

PRESS RELEASE
March 18, 2026



**TRUE NORTH 2026 OPENS—
sculpture + heights blvd**

- 8 sculptures by Texas artists along Heights Boulevard, Houston, Texas
- The project's 13th installation
- On exhibit March to December, 2026
- Open to the public

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A large banner with a black background. On the left, a pink hand is shown holding a pencil, with the pencil tip pointing towards the text. The text "TRUE NORTH 2026" is written in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below the banner, eight individual photographs of sculptures are arranged in two rows of four. Each photo is accompanied by a caption identifying the artwork and the artist's name.

**TRUE NORTH
2026**

*"Mantis with Saddle"
Hans Molzberger*

**"Mantis with Saddle"
Hans Molzberger**

**"Folly in the Park"
Suzette Mouchaty**

**"beyond reach"
Jimmy Phillips**

**"Bloom"
Roger Colombik**

**"Bucket Corral"
Mark Nelson**

**"Goddard Nomad V"
Robbie Barber**

**"Sanctuary"
Jim Robertson**

**"Migrations"
Keith Crane/Damon Thomas**

Sculpture photos (Kolanowski Studio).

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/gexh1su8l39dvsjt9lkeg/AH8bnBUfrcSHLa9WvoSdyv4?rlk=9a5fepheidsglej8o71bvudhat&e=2&st=sft92q5a&dl=0>

Sculpture opening.

True North unveils its 13th installation along Heights Boulevard with eight incredible new works of sculpture by these gifted Texas artists.

Robbie Barber of Waco gives us “Goddard Nomad V,” an out-of-this-world sculpture he created in 1991 from salvaged parts—including rocket thrusters originating from from White Sands Missile Range—while in artist residency in Roswell, New Mexico. Barber draws inspiration from his travels through rural America and from rocketry—focusing on the work of Robert Goddard, considered the father of modern rocketry.

Roger Colombik of Wimberley arrives with the luminous and resilient “Bloom.” Made of stainless steel weld, it is one of a sculpture series that evolved from the artist’s experience during and after the 2022 ice storm that was particularly devastating to the Texas Hill Country’s cedar and oak groves.

Keith Crane & Damon Thomas, both of Houston [Heights], have installed a contemporary work of oxidized steel and hand-built clay. Their meditative sculpture, “Migrations,” arrives first with a flock of bright red birds...while we await new and exciting inhabitants as the seasons change. Stay tuned....

Hans Molzberger of Houston, Texas, and Hilmsen, Germany, reconstructs the behemoth and deadly serious “Mantis with Saddle, made of steel and found objects, which has traversed the sea from Germany for True North 2026. Molzberger tells us, “The praying mantis survives through invisibility. Through patience. Through precision. It disappears into its surroundings. It becomes absence. And then—it waits. Motionless. Silent. Alert.”

Suzette Mouchaty of Houston offers us “Folly in the Park: The Famous Adventure of the Enchanted Pole and Some Other Things Worth Knowing,” where she has magnified a sea creature so tiny as to be invisible into an imposing and charismatic form. Mouchaty says, “Nature inspires awe, that sense of wonderment that brings us into the moment and helps us know our humanity.”

For his NYU Fellowship, Houston [Heights] artist **Mark Nelson** established and ran a public art project called GLASSfreeGROUNDS—creating 36 workshops held over time at City parks where children and adult participants gathered one ton of broken glass and painted and decorated a thousand GfG Art Buckets. His True North installation “MARBLEOUS GfG BUCKET CORRAL” is composed of 80 of these buckets, inviting us to study each bucket’s unique and whimsical artwork and reflect upon the dangerous issue of glass usage and litter in public spaces.

Houston artist **James D. Phillips** has created “beyond reach”—made of carved tree remnants and pine planks—playfully depicting a giraffe, stretching hopefully for the sustenance of a nearby tree. Elements of the work—its head, tail and mane—represent the artist’s iconic woodcarvings, and the body’s composition reminds us of an instantly recognizable and nostalgic assembly of popsicle sticks.

Jim Robertson of Trinity follows his lifelong passion for architecture with “Sanctuary,” a creative mashup of architectural icons—Egyptian pyramids, Gothic pointed arches and towering minarets. With its almost ghostly translucence, the artist has chosen bright teal to shimmer against its natural background.

