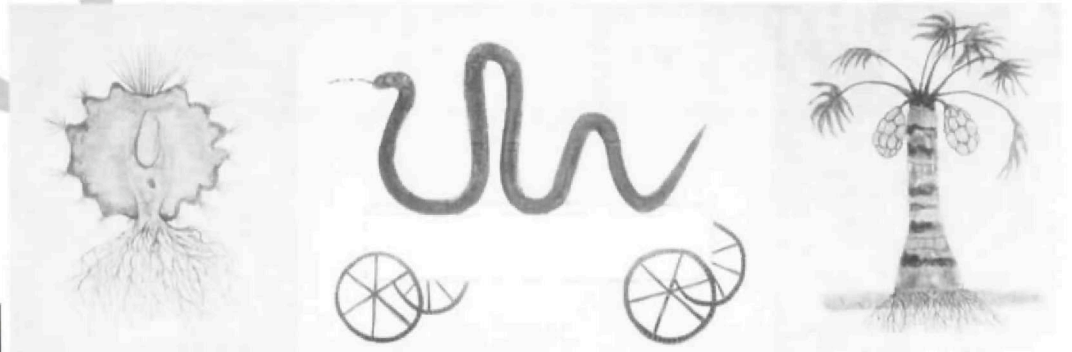


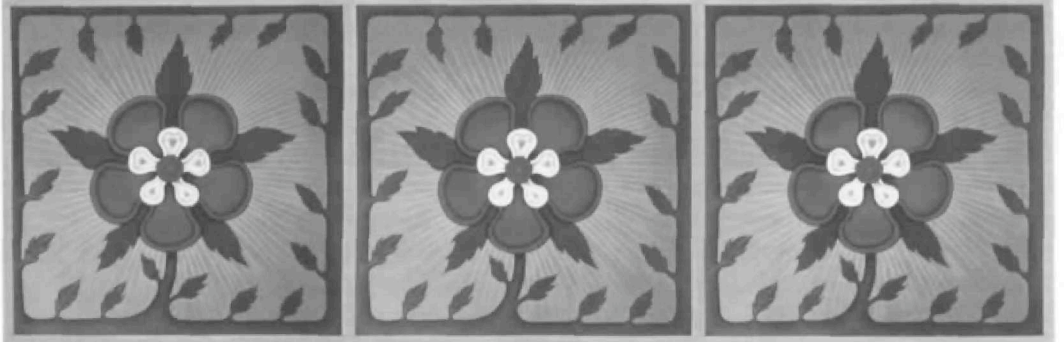
CITELINES



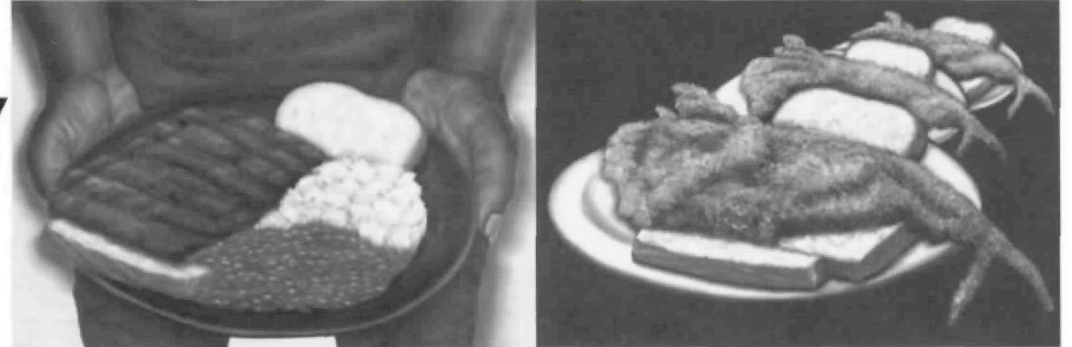
SIGNS OF THE TIMES



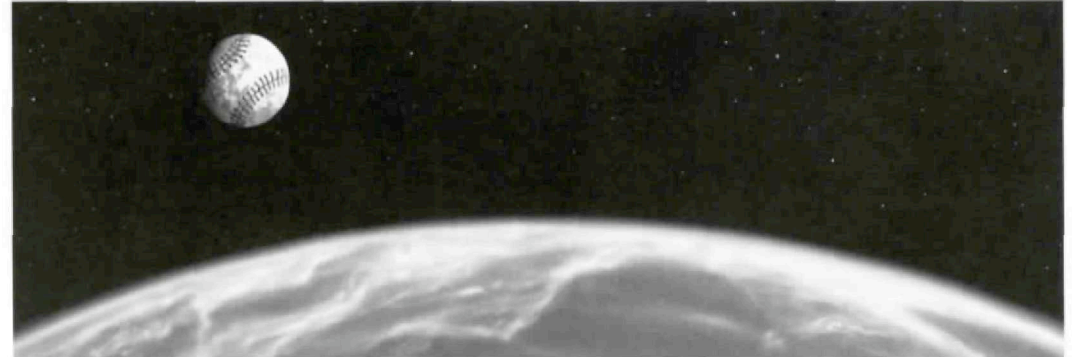
St. Joseph's Parkway near Crawford. Isabelle Scurry Chapman, artist.



St. Joseph's Parkway near Austin. Andy Feehan, artist.



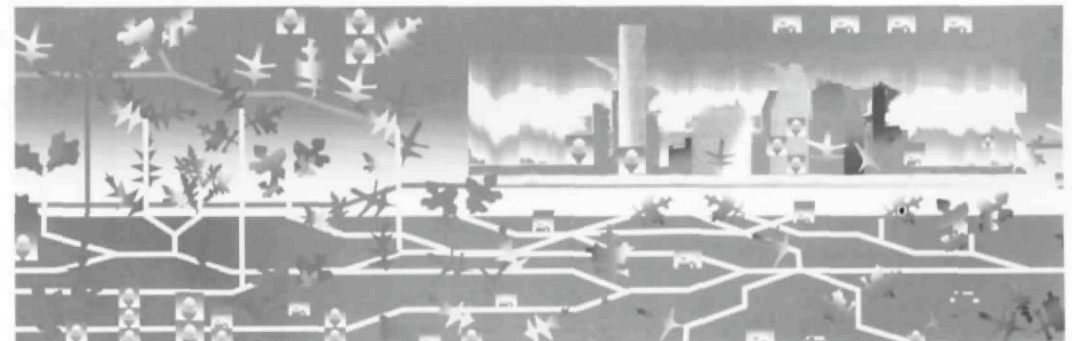
St. Joseph's Parkway near Fannin. Wanda Tinsely, artist.



Crawford near (not surprisingly) Enron Field. David Lozano, artist.



