly *Art Lies*,<sup>1</sup> encapsulates Colpitt's early approach to criticism set within a brief historical trajectory that concludes in recognizing the fallibilities in varying modes of criticism. For an *Art Lies* special issue on painting, Colpitt was invited by Gupta to be guest editor and writer of the feature essay "Dumb Painting: The End of Representation" (Summer 2005). Parsing a modern history of debates on painting's viability, Colpitt highlights the often divergent and conflicting roles of artists and critics in determining such viability. In discerning the remains of "representation" she focuses on the potential of contemporary painting—from neoformalism to conceptual abstraction—reminding us of painting's presence and ability to seduce.

Writing for *Artillery*,<sup>2</sup> cofounded and edited by Kinney, Colpitt's feature "The Thing" (February 2016) takes up "sculpture" materially and linguistically, emphasizing the influential role of the "object" and its important distinction from the sculptural, following Donald Judd as well as Robert Morris and Lucy Lippard. She chronicles specific differences and developments within the evolution of objects, the "non-sculptural," environments and installation art, and the subsequent possibility for new "sculpture," drawing attention to the linguistic laziness of later three-dimensional nomenclature.

<sup>1</sup> An acclaimed publication for the Texas region and beyond, *Art Lies* provided "an international forum for the critical examination of artistic practice, theory and discourse on and about the contemporary arts." It was published from 1994 through 2011 and merged with *Gulf Coast Literary Journal* in 2013. For more information see the digital archive with *The Portal to Texas History*, University of North Texas Libraries: <https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/ARTL/> accessed August 23, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Founded in 2006 by Tulsa Kinney and Charles Rappleye, *Artillery* is a Los Angeles based art magazine covering the international art scene through "accessible text on current issues, thoughts and trends in the art world." Find *Artillery* in print and online: <https://artillerymag.com/> accessed September 1, 2024.



# DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT?

TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY &  
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO



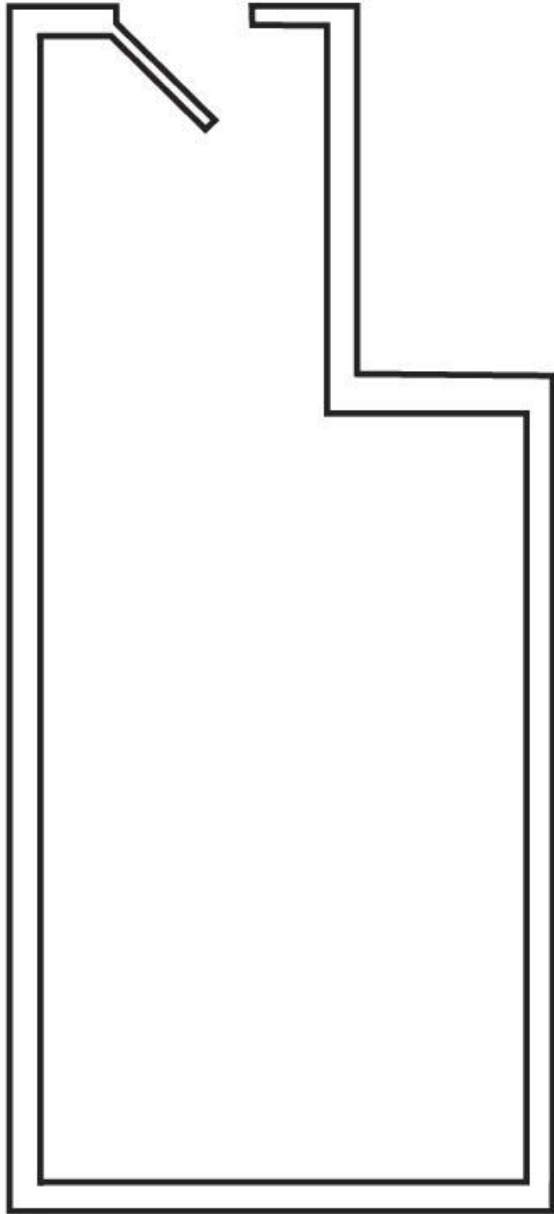
## ARTISTS

Terry Allen	Constance Lowe
Jesse Amado	John M. Miller
Edith Baumann	Yunhee Min
Richie Budd	Aaron Parazette
Jerry Cabrera	John Pomara
John Eden	Chuck Ramirez
Sharon Engelstein	Hector A. Ramirez
Vernon Fisher	Susie Rosmarin
Tommy Fitzpatrick	Chris Sauter
Thomas Glassford	Cameron Schoepp
James Hayward	Hills Snyder
Felice Koenig	Terri Thornton
Casey Leone	John Wilcox





# INTERVENTION OFFICE HOURS



As a companion to *Do you really believe that?* Sara-Jayne Parsons invited artists Gregory Ruppe and Terri Thornton to respond to Dr. Colpitt's still vacant office at Texas Christian University in the summer of 2024. During "office hours" each artist created a temporary onsite intervention.



