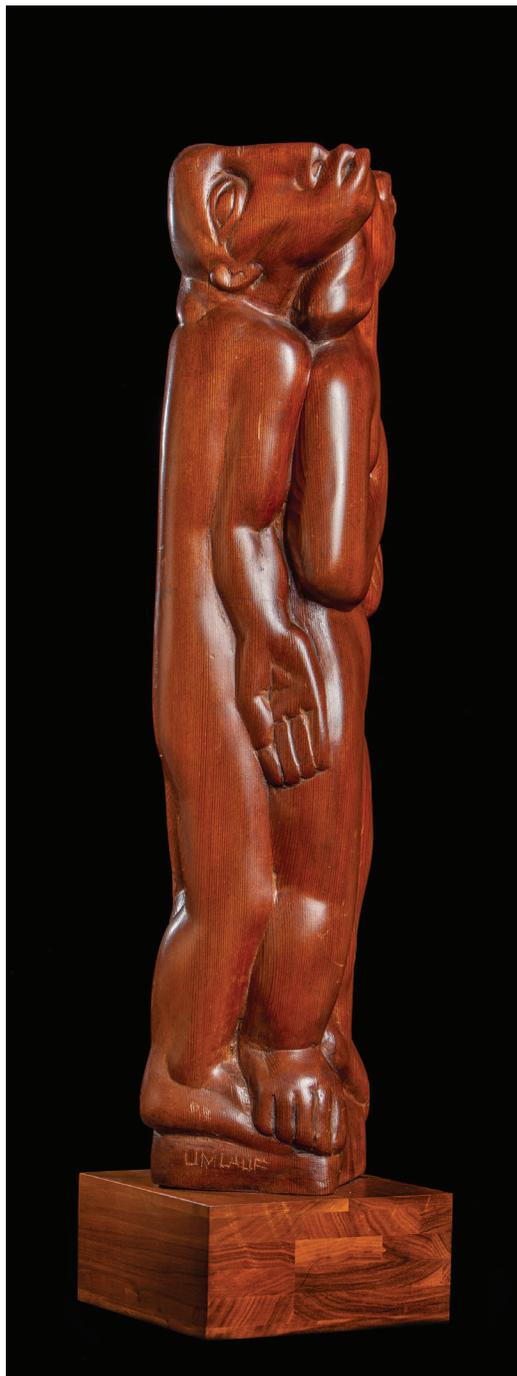


# C2 Sculptors:

Charles Umlauf & Charles T. Williams



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## C2 Sculptors: Charles Umlauf and Charles T. Williams

All eyes were on Texas in 1957 when *LIFE* magazine published an article showcasing the state's art. The full-color essay pictured international modernist art alongside Texas paintings and sculptures. Circulating to millions of readers, the essay was a coup for a state that lacked a strong profile in the art world. It signaled a shift: Texas art was beginning to gain a national reputation.

*LIFE* featured a color photo with sculptures by Charles T. Williams and Charles Umlauf. These two artists were vital to the state's burgeoning success story. Highly competitive and wholly dedicated to their craft, they had much in common. Both settled in Texas after formative experiences outside the state. Each drew inspiration from international art movements and exhibited in countless regional and national juried exhibitions. Umlauf won many prizes in the statewide Texas annuals. So did Williams, who took home the Purchase Prize in 1962. Both were awarded lucrative commissions. Both applied repeatedly for Ford Foundation grants: Umlauf won one. He also won a prestigious Guggenheim Foundation grant in 1949. By the 1960s both men were exhibiting at Valley House Gallery in Dallas, which inaugurated its new garden in 1959 with an ambitious Umlauf retrospective.

With their markedly different aesthetic styles, Umlauf and Williams also represent distinct strands of twentieth century sculpture. As seen in *LIFE*, Umlauf's work often embodied figuration, while Williams favored abstract forms. However, as this exhibition demonstrates, at other times their work is strikingly similar.



