

TEXAS PLACES



Cite

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O F HOUSTON

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OverCite:
Regarding the El Portal Competition in Laredo (*Cite* 38, p. 27), images of the first and second place winners were reversed.

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Near Riviera Beach. Photo by Barrie Scardino, 1997



Odessa 1936. Photo by Dorothea Lang, courtesy: Library of Congress



The myth that everything in Texas is bigger than life begins with the land, some 260,000 square miles of it, forming an olympian stage where big dreams meet up with hard scrabble realities. In popular images Texas is a state of contrasts: sprawling, scrubby plains spiked with oil derricks and populated by cattle driven along by wizened cowpokes, or clustered modern office towers where urban cowboys work a deal. To urbanized Texans, the contrast might be between city places and no place.

The reality is not so simple. In this issue of *Cite* we set out to explore the places in between — the vast rural landscape studded with small, sleepy towns, the edges, and the thin lines of transportation that sew it all together. This is territory where time moves sluggishly as the past gently collides with the future, and where hopes and aspirations and struggles to make a place (at a bigger, more abstract scale this becomes the stuff of allegories) are miniaturized in little dramas. The concept of the authentic, the original, may be disappearing from the landscape, rudely shoved aside and buried under so much universal, corporate newness. But it is not all gone. Maybe you just have to look a little harder to see it.

J.B. Jackson, the inveterate explorer of American places, described the landscape as "a rich and beautiful book . . . always open before us." It is a book that is continually being written, revised, and edited. As it evolves, the results are often distorted and in conflict, but the places that emerge from this struggle to reinvent the *genius loci* still remain the best evidence of how we learn to dwell. The myths about smaller and simpler places can be deceptive; as Colin Rowe and John Hejduk, who in their Texas Ranger days came to admire the clarity and order of the small courthouse towns in Texas, put it, "How much of the present susceptibility to these towns is merely nostalgic, how much is pure hallucination, and how much corresponds to reality is difficult to judge."

Bruce C. Webb and Nonya Grenader, guest editors