



INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST - AND REAL ESTATE TALENT- DAVID ADICKES



RH: Welcome to RED News, David. You have been the Dean of the Houston Art Community for decades now, but most people don't know that you have had a shrewd eye for real estate deals over the years. Before we get into that, though, can you give our readers a summary of your career in painting and sculpture, including your early studies?

David Adickes: Yes...I studied painting in Paris with Fernand Leger, one of the modern biggies, for two years: 1948-50. I returned to Houston and had shows at several galleries and museums, including the Museum of Fine Art. The first big sculpture I did was for real estate developer Joe Russo at his Lyric Center building, The Cellist.

Joe was unsure if he had done the right thing putting this large sculpture up. (I wired it to 'play' classical music for about twelve hours a day.) About the same time, other building owners had put up large expensive sculptures by Miro and Dubuffet, one of which cost \$1 million, so Joe commissioned a Houston poll to see where his The Cellist ranked of these three. It topped the list with 85% approval, so he was happy!

RH: This leads us to your real estate activities. Can you describe your first big deal and how it came about?



DA: I had decided to create three sets of large busts/heads of all the U.S. presidents and I needed a roomy warehouse. Almost by accident, I found an abandoned paint factory in what was then one of the shabbier parts of Houston, on Summer Street. I bought 6.25 acres for \$240,000 on a lease-purchase contract with rent payments going toward principal. The property was tied up with many others around the country in a master bankruptcy proceeding and after five years I heard the title on my warehouse had just cleared so I exercised the option in my lease and I closed the next day!

I subsequently sold about half of the site for what is now a Target store, and eventually sold the residual piece with my warehouse workshop: total sales receipts were about \$5 million. Much of the appreciation in the site came as people discovered 'the presidents' in the large parking lot and before I knew it individuals, couples, and even tour buses were coming in and taking selfies and photos of the presidents. The district became known as 'the art district'.

While I had the warehouse for the production of the presidents, I rented out spaces to other artists, but frankly I was not too demanding to all of them for their rent. But it did establish for the first time the concept in that neighborhood of an incubator for artists. Now developers on Winter Street and elsewhere have established the largest concentration of art studios in the U.S.

RH: Most young Houstonians know you for your giant statue of Sam Houston on I-45 just south of Huntsville, your home town, and your bronze sculpture of George Bush Sr. has stood in a prominent location in Terminal C of the Houston airport named for him. Was the Sam Houston statue a real estate play?

“My secret to a happy life:
Do only what you love to do.”
- David Adickes



DA: Indirectly, yes, but not for me and my donors. Several of us contributed and built the statue and gave it to the City to honor the 200th anniversary of Sam Houston's birth. Today TXDOT is creating a special feeder direct to the base of the statue. The real estate benefit has been to the reputation, businesses, and hotels of the City of Huntsville, which was formerly known primarily for being headquarters for the state prison system. 1,250,000 visitors have registered at the Visitors Center since 1994, not counting the millions who drive by and enjoy the statue without stopping.

RH: Where did you move your art studio when you sold the Summer Street warehouse?

DA: I moved to Nance Street in the Warehouse District and built a 5,000 SF building. TXDOT has plans to condemn it in about two years to build a large overpass, so we will see how that works out.

RH: Can you tell our readers your views about how art increases the value of real estate in a community?

DA: Huntsville is one example. In the Sawyer Street area near my old paint factory studio, ART is all around, including an art store, auction house, studios, and a party venue upstairs in my former studio that rents for as much as \$10,000 per night. It has specialized as a marriage venue for super star athletes (I don't know if you can rent it for half price for a divorce party!)

I currently am leasing my four giant Beatles statues to the Eighth Wonder Brewery and Beer Garden in Eado. I must assume the owners feel these sculptures add value.



Nearby the City has razed a long stretch of Bastrop Street, which will be turned into a mini-Discovery Green for the near East Side. Art will figure prominently in this new park, along with trees and other amenities to create an aesthetic focal point for real estate development.

RH: You are in your nineties and show no signs of slowing down. Can you tell us of any current or future projects and is there a secret to your Fountain of Energy?

DA: People tell me all the time that I should retire, but I checked my tires and I still have 30-40,000 miles on them. But the fork lift I use to move around my giant sculptures needs tires. Does anyone know where I can find some used ones?

And my secret to a happy life: Do only what you love to do. Easy to say, right? Everyone has to make a living, but make that living doing what you truly love. ■