About True North

Named for the compass bearing of Heights Boulevard, True North installed its first exhibition in 2014—a temporary outdoor public art installation, free and open to the public, on eight designated sites along the winding foot trails of that boulevard’s beautifully forested esplanade. True North is organized by an all-volunteer team and works in cooperation with the City of Houston Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments. The Houston Heights Association is True North’s nonprofit/fiscal sponsor/partner. Team members behind the sculpture project are Donna Bennett, Gus Kopriva, Dean Ruck, Chris Silkwood and Kelly Simmons—all longtime community- and arts-advocates. The project is underwritten entirely through private donations from individuals, businesses and professionals in the community and beyond who wish to support the popular public art project and its ongoing success.

A wide range of eight sculptures is chosen each year—based on media, theme, color and visibility—and the works remain in place for a nine-month permitted period from March to December. With this 13th installation, True North has exhibited over 100 unique sculptures by established and emerging Texas artists. Large enough in scale to be seen from passing vehicles and bicycles, with more intimate views on foot, True North sculptures are seen by hundreds of thousands of residents and visitors to the Houston Heights each year.

Heights Boulevard’s esplanade is a designated City of Houston park which runs directly through the heart of Houston Heights. Originally patterned after Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, the historic boulevard’s 60-foot-wide esplanade was the site of Houston’s first electrified streetcar system, ferrying Houston Heights residents the “considerable distance” of four miles to the big city. Fast forward and thanks to the Houston Heights Association and extensive community activism, volunteerism and fundraising over the years, the esplanade is now home to show-stopping architectural gardens, pavilions, old-growth treescapes and one of the most popular foot trails in Houston.

Social Media/Website

[Facebook](#) @TrueNorthHeightsBlvd

[Instagram](#) @truenorthheightsblvd

[Website](#) www.truenorthheightsblvd.com

True North Mission Statement

True North's mission is to organize and install a temporary public sculpture exhibition on the esplanade of Heights Boulevard – representative of works by prominent and emerging Texas artists – to advance the accessibility, understanding and enjoyment of contemporary art for the community and its visitors.

2026 UNDERWRITERS

NOGUCHI

HOTEL DAPHNE

MIRÓ



**JUNE & STEVE
BARTH**



CALDER

Donna & Jim Bennett – Jerred & Rita Blanchard – Braun Enterprises – Tyri & David Centanni – Craft Chu PLLC – District Dental, Dr. Andres & Mrs. Erin Villaseñor – Diane & Mike Easley – ENGIE – EQ HEIGHTS/ ELEVATE HUMANITY, Inc. – Eye to Eye, Dr. Michelle Hung & Mr. Robert W. Raney III – Linda & Simon Eyles – The Anne Caroline Fant Charitable Fund – Greenwood King Properties – Robert J. Killian – Sue & Ken Korthauer – Dion and Lisa Laurent – Lucas Craftsmanship Inc. – Merritt M. Lutz – Laura Menefee & Paula Johnson – Morris Strategic Investments, LLC – MouerHuston PLLC – Shunney & Shaji Nair – PrimeWay Federal Credit Union – Cathy & Brian Richard – Chris Silkwood & Gary Milnarich – Kelly Simmons & Keith Crane – Carol & Buddy Welter

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True North 2026

Artist Bios

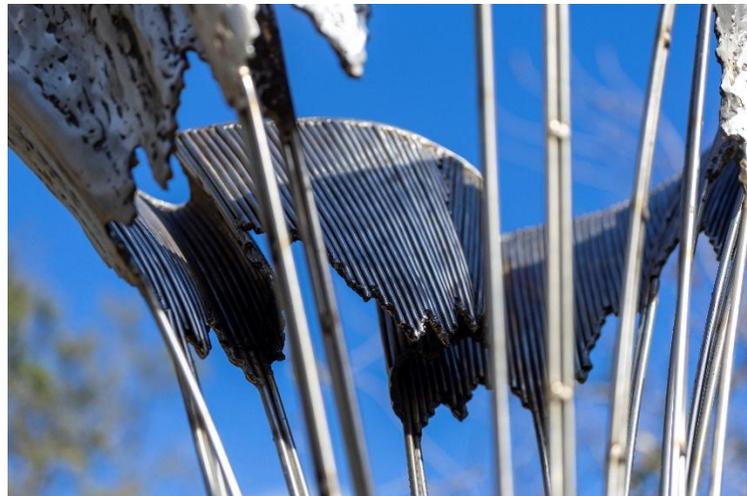
Robbie Barber, Waco “Goddard Nomad V”

