

Local Culture

Art Valet: A Tribute to Carolyn “Bertrand” Hodges

Twenty-one years ago, I met Carolyn “Bertrand” Hodges, a then 77-year-old artist with a sharp mind and timeless, unassuming style. Despite scoliosis and small stature, she moved with speed and purpose, her intense gaze—undimmed by a lazy eye—leaving a lasting impression. At my fledgling Houston art market, she handed me a blue folder stuffed with her bold proposal for an art community of studios, workshops, galleries, and sculpture gardens, a vision she’d pitched to the City Council. Entrusting this to a stranger like me, she vanished as quickly as she arrived, her walker leading the way.

Over the next decade, Miss Hodges popped by the market now and then, engaging artists with her questions and showing her work on one First Saturday. Her unwavering passion for art left an indelible mark, embodying a spirit both fiercely independent and deeply inspiring. Apparently, Miss Carolyn, as I began calling her, made unannounced visits to galleries, studios, museums, art stores, coffee shops, and anywhere sweets were sold. I just happened to get her attention through my market.

Carolyn Ellen Hodges, who used her grandmother’s maiden name, Bertrand, as her art name—Carolyn Bertrand Hodges or often just Carolyn Bertrand—passed away on Saturday, April 26, 2025. Born on January 18, 1927, in Houston, Texas, to Lillie Fitzsimmons and Charles Belford Hodges, she was predeceased by her parents and siblings, Charles Belford Hodges Jr. and Louise Edwina Hodges McEwen. She graduated from Mirabeau B. Lamar High School in 1944, leaving behind nephews Ed, Dale (deceased), and Bob; nieces Diane, Gayle, and Linda; and many grandchildren and grand-nephews.

Nephew Ed McEwen wrote about his relationship with his aunt, capturing the intensity of her passion for contemporary art, which many



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friends experienced.

“Carolyn corresponded with me in my 20s and 30s, sharing our interest in metaphysics, sparked by Edgar Cayce readings she introduced me to,” McEwen wrote. “She had a connection to an A.R.E. (Cayce) study group in New York City and later embraced Buddhism, discussing it eagerly. A ‘starving artist,’ she lived for her art, working part-time jobs but rarely mentioning practical concerns. Her unworldly nature and pursuit of her artistic vision, shared through letters, left a lasting impression.”

Miss Carolyn told me she lived in NYC for a time but never mentioned A.R.E., the Association for Research and Enlightenment, founded by Edgar Cayce to study metaphysics.

Miss Carolyn’s passion for art touched many friends. David M. Behrman, an artist who met her around 2021, joined her most Wednesdays for visits to galleries, museums, coffee shops, or restaurants, sharing her love for culture. Recently, he accompanied her to doctor’s appointments.

Carrie Olsen, an accomplished Houston sculptor and featured in Art Valet in October 2020, has been a long-time friend to Carolyn. We have had many light-hearted discussions about our passionate friend.

Houston’s art community embraced Carolyn’s vision. Valentina Atkinson, owner of Serrano Gallery, a Houston art space, hosted her solo exhibit My Sky Pie Wish in 2019, followed by her final show at Urban Eats in 2023, supported by Levi Rollins and Eric Munoz. Rebecca Sanders and Susan Shrum, then of Happy

Fatz, hosted a 2015 show where many artists met her. Andrew Durham, owner of Andrew Durham Gallery, recently encouraged her, uplifting her spirit.

Nicky (last name unknown), Miss Carolyn’s most recent caregiver from the First Ward, navigated her fierce independence. The two of them gave me quite the history lesson on the recently gentrified area.

Recalling that blue folder, it was poignant when Miss Carolyn, from her nursing home bed, mentioned a briefcase for me at her apartment. I’ve only peeked inside, but I



Submitted photos
(RIGHT) Miss Carolyn poses at First Saturday Arts Market, photographed by artist C.S. Ellington. (LEFT) Carolyn E. Hodges in an undated photo by Vincent Price.



Photo courtesy of Gayle McEwen Bricker
Aunt Carolyn with nephews and niece Gayle.

can tell you this: our writing collaboration ain’t over yet.

“I can’t be like those people (her age) just sitting around. That’s why I’ve lived so long—I push myself to keep going,” Miss Carolyn told me once.

She lived on her terms, never missing a gallery, artist, or sweet shop.

Thank you for being such an incredible friend and inspiration to me and so many others, Miss Carolyn. Though she argued with me about it, she’ll be remembered for a long time. May her memory be a blessing.

Thank you Gayle Bricker



Submitted photos
A note, and the rest is silence, ink on board, by Carolyn Bertrand Hodges

and Ed McEwen for your contributions, more so for showing friends of Miss Carolyn a side we never met: Aunt Carolyn!

No public service is scheduled. I’ll keep you posted. You can follow this webpage I set up for Miss Carolyn’s art and, now,

her legacy at www.carolynbertrandhodgesart.com. I’ll update it with news clippings and the past articles in The Leader.

Cohen is an artist and founder of the First Saturday Arts Market. Visit his website at ArtValet.com.

Goats are baaack at the Houston Arboretum to mow the woodland understory starting May 7

COMMUNITY REPORTS

Public is welcome to come and view the goats as they work

Everyone’s favorite ruminants, the goats from Rent-a-Ruminant Texas, return to

Houston Arboretum & Nature Center on Wednesday, May 7, for nearly two weeks to clear out the dense thicket of both native and invasive vegetation in two parts of the woodland area. The goats will start between the Display Walk, 610 Parking Loop, and Ravine

Trail, and after the first week they will move to their second grazing location along the Inner Loop between the Muscadine and South Meadow Trails. The two sections where the goats will work cover almost 7 acres of land.

The popular animals last hit town in May 2024 when they grazed on the vegetation and invasive species around the Meadow area. This will be their sixth visit, with the first being in 2020. Approximately 150 goats will be chewing away under the direction of Rent-a-Ruminant owners Kyle and Carolyn Carr.

The public is welcome to view the goats at work during the time they are there, although the Arboretum staff asks that guests do not touch,

engage with, or feed the animals, for the safety of the animals and people. The goats will be switching locations halfway through their stay at the Arboretum. Visit houstonarboretum.org/event/goats-at-the-arboretum for a map of the two areas.

“The goats are targeting dense underbrush, including both invasive and aggressive natural species, in our woodland areas to simulate native herbivores,” says Stephen Benigno, Conservation Director for the Arboretum. “Goats are browsers, meaning they prefer leaves and twigs from woody vegetation such as trees, shrubs, and vines. Their eating habits are similar to deer, and they will create a “browse line” that will im-

prove visibility, allow sunlight to reach the forest floor, and enhance understory diversity.”

“You can’t argue with success,” says Debbie Markey, Houston Arboretum’s Executive Director. The Rent-a-Ruminant goats have been a huge asset in clearing certain unwanted species at the Arboretum all without demanding much staff time or effort. Parents and kids especially like to come out and watch the goats in action.”

Rent-a-Ruminant Texas provides a workable alternative to traditional land clearing, chemicals, or commercial mowing. The goats are effective at reducing brush overgrowth, green briars, poison ivy, ragweed, and other undesirable plant spe-

cies. The Carrs operate out of a ranch in Brownwood, Texas and have nearly 250 goats in their herd, about half of which travel with them throughout the state to provide natural mowing services. The goats even have names!

The Houston Arboretum is open daily from 7 a.m. to dusk. Parking is \$6, and it is free on Thursdays and free every day for Arboretum members. Guests can enter at 4501 Woodway Dr. or at 120 West Loop North off of Interstate 610.

To learn more about the Arboretum, please visit houstonarboretum.org. You can also get more information by calling the Houston Arboretum at 713-681-8433.

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Public Notice
The Consulate General of Saudi Arabia in Houston is selling the following vehicles:

- 1- Mercedes Benz ML350 Black (2014 / Miles: 106225)
- 2- Toyota Highlander Silver (2014 / Miles: 131977)
- 3- Toyota Camry Silver (2014 / Miles: 71846)
- 4- Ford Explorer Gray (2014 / Miles: 134430)

All Purchase Orders must be sent to the Saudi Consulate Address: 5718 Westheimer Rd., Suite 1500, Houston, TX 77057 or email us at: ustxcon@mofa.gov.sa. Anyone interested may inspect the vehicles Monday 05/05/2025 to Thursday 05/08/2025 from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM. Please contact us at 832-520-1186.

PUBLIC NOTICE: Plumbers Local Union No. 68 Community Improvement Fund, which is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt charitable organization, is opening the fund's records for public inspection at 502 Link Road in Houston, Texas. Interested parties may review the records during the hours of 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. Monday - Friday.