Milam near Franklin. Thomas Hughen, artist.



Congress near Louisiana. Richard Glen Smith, artist.



The postcard from Houston (top of page) was the first Wayfinding art to be put in place. By Kelly Joe Klaasmeyer, it can be seen on a sign on Texas near Milam. Above, a Wayfinding sign seen from the front, where the directional panels are located.



Crawford near Preston. Zita Giraldo Lang, artist.



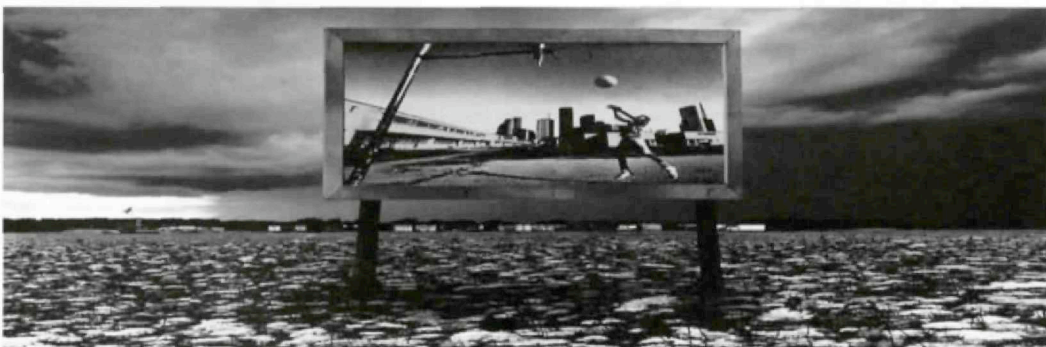
Jefferson near Main. Willie Moe (Moore), artist.



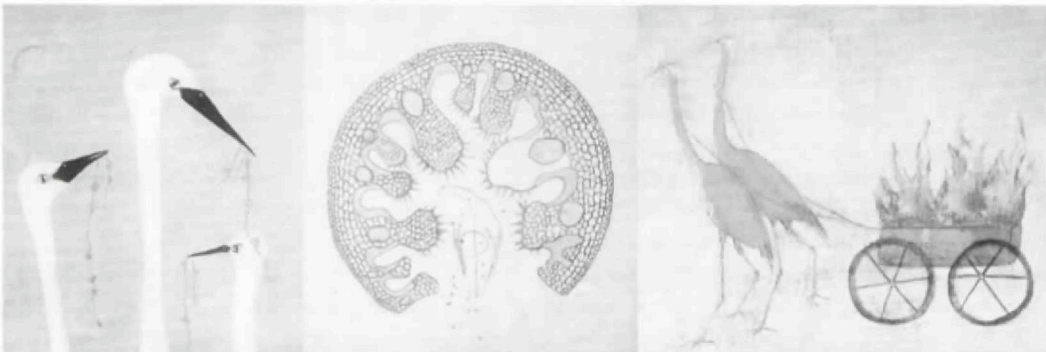
Jefferson near Austin. Bonnie Lombourn, artist.



Smith near Congress. Charles Mary Kubricht, artist.



St. Joseph's Parkway near Milam. James Nakagawa, artist.



Smith near Prairie. Isabelle Scurry Chapman, artist.

It began as something practical, then became something artistic. And then, as often happens, it turned into something controversial.

Still, despite some last minute problems, just as Enron Field was getting ready to open, a baker's dozen of art-enhanced directional signs went up downtown. Part of the Downtown Management District's \$1 million Wayfinding Project, the signs were erected along St. Joseph's Parkway, Milam, Congress, Smith, Jefferson, and Texas. Five feet tall and with a 15-foot cantilever over the street, the signs have three directional panels on one side pointing the way to such destinations as Market Square, the East End, or the Convention Center. On the other side are billboard-sized pieces of art.

It is, says Debbie McNulty, who helped coordinate the project for the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County, a unique way to mix public art with public information. Though other cities have incorporated art into their directional signs, none have done it on quite this scale. The very size of the art makes it stand out, both literally and figuratively.

But it was the size that disturbed some members of Scenic Houston when, in early January, the very first of the signs, sporting a postcard inspired "Greetings from Houston" design by artist Kelly Jo Klaasmeyer, was installed near the intersection of Texas and Milam. Though Anita Brown, Scenic Houston's executive director, says that her group never objected to the idea of the signs, they felt that they were too big for their surroundings. "What we wanted," she says, "was to find something that works aesthetically with the Texas Avenue project."

Part of the problem, admits Guy Hagstette, director of capital projects and planning for the Downtown Management District, is that his group didn't do a good enough job letting the people at Scenic Houston know what the signs would ultimately look like. In the beginning, the signs were intended to be somewhat smaller, and to be placed along Preston rather than Texas. That, at least, was the plan in 1993, when the Wayfinding Project got off the ground. Originally, the Wayfinding Project was intended only to help direct people around downtown with uniform signage. But early on it was decided to augment the signs with art. Then, as the construction of Enron Field cut off Preston at the end, it was decided to move the signs that were to go on Preston over to Texas.

That move caught Scenic Houston by surprise. In response to their complaint that the art-enhanced signs didn't fit with other redevelopment being done on the Texas, the Downtown Management District decided to hold off installing three other such signs that had been planned for the street. The hope had been to have 16 signs up by the time the new baseball stadium began luring fans downtown. Instead, only 13 were erected, and those, Hagstette says, were placed "on the periphery of downtown, where the environment isn't as sensitive." (The art for the signs that were put into place can be seen on this and the preceding page.)

So what's next? Plans for the Wayfinding Project had called for some 29 signs to be installed downtown by the end of the year. Those signs will still be erected, Hagstette says, but they may be smaller than earlier envisioned. The Downtown Management District and Scenic Houston have agreed to test two other versions of the signs, both of them two panels big rather than three, with one version hanging horizontally over the street, and the other stacking its panels vertically.

Ultimately, however, art-backed directional signs will be spread through much of downtown, says Hagstette. "This approach is pretty much new, and I think it's pretty clever," he notes. "We weren't prepared for the criticism, but overall, I think people will appreciate it." — Mitchell J. Shields