Gregory Ruppe, *Cool Memories*, an exhibition of site-specific works in commune with the former office of the late Dr. Frances Colpitt (1952-2022).



## ETHER

Essay for the collaborative exhibition project *ether*, by Frances Colpitt and Terri Thornton, testsite 8.1, Austin, 2008. Courtesy of the Frances Jean Colpitt Estate and Terri Thornton.

Among the most challenging and therefore most engaging works of art are those that push the limits of visibility. “Silent Art,” Lucy Lippard called it in 1967. *Pictures of Nothing* is the title of Kirk Varnedoe’s posthumously published lectures on abstraction. Neither writer—as well as the many other authors who have tackled monochrome painting and other examples of reductive abstraction—was at a loss for words but language fails when it comes to conveying the meaning of such work. It is describable: one can write about shape, scale, size, color, materials (industrial, traditional), brushwork, surface texture, depth, thickness of paint or stretchers and shadows cast by the thing, degrees of light reflection (shiny, glossy, matte, dull), the framing edge or silhouette, and the height of hanging or position in the gallery. To truly know the work in question it must be experienced in person.<sup>1</sup> Language is no substitute for the work’s unique presence in time and space and the phenomenological experience that washes over the viewer. This effect can be circled around and around with words but can never be fully communicated by the writer to the reader.

The description of a work cannot, should not, be a substitute for the work itself. With increasing frequency I encounter artists, viewers, and students who scan works of art for information, much as they scan or read a computer screen or a magazine page. This may allow them to describe what they have seen or read but not to feel the authority of touch resonating from a brushstroke or the finely tuned sense of scale emanating from a sculpture. According to Hubert Damisch, the problem results from treating paintings as texts, a common enough approach today. “But painting only constitutes itself as a language through our acts of describing it, or the linguistic appropriation of painting. But what fascinates me the most,” he says, “is the moment when painting forces us into silence. We talk and then we sense that there’s something that escapes us.

“. . . A description must finally arrive at silence. . . . It’s an idea of description that is completely different from the notion that it should substitute itself for the object.”<sup>2</sup> Damisch was no doubt influenced by his teacher Merleau-Ponty who posited silence at the heart of painting (as well as language). “More than being manifested by the painting,” writes Merleau-Ponty, quoting Sartre and Malraux, “the meaning sinks into it and trembles around it ‘like a wave of heat.’ It is ‘like an immense and futile effort, always arrested halfway between



# ARTPACE SONGS FOR FRAN AND DONNY

## SONGS FOR FRAN AND DONNY

A COMPANION SHOW WITH WORKS BY ARTPACE AFFILIATED ARTISTS RESPONDING TO OR SPIRITED BY THEIR CONNECTIONS TO FRANCES COLPITT AND HER HUSBAND DONALD WALTON. (AUGUST 2024)

When Artpace opened in 1995, many people worked to launch a unique, and now leading, artist residency program and exhibition space in San Antonio, Texas. Art history professor, critic, and curator Frances Colpitt was a pivotal influence in the early culture of Artpace, and these influences have carried on into the present day. She was a professor who liked being with artists and posed questions that influenced and guided many of her students to a creative life working in the arts.

I was one of her students attending a graduate seminar studying contemporary practices of artists working in the 1980s and 90s. Her reverence for Donald Judd led most of her students to make the trip to Marfa, Texas well before it attained its current cultural standing as the heart (and brain) of Minimalism and a destination for Conceptual art. Fran knew Judd well from her time spent interviewing him for her book *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective*. Class was canceled the week Judd died, a tragedy that brought the class together as a group of artists still producing art three decades later.

At Artpace, Fran wrote essays and conducted interviews for several residents' exhibitions, curated and organized exhibitions such as *Texas Abstract: New Painting in the Nineties* (1995) and *Glow: Aspects of Light in Contemporary American Art* (2002), hosted her classes in the building, used the Archives for research, and collaborated with Artpace to organize an annual award for writers from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her published essays in *Art in America* shaped San Antonio's art scene and gave the city national and international attention.

For me as an artist, and now the Director of Artpace, I can see her work imprinted on the institution and the city. The artists in *Songs for Fran and Donny* exhibit this influence in a mixed and diverse set of artworks that honor her as a mentor and friend.

RILEY ROBINSON

## ARTISTS

Justin Boyd

Andréa Caillouet

Nate Cassie

Mark T. Hansen

Meg Langhorne

Alex de León

Ken Little

Karen Mahaffy

Michele Monseau

Juan Miguel Ramos

Jack Robbins

Ethel Shipton

Robert Tiemann

Randy Wallace



# RUBY CITY SYNTHESIS & SUBVERSION REDUX

The Estate of Frances Jean Colpitt generously gifted several works to the Linda Pace Foundation, Ruby City, and it is on the occasion of this gift that we, the director of the Foundation and the curator of Latinx Art at the McNay Art Museum, decided to mount an exhibition that ties to Colpitt's legacy as a scholar and curator. In the course of research, even before this exhibition opportunity presented itself, we heard a great deal about the 1996 exhibition *Synthesis and Subversion: A Latino Direction in San Antonio Art* that she curated for the UTSA Art Galleries while a professor in the Department of Art and Art History (now School of Art). The artists included—Jesse Amado, David Padilla Cabrera, Alejandro Diaz, Franco Mondini-Ruiz, Ana de Portela, and Chuck Ramirez—were anchored in the exhibition by their time spent in San Antonio, their friendships, and a shared visual approach to subject matter. Our research on Ramirez, whose work is well represented in both our institutions' permanent collections, revealed multiple mentions of this show and its pivotal nature in his career as well as in the careers of the others, Colpitt included. It seemed fitting to revisit this exhibition as it was a unique interpretation of Latino art in San Antonio at the time, and it generated a great deal of discussion and even protest when it was mounted. Revisiting the thesis of *Synthesis and Subversion* allows us to address the history of the show, to consider Colpitt's legacy, as well as to highlight the changes wrought in the art world since then through the work of a group of young San Antonio artists working today: Juan Carlos Escobedo, Jenelle Esparza, Bárbara Miñarro, Angeles Salinas, and José Villalobos.

As Colpitt stated in her accompanying brochure for *Synthesis and Subversion*, the show demonstrated a "particular sensibility informed by autobiography, abstraction and the everyday." The title of the exhibition alluded to the fact that these artists were equally adept at articulating their personal experiences and identity through visual gestures that both challenged (or "subverted") and incorporated (or "synthesized") the vocabulary of contemporary art.



## ARTISTS

Juan Carlos Escobedo

Jenelle Esparza

Bárbara Miñarro

Angeles Salinas

José Villalobos



This volume has been published in conjunction with the exhibitions:

### DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THAT?

**Fort Worth Contemporary Arts, Texas Christian University**

August 30 – November 16, 2024

**UTSA Main Art Gallery, University of Texas at San Antonio**

January 22 – February 28, 2025

### OFFICE HOURS

**Moudy North Building, Room 221, School of Art, Texas Christian University**

Summer 2024

### SONGS FOR FRAN AND DONNY

**Artpace, San Antonio**

January 16 – June 26, 2025

### SYNTHESIS & SUBVERSION REDUX

**Ruby City, San Antonio**

February 15 – September 28, 2025

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\*Due to differing catalogue and exhibition production schedules, the artists' works represented in the Artpace and Ruby City sections of this catalogue may not be the artworks presented in their exhibitions.

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COLLEGE of  
FINE ARTS

*School of Art*



**artpace**  
san antonio

**RUBY CITY**



**Texas  
Commission  
on the Arts**  
Investing in a Creative Texas

Front Cover:

Fran Colpitt viewing the work of John Wilcox at Barry Whistler Gallery, Dallas, 2018.  
Photo by Allison V. Smith. Courtesy Barry Whistler Gallery.

Back Cover:

Frances Colpitt in Nevada c. 1984. Courtesy Mary Colpitt, Executor Frances Jean Colpitt Estate.

Frances Colpitt's handwritten notes on John McCracken's work presumably for her talk "Reading Minimalism" in conjunction with the exhibition *John McCracken: Heroic Stance* (1987). Courtesy Frances Colpitt papers, 1952-2022, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

material's express artist's CONCEPTION  
rather than manual skills  
(Gk notion of techné = craft, tech  
experience ← industrial fabrication  
+ perfection of form

McC # 71905

Bring us to curious notion of McC's  
hand-made obj's.



McC's process + self-expressive  
= SELF-EFFACING

- sculpts himself out of the object

So that, as I suggested in beginning, our  
gaze, our experience + our awareness  
product (not process), It is the OBJECT  
not the ARTIST. Not we desire