As Professor of Art at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, **Robbie Barber** has taught Sculpture since 2000. His head-turning creation for True North in 2016 was titled “Stroll in the Park”—an oversized baby carriage made with welded steel and parts from an old trailer home. Barber says, “My architecture-related sculptures are influenced by my travels through rural America. I am attracted to the strong visual character of this country’s vernacular architecture. Vintage lap-board houses, mobile homes and agriculture-related structures have become regional icons that ultimately tell the stories of their inhabitants and builders. I often fuse these influences to create hybrid objects of fantasy, the results of which are often humorous, ironic or visually poetic in nature.” An example is this year’s sculpture, “**Goddard Nomad V**”—an out-of-this-world sculpture depicting a mobile home that has been transformed into a spacecraft of dubious reliability. The work is an homage to Robert Goddard—considered the father of modern rocketry—an American who invented the liquid propelled rocket by hand in the 1930s, leading to the Saturn V rockets that took us to the moon. After salvaging rocket thrusters previously used at the nearby White Sands Missile Range, Barber conceptualized and created the sculpture in 1991 during an artist residency in Roswell, New Mexico.



ROGER COLOMBIK, Wimberley “Bloom”

Born and raised in Chicago, that City’s immense sculptural presence helped to define an understanding of the relationship between artist, community and public spaces for **Roger Colombik**. He also counts three mentors for building the foundation for his life in the arts and career in academia: Elliot Balter, a dynamic high school art teacher, Roger Blakley, a longtime professor at the School of Art and Design at University of Illinois, and Thomas Walsh, a director of the graduate sculpture program at Southern Illinois University. Colombik’s own distinguished 34-year career as professor and Sculpture Head at Texas State University, in turn, influenced and instilled talent and confidence in the lives of countless young artists. His True North 2026 sculpture **“Bloom”** engages the viewer in a constructive visual dialogue about our resilience and ability to bloom, as individuals and a society, after difficult circumstances. He tells us, “The genesis of the series was the aftermath of the 2022 ice storm that was particularly devastating to the Texas Hill Country’s cedar and oak groves. This body of work began as an attempt to return a sense of grace to the fractured forest and resilience in individual will. Most importantly, it is a reflection that beauty can blossom in the wake of adversity.” Colombik lives and creates art in Wimberley with his wife and artistic collaborator, Jerolyn Bahm-Colombik.



KEITH CRANE, Houston [Heights] **DAMON THOMAS, Houston [Heights]** “Migrations”

A self-taught outsider artist, **Keith Crane** loves sifting through metal salvage yards and “junk” stores for those diamonds in the rough that may one day become the catalyst for a new creation. Using those found treasures—binding elements together through welds and fastenings—he has been creating otherworldly- and botanical-esque works since the 90s, and you may just stumble upon one around the Heights in the gardens and homes of friends and collectors. His creative curiosity was piqued early on by an artistic aunt who used metal as a primary medium and later inspired by the vibrant art scene in Houston and the quirky, art-centric nature of the Heights neighborhood where he’s lived since 1988. He was further inspired by the incomparable Houston artist and friend, Mark “Scrapdaddy” Bradford, and his legion of fantastical, mechanical creations, and has enjoyed sculptural collaborations with Houston mosaic artist and longtime friend, Chris Silkwood, including “Flower Power” for True North in 2016—created from an industrial attic fan, metal salvage and glass mosaic..



Damon Thomas hand builds his clay works using stiff slabs and hand-formed coils—intentionally leaving traces of hand building and other “imperfections” in the surface. True North was proud to exhibit his warm and meditative sculpture, “Home Fire,” in 2019—a work of clay logs and steel flames. His style is an abstracted realism that generally follows human proportion from which he freely deviates, and he often combines clay sculpture with found objects which carry their own stories. Thomas says “My artwork, like me, is often called quiet; I am drawn to glazes and surfaces that quieten and unify the pieces. I hope that my art is soulful and meaningful. If it is, then I have



accomplished what I set out to do as an artist.” Born in the Heights, and growing up in the East End, he was drawn back to the neighborhood in 1996. Thomas attended High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Houston, earned a BA from University of Houston, an MA from University of Texas at Austin, and holds a Certificate of Achievement in Ceramics from The Glassell School of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. “Kirk and David” