

# Dorothy Antoinette "Toni" LaSelle (1901 - 2002)

*works from 1947-1964*



Toni LaSelle at the beach in Provincetown, MA in the summer of 1947  
Image courtesy of the TWU Woman's Collection, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX

Although Texas modernist Dorothy Antoinette "Toni" LaSelle, (b. 1901, Beatrice, NE–d. 2002, Denton, TX) grew up in the American Midwest far from modern cultural centers, she was nevertheless a voracious and intuitive student of modernism, profoundly influenced by images of Post-Impressionism and Cubism she saw in university (BA, Nebraska Wesleyan, 1923). LaSelle wrote her Master's thesis in art history (University of Chicago, 1926) on the indigenous masks of New Guinea in the Field Museum collection, due to the masks' influence on the development of Cubism in Paris. After graduating, she traveled to Europe and spent six months studying in England, Italy, and France.

From 1928–1972, she lived in Denton, Texas, and taught art and design at what is now known as Texas Woman's University, all the while seeking knowledge of and exposure to the burgeoning concepts and processes of modernism. During sabbaticals and summers, LaSelle sought out teachers and mentors, the most influential being European émigrés Hans Hofmann and László Moholy-Nagy. She became an acknowledged expert on the new trends in art in her region, periodically giving museum lectures on Hofmann, Mondrian as well as other European artists at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (now the Dallas Museum of Art).

We are pleased to present a selection of work from LaSelle's most active decades, the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s for the 2024 Texas Art Fair.

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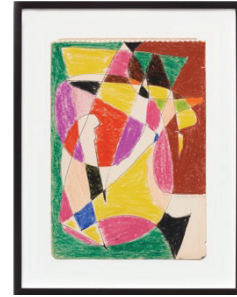
## LaSelle in 1946



*Space Movements, Still Life*, 1946  
oil on canvas, vintage frame  
24 x 17 3/4 in, 24 3/4 x 18 5/8 in framed



*Early Constructions no. 21*, 1946  
ink and Cray-Pas (oil pastel) on paper  
14 x 9 3/4 in, 18 3/8 x 14 1/4 x 1 5/8 in framed



*Sky + Sea / Nick's Wharf*, 1946  
ink and Cray-Pas (oil pastel) on paper  
14 x 9 3/4 in, 18 3/8 x 14 1/4 x 1 5/8 in framed



*Sky and Sea*, 1946  
ink and Cray-Pas (oil pastel) on paper  
14 x 9 3/4 in, 18 3/8 x 14 1/4 x 1 5/8 in framed

The five works on view from 1946 show us LaSelle's acute understanding and absorption of developments in the 1940s art world. In particular, we see her use of lyrical abstraction and biomorphic Surrealism. Biomorphically Surrealism was the dominant style in the 1940s that many young artists were responding to or addressing in their own practices. LaSelle visited New York often in the 1940s and very likely visited Peggy Guggenheim's "Art of this Century," the gallery that showed the work of Surrealists, including Jean Arp, Roberto Matta, Max Ernst and others. "Art of this Century" opened in 1942; LaSelle's first visit to New York came in 1944, when she spent the spring of that year studying with Hans Hofmann, one of the most important teachers of modernism.

In the spring of 1948, LaSelle had a solo exhibition of drawings at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (now the Dallas Museum of Art). That summer, she saw an exhibition of work by Pierre Bonnard at the Museum of Modern Art, NY, on her way to Provincetown.

LaSelle's practice included creating individual, finished and signed works within spiral bound notebooks. In her lifetime, she tore sheets out to exhibit the drawings, and these works have been torn from the original notebook, presumably by the artist, although we do not know if they were ever exhibited in her lifetime.

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## The 1950s



*Untitled*, 1956  
charcoal on paper  
25 x 19 in, 30 1/2 x 24 1/4 x 1 3/4 in framed



*Theme 1-C*, 1952  
oil on canvas, vintage frame  
44 x 25 in, 44 1/2 x 25 3/4 in framed



*3 Soper St no. 10*, 1953  
ink and watercolor on paper  
11 x 14 in , 15 1/2 x 18 1/2 in framed



*3 Soper St no. 4*, 1953  
ink and watercolor on paper  
11 x 14 in , 15 1/2 x 18 1/2 in framed

The 1950s saw LaSelle with increased recognition for her work, beginning with a 1950 exhibition in New York at Rose Fried Gallery, which was favorably reviewed in the New York Times. Unfortunately, the gallerist told Toni that her clients did not buy the work of women and that exhibition became her only solo show in a commercial gallery in New York. Each summer, LaSelle decamped from Denton, TX to Provincetown, MA where she studied at Hans Hofmann's summer school. She participated in group exhibitions at the Provincetown Art Association and at various locales around the Dallas region.

In 1959, the Fort Worth Art Association (the precursor to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth) mounted a retrospective exhibition, which included 25 paintings and 42 works on paper., spanning 1948-1957; *Theme 1-C*, presented here, was included. With a forward written by her mentor Hans Hofmann, this exhibition was a highpoint in her career.

As exemplified by the four works on view, by the 1950s, LaSelle focused on a rich, geometric abstraction, utilizing oil, charcoal or watercolor. The space presented in each work is resolutely flat, but there is a lushness to her mark making.

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## The 1960s



*Summer 1964 III, 1964*  
oil on canvas  
33 x 33 in, 33 3/4 x 33 3/4 in framed



*Etudes for White no. 6, 1964*  
Cray-pas (oil pastel) on paper  
14 x 11 in, 18 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 1 5/8 in framed



*Etudes for White no. 7, 1964*  
Cray-pas (oil pastel) on paper  
14 x 11 in, 18 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 1 5/8 in framed

By the 1960s, LaSelle's canvas and works on paper are lighter, more sparse, and focus on the perceived visual tension between the shapes in her compositions. She increasingly turned to oil pastel (cray-pas) as her primary drawing medium, producing a prodigious number of expressive compositions in the mid-1960s through early 1970s. She focused on simple geometric shapes, the circle, triangle and square, and their relationship to one another, with bold, high key colors. It was also in the 1960s when she began experimenting with tape to define or outline geometric shapes, resulting in the most hard-edge compositions of her career. All of these works show her fine-tuned attention to color and space.

LaSelle had a solo gallery exhibition at the well-regarded New Arts Gallery in Houston in 1963, as well as a solo exhibition at the Elder Gallery, at Nebraska Wesleyan, her alma mater, in 1967. Additionally, she participated in a number of group exhibitions, in Dallas, Fort Worth, and a few locations outside of Texas during this time. Additionally, LaSelle presented a number of lectures at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (now the Dallas Museum of Art) on Mondrian, Picasso, DuBuffet, and the Sidney Janis Collection, as part of programming surrounding these exhibitions.

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