Figure 1: Exhibition installation with Williams's steel and brass coated *Battleground* at far left and Umlauf's stone *Horse* at far right. *LIFE* magazine cover and interior photo: *LIFE*, "Turnout for Art in Texas," April 29, 1957 p. 168.



**TEXAS SCULPTURE** at Fort Worth showed work by (l. to r.) Charles Williams of Fort Worth, Virginia

Oechsner of Dallas, Bess Hubbard of Lubbock, Heri Bartscht of Dallas, Charles Umlauf of Austin.



Figure 2: Charles Umlauf, November 1, 1951. Douglass, Neal. [Charles Umlauf]. The Portal to Texas History. <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph74795/>.

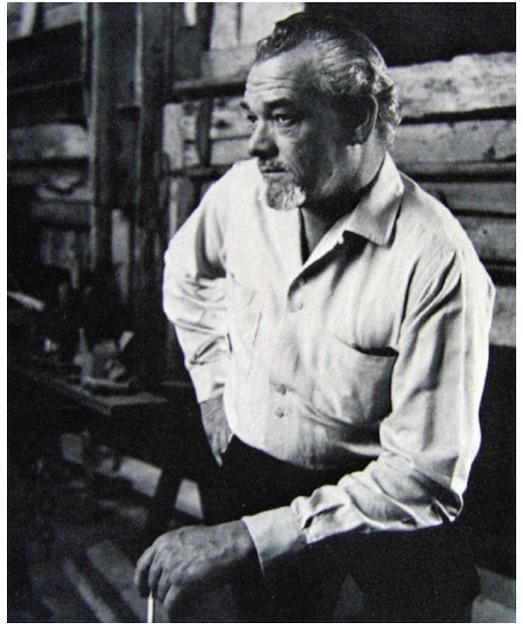


Figure 3: Charles T. Williams, circa 1965, photographer unknown.

*C2 Sculptors* is the first exhibition dedicated solely to Charles Umlauf (1910-1994) and Charles T. Williams (1918-1966). By placing their work side-by-side, this exhibition offers an unparalleled opportunity for viewers to follow their aesthetic paths.

Although Charles Umlauf was older, they both developed artistically amidst the uncertainty of 1930s and 1940s America. Umlauf trained in Depression-era Chicago, spending endless hours in the vast galleries of the Art Institute of Chicago. He learned to cast realistic and classicizing sculpture via the ancient lost wax technique while working under American Lorado Taft and Czech-born American Albin Polasek. Although Umlauf never served in the War, he registered his response to the Nazi invasion of Poland in his cast stone *War Mother* (1939). Likewise, Umlauf's *Refugees* series depicts the human devastation wrought by war. *War Mother* and *Refugees II* (1945; both are in the Garden) evoke the melancholic mood and haggard features of German Expressionism, particularly that of sculptors Wilhelm Lehmbruck and Käthe Kollwitz. Shortly after Umlauf moved to Austin to teach at the University of Texas, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

Eight years younger than Umlauf, Williams was studying at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas when the War interrupted. He was deployed to Paris with the Army Corps of Engineers (1944-46), where he took part in the Liberation of Paris. In his free time, he sought out European modernist sculpture, seeing first hand work by modernists like Jean Arp, Constantin

Brancusi, Pablo Picasso, Auguste Rodin, Amedeo Modigliani, Henry Moore, and many others. Williams's tour-of-duty bolstered his determination to become a sculptor. In 1949, he settled in Fort Worth, where his studio became the north Texas gathering place for artists, patrons, and revelers.



Figure 4: Charles Umlauf, *Family*, 1943, redwood, City of Austin/Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, 1985.11, photo: Jim Lincoln.



Figure 5: Charles T. Williams, *Indecision*, 1949, redwood, Collection Karl B. Williams.

Williams's and Umlauf's styles are most closely aligned in the 1940s, a period when the European modernist influence on them is tangible. For example, both Umlauf's *Family* (1943) and Williams's *Indecision* (1949) are columnar figures shaped in redwood. Umlauf packs three figures into the rectilinear block, almost as if he made a game of removing as little wood as possible. Williams, too, begins with a length of redwood, but carves away more of the wood to develop a gradually tapered figure.

Both artists were masterful draftsmen by the 1940s, fully capable of handling anatomy and proper proportions. Yet neither *Family* nor *Indecision* abides by traditional rules of figure composition. This choice was deliberate. In addition, their sculptures are directly carved, a

method that underwent a resurgence in the early 20th century. Since the Renaissance, European academies had trained sculptors in ateliers to use plaster or clay models and mechanical devices to create true-to-life figures. (Umlauf apprenticed in this manner in Chicago.) But direct carving discards the elaborate traditional system, relying instead on the single artist who is inspired by material alone.

As practiced by Constantin Brancusi (an influential figure for both Umlauf and Williams), direct carving was more than mere technique. It represented a rejection of academic training and an embrace of modernism. Because pre-Columbian and Oceanic people had always carved directly, the method became associated with primitivism. With their thick limbs, large heads, and hands, Umlauf's *Family* is aligned with primitive—not Renaissance—art. Similarly, Williams's figure, from her narrow head to her heavy feet, is decidedly non-Western.

Other sculptures in the exhibition, like Umlauf's *Standing Woman* (1940s, painted plaster) and *Prayer Figure* (1950, glazed terra cotta), and Williams's *Torso #2* (1949, black walnut), fit along the primitivism-modernism spectrum. Geometrically stylized, *Torso #2* advances Williams deeper into Cubist and Dada-inspired modernism. By the time of *Torso Figure* (1958) and *Walnut Construction* (1960), Williams had perfected his abstract caryatids, transforming the figure completely into anthropomorphic columns.

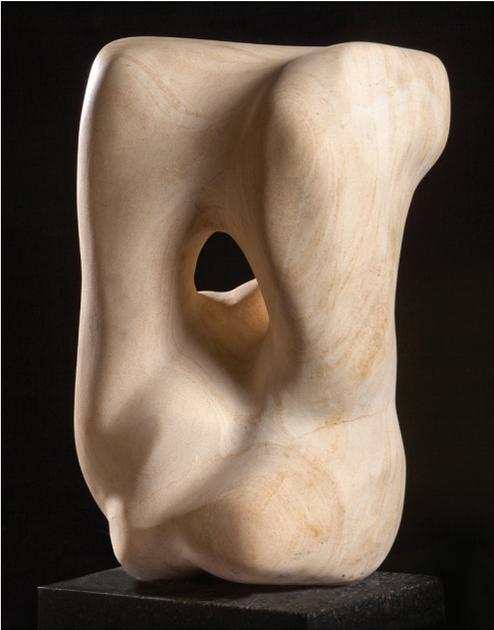


Figure 6: Charles Umlauf, *Supplication*, 1949, Cordova cream limestone (Autin limestone), Collection City of Austin/Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, 1985.041, photo: Jim Lincoln.



Figure 7: Charles T. Williams, *Continuum*, 1951, limestone, Collection Karl B. Williams, photo: Robert LaPrelle.



Figure 8: Charles Umlauf, *Siamese Cat*, 1958, bronze, City of Austin/Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, 1985.078, photo: Jim Lincoln.



Figure 9: Charles T. Williams, *Moritz the Elephant*, 1962, found object construction, Collection Karl B. Williams, photo: Robert LaPrelle.

A striking pairing in this exhibition is that of Umlauf's *Supplication* and Williams's *Continuum*. These limestone works were made in the same year (1949) and take as their subject a human form confined within a rectilinear format. Each is animated by a central hole.

In the 1940s, one artist had the monopoly on sculptural holes: Englishman Henry Moore. "The first hole made through a piece of stone is a revelation," wrote Moore in 1937. "A hole can itself have as much shape-meaning as a solid mass." So identified was Moore with the openings in his sculptures that German-born psychologist Rudolph Arnheim published an influential article analyzing their meaning: "The Holes of Henry Moore: On the Function of Space in Sculpture" in 1948. And, like Brancusi, Moore renounced academic practices by insisting on direct carving. Charles T. Williams paid homage to Moore's abstract anatomies again and again, including in his own cast "Happies" series of the late 1950s.

