



Dallas and Fort Worth: Philanthropy and civic pride give birth to major cultural institutions

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DALLAS, Texas – Dallas was founded in 1844 along the Trinity River. Today this river is only navigable by small canoes. Dallas became a commercial center when north-south and east-west railways intersected in the city in 1873. Further boosts to its development came with the discovery of oil in 1930 and the advent of air-conditioning which made the inhospitable hot and humid climate more bearable.

Today its population is 1.3 million while its sister city, Fort Worth, has a population of more than 700,000. The Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area has a total population exceeding 6 million.

Recently I spent time as a visiting professor in the impressive University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas and in my free time, availed myself of the opportunity of exploring the cultural sites of the area. I was fortunate to attend the opening production of Verdi's *Otello* at the new Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House in the Arts Center in Dallas. This ultramodern facility was designed by the British-based firm of Foster and Partners. On the outside there is a canopy which functions as a sun-screen to protect from the intense Texan heat. The interior has a characteristic horse-shoe-style auditorium and the acoustics are superb. With this new *Otello* and a stunning new venue, the Dallas Opera has joined ranks with other major international and national opera companies.

Right next to the new opera house is the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center, a state of the art concert hall designed by famed architect I. M. Pei. This is the home of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Nearby are a series of museums. Pride of place goes to the Nasher Sculptor Center. Designed by architect Renzo Piano, this small museum contains Raymond Nasher's collection of modern art, including works by Calder, de Kooning, Giacometti, Hepworth, Kelly, Matisse, Miro, Moore, Picasso, Rodin, Serra, Maillol and Borofsky. Since this is a large collection, the pieces rotate through the museum and the tastefully designed sculpture garden.



VERDI VENUE: The new Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House in the Dallas Arts Center. (Irving Spitz)

The art district also houses the Dallas Museum of Art which is especially known for its collection of the arts of the ancient Americas, Africa, Indonesia and Southeast Asia. It also has a collection of European and America painting, sculpture and decorative arts. The final museum in the arts district is the Crow Collection of Asian Art. Its exquisite collection is devoted to the art of Japan, China, Tibet, India, Nepal and Southeast Asia.

Situated in another section of the city is the Meadows Museum, which is on the campus of Southern Methodist University. This boasts a collection of classical Spanish painting reputed to be one of the best out-

side Spain. Glossing the walls are marvelous paintings by El Greco, Velazquez, Murillo, Goya, Picasso and Miro. There is also a fine collection of sculptures by 20th century masters including Rodin, Maillol, Giacometti, Moore, Smith and Oldenberg, together with recently acquired sculptures by Calatrava and Plensa.

Despite these enticing museums, the most popular tourist attraction in Dallas is the site of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. It is situated in the former schoolbook depository and its sixth floor served as the alleged perch for the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. The sixth floor has been transformed into a fascinating in-

depth museum chronicling the life and legacy of JFK.

Another astounding experience awaits the visitor who travels to Fort Worth, a short train ride away. At a price of \$2, this ride represented a real bargain. Nevertheless, I was one of the few people in the carriage. Train travel is not the thing in Texas as everyone drives. Several museums are gathered together in the Fort Worth cultural district. Pride of place goes to the Kimball Art Museum. The building, designed by Louis Kahn, opened in 1972 and is a work of art by itself. Conceived as a long, low building with repeated parallel galleries, it makes innovative use of natu-

ral light by means of a plexiglas skylight inserted into every vault. The curatorial policy emphasizes quality over quantity and this exquisite collection comprises only about 350 pieces. The emphasis is on European painting and sculpture and includes masterpieces by Fra Angelico, Duccio, Donatello, Bernini, Velazquez, Cranach, Murillo, Caravaggio and La Tour among many others.

Its most recent acquisition is the first painting by Michelangelo, *The Torment of Saint Anthony*, a work executed in oil and tempera. This is the only Michelangelo painting in a US collection and only one of four easel paintings of the master known to exist.

Adjacent is the Modern Art Museum. Designed by Tadeo Ando, its five pavilions of concrete and glass are surrounded by a reflecting pool. It houses one of the foremost collections of modern and contemporary art in the central US. All modern art movements and styles well represented.

Another major attraction is the Amon Carter museum, a stunning building designed by Philip Johnson. It is devoted to American art with masterpieces from the 19th and 20th centuries, including those of Remington, Russell, Church, Homer, Eakins and Chase as well as works by Davis, Dove, Hartley and O'Keeffe. The museum also houses one of the major collections of American photographs spanning the history of the medium from early daguerreotypes to contemporary digital prints.

Both the arts district in Dallas and the culture district in Fort Worth have become architectural showcases with a total of 6 buildings designed by Pritzker Prize winning architects.

It is astounding that with only two exceptions all the cultural complexes mentioned above were primarily financed by high minded local philanthropic industrialists and civic leaders who clearly take a great pride in their cities. The results speak for themselves.

The writer, emeritus professor of medicine, is an avid traveler and photographer. He frequently writes, reviews and lectures on medical topics, music, art, history and travel. Additional pictures from this as well as other trips can be seen on www.pbphase.com/irvspitz.