

## Tom Lea Historical Timeline

JULY 11, 1907 – JANUARY 28, 2001

**JULY 11, 1907** Born in El Paso, Texas, to Tom and Zola Utt Lea

**1915-1917** Father is mayor of El Paso during the Mexican Revolution.

**1912-1924** Attends El Paso public schools.

**1924-1926** Studies at the Art Institute of Chicago. Marries fellow art student Nancy Jane Taylor.

**1926-1933** Serves as apprentice to muralist John Warner Norton. Travels to Europe.

**1933-1935** Works in Santa Fe at Laboratory of Anthropology. Illustrates New Mexico Magazine. Paints for Works Progress Administration (WPA). *Conquistadors* and *Old Mesilla* murals for New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Las Cruces, N.M.

**1936** Returns to El Paso. Nancy Lea dies. Centennial murals for Hall of State, Dallas State Fairgrounds. Enters juried competitions for Section of Fine Arts, U.S. Treasury Department. Paints *The Nesters* mural (lost), Ben Franklin Post Office, Washington, D.C. Meets printer Carl Hertzog and writer J. Frank Dobie.

**1937** Paints *The Baptism of Christ* mural, First Baptist Church, El Paso (lost). Competes for San Antonio Post Office murals. Loses competition.

**1938** Paints *Pass of the North* mural in Federal Courthouse, El Paso. Marries Sarah Catherine Dighton of Monticello, Ill. One son, James Dighton.

**1939** Paints mural in Burlington Railroad Station, Lacrosse, Wis. Paints *Back Home, 1865* mural in Pleasant Hill, Mo. Illustrates *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver* and *John C. Duval: First Texas Man of Letters* by J. Frank Dobie. Competes for St. Louis, Mo., Post Office murals. Loses competition.

**1940** Paints *The Stampede* mural in Odesa Post Office. Illustrates *The Longhorns* by J. Frank Dobie.

**1941** Illustrates children's book *Hills of Gold*. Writes and illustrates *Randado*,



designed and printed by Carl Hertzog.

**1941-1946** Paints *Comanches* mural, Seymour, Texas. Awarded Rosenwald Fellowship. Declines fellowship to join *LIFE* magazine as World War II artist correspondent. Travels over 100,000 miles on four tours. Work printed in 10 issues: *Top Sergeant: Bruce Bieber Makes Soldiers out of Citizens* (July 7, 1941); *Soldiers at Work: Tom Lea Catches Their Absorbed Expressions* (April 27, 1942); *Tom Lea Paints the North Atlantic Patrol* (May 25, 1942); *Hornet's Last Day - Tom Lea Paints Death of a Great Carrier* (August 2, 1943); *Sinking of the Wasp* (April 5, 1943); *Tom Lea Aboard the U.S.S. Hornet* (March 22, 1943); *China's War Anniversary* (May 29, 1944); *John Hersey, Three Airmen* (May 29, 1944); *LIFE's Artists Record a World at War* (April 30, 1945); *Peleliu: Tom Lea Paints Island Invasion* (June 11, 1945).

Writes and illustrates *Grizzly from the Coral Sea* and *Peleliu Landing*, designed and printed by Carl Hertzog. Submits *The Shining Plain* to "All-Texas Show" at Dallas Museum of Art. Painting rejected. Travels to Mexico documenting history of beef cattle in the Americas for *LIFE* Magazine. Learns about black fighting cattle.

**1944-1946** Begins work on a novel. Completes painting *Sarah in the Summertime* and gives it to Sarah.

**1947** Writes and illustrates *The Brave Bulls* published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1949). Novel becomes bestseller

and movie starring Mel Ferrer and Miroslava. Paints portrait of Benito Juarez for Pan American Round Table of El Paso (1948). Painting sent to President Harry Truman at Blair House.

**1952-1959** Writes and illustrates *The Wonderful Country* published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1952). Novel becomes bestseller and movie starring Robert Mitchum and Julie London. Writes and illustrates two-volume history of *The King Ranch* (1952-1957). Completes *Southwest* mural for El Paso Public Library with Sarah, a gift to citizens of El Paso (1956). Designs Steuben glass bowl, *Trail Driver* (1958) and stained glass window for entrance of First Presbyterian Church, El Paso (1959). Writes and illustrates *The Primal Yoke*, published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1960).

**1960-1965** Paints and writes about Mexican character Juan Sanchez. Illustrates *Knight in the Sun* for fellow El Pasoan. Book published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1962). Writes and illustrates *The Hands of Cantu*, published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1964). Paints *Ranger Escort West of the Pecos* for Texas Gov. John Connally (1965). Paints portrait of Sam Rayburn for Rayburn Building, Washington, D.C. (1966).

**1967-1968** *Western Beef Cattle: A Series of Eleven Paintings by Tom Lea* published by Encino Press, Austin (1967). Writes and illustrates *A Picture Gallery*, published by Little, Brown and Company, Boston (1968).

**1974** Writes and illustrates *In the Crucible of the Sun*, published by King Ranch, Inc., Kingsville (1974).

**1974-1997** Works as studio painter in El Paso. Records *Tom Lea, An Oral History* with Adair Margo, published by Texas Western Press, El Paso (1995). El Paso Museum of Art establishes Tom Lea Gallery in new museum (1997).

**JANUARY 29, 2001** Tom Lea dies in El Paso. First Lady Laura Bush attends his funeral at First Baptist Church on February 1.

Tom Lea  
INSTITUTE



and the

Smithsonian American Art Museum • El Paso Times • Seymour, Texas, Chamber of Commerce  
El Paso Museum of Art • Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum • General Services Administration  
Ellen Noel Art Museum of the Permian Basin • El Paso Inc. • Humanities Texas  
Library of Congress • University of Texas at El Paso • National Museum of American History  
El Paso Museum of History • United States Postal Service

PRESENT

## The Art of Tom Lea: Preserving Our National Heritage

A case study for preserving New Deal murals in the United States

Wednesday, September 24, 2014  
Smithsonian American Art Museum



This program is supported by Wells Fargo Bank,  
Maureen & Robert Decherd, J.P. & Mary Jon Bryan,  
Betty Ruth Wakefield Haley, and Jack & Evonne Cardwell.

**D**uring a 2013 Tom Lea Month program in Odessa, Texas, the former director of the Ellen Noel Art Museum of the Permian Basin walked into the local U.S. Post Office and saw sprayed Coca-Cola and loose paint on Tom Lea's masterful 1940 mural *Stampede*. Concern about its deterioration led George Jacob to write a letter to the Tom Lea Institute with an expressed desire to have the work restored. That single letter led to this national conference, focusing attention on the importance of New Deal murals across the country, using the murals of Tom Lea as a case study. A series of panel discussions address the importance of preserving New Deal murals not only for the sake of regional heritage, but also for the sake of international understanding.

9:00 a.m.

## Welcome



**Betsy Broun**  
Director, Smithsonian  
American Art Museum



**Adair Margo,**  
Past Chairman, President's  
Committee on the Arts  
and Humanities;  
and President,  
the Tom Lea Institute



**The Honorable  
John Cornyn**  
United States Senator  
from Texas

9:15 – 10:30 a.m.

## Does Regional Heritage Matter?

*The meaning of New Deal murals  
to the American people and their future*

MODERATOR AND PRESENTERS:



**Anne Imelda Radice,**  
Past Chairman,  
Institute of Museum  
and Library Services;  
and Director,  
National Folk Art Museum



**Jennifer Gibson,**  
Director,  
Art in Architecture  
and Fine Arts,  
U.S. General Services  
Commission



**George Jacob,**  
Former Executive Director,  
Ellen Noel Art Museum  
of the Permian Basin



**Daniel Delahaye,**  
Federal Preservation Officer,  
U.S. Postal Service



**John Gray,**  
Director, National Museum  
of American History



**Lawrence L. Reger,**  
President,  
Heritage Preservation



**Virginia Mecklenburg,**  
Chief Curator,  
Smithsonian  
American Art Museum

*Questions & Break*



*Comanches*, mural, 1942. Oil on canvas, 5' X 13'17". U.S. Post Office, Seymour, Texas. Commissioned through the Section of Fine Arts, 1934-1943. Fine Arts Collection, U.S. General Services Administration.

11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

## Do Regional Murals Communicate to the World?

*Tom Lea, a case study*

MODERATOR AND PRESENTERS:



**James Billington,**  
Librarian of Congress



**Luciano Cheles,**  
Art Historian,  
University of Poitiers, France;  
and Smithsonian  
Senior Fellow 2006-2007



**Sabiha Al Khemir,**  
Islamic Scholar;  
and Senior Advisor,  
Islamic Art,  
Dallas Museum of Art



**Julia Bussinger,**  
Director,  
El Paso Museum  
of History

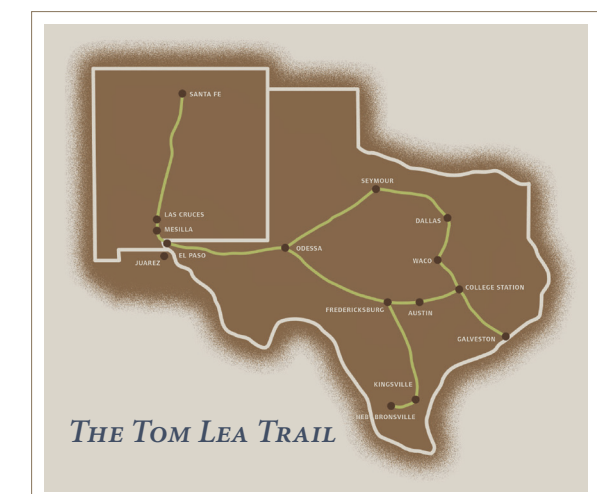
*Questions*

12:30 – 1:00 p.m.

## Transcending Texas: The Tom Lea Trail



**Adair Margo,**  
Past Chairman, President's Committee  
on the Arts and Humanities;  
and President, the Tom Lea Institute



### ON THE COVER:

*Stampede*, mural, 1940. Oil on canvas, 5½ x 16 feet.  
U.S. Post Office, Odessa, Texas.  
Commissioned through the Section of Fine Arts, 1934-1943.  
Fine Arts Collection, U.S. General Services Administration.