Tellingly, Umlauf's title of *Supplication* suggests that his sculpture is still a human form. Umlauf frequently revisited the idea of the supplicant in his oeuvre. His highly sensual figurative interpretation of the *Supplication* theme is just outside this gallery on the terrace. On the other hand, Williams gives his limestone an abstract, mathematical title: *Continuum*. Their choice of titles hint at a fundamental difference between them: Umlauf tended to be more comfortable dealing with the human story and its physical embodiment.

In other realms, too, *C2 Sculptors* demonstrates how their works converge and diverge. Consider Umlauf's animals, among his most endearing and popular works. His *Siamese Cat* (1958) and the later *Otter* (1973) are in this gallery; several other animals are on permanent view in the Garden. Striving to

capture the essence of each creature, Umlauf casts charmingly realistic representations in bronze. Unlike Umlauf's animals, Williams's *Moritz the Elephant* (1962) is a found object construction wittily assembled into a Dada-like pachyderm. Other "put-togethers" (a term coined by Williams's friend Jim Love) are equally lighthearted, with his characteristic titles: *Personage With A Social Problem* (1960) and *George Washington (From Gallery of Notables)* (1962).

Although Williams revisited the human figure time and again, he was content to abandon it entirely. See, for example, his geometrically generated forms like the untitled metal constructions #1 and #2 (1964) and the I-beam constructions (1960s, all are on view in the Garden). In fact Williams eschewed extremely realistic representations, preferring visual substitutions and metaphor. One senses his jocular approach to the sexually liberated climate of the 1960s in *Fun with Freud* and *Earth Gender* (note how this abstract bronze has a male and female side). By contrast, realistic figuration was Umlauf's signature style, the mode he returned to throughout his life. Umlauf manifests female sexuality with traditional indicators: from the symmetrical features, full lips, and flowing hair in *Head Study ("Farrah")*, to the curvaceous, highly polished marble and gold-electroplated torsos on view here.

Williams's prodigious exploration ended with his untimely passing in 1966. Umlauf retired as Professor Emeritus in 1981, and died in 1994. It remains unknown whether the two men ever shared more than a brief greeting at an opening. What is certain is that both dedicated their lives to celebrating the primacy of the three-dimensional form. Fortunately each left an immense sculptural legacy that continues to enhance our understanding of Texas and American art at midcentury.

Katie Robinson Edwards  
UMLAUF Curator



Figure 10: Charles Umlauf, *Otter*, 1973, bronze, City of Austin/Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, 1985.094, photo: Jim Lincoln.





Figure 11. Charles T. Williams, *Mother and Children*, 1953, welded steel, Collection Karl B. Williams.

Figure 12: Charles Umlauf, *Mother and Child (Supplication)*, 1949, alabaster, City of Austin/Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, 1985.041, photo: Jim Lincoln.

Figure 13: Charles Umlauf, *Seated Entertainer*, 1965, bronze, City of Austin/Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, 1985.143, photographer unknown.

Figure 14: Charles T. Williams, *Seated Female Figure*, 1952, welded steel rod, Collection Karl B. Williams.

Front cover: Left: Charles Umlauf, *Family*, 1943, redwood, City of Austin/Umlauf Sculpture Garden & Museum, 1985.11, photo: Jim Lincoln. Right: Charles T. Williams, *Torso #2*, 1949, black walnut, Collection Karl B. Williams, photo: Robert LaPrelle.

Back cover: Charles T. Williams, *The Nile*, 1952, black walnut, Courtesy of a private collection, Austin, TX; photographer unknown.

Henry Moore quotation from "The sculptor speaks," tr. by Daphne Woodward, 1937, in Richard Friedenthal, *Letters of the Great Artists: from Blake to Pollock* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1963: 251).

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# Austin Community Foundation



See Charles T. Williams's *The Nile* at

# UMLAUF sculpture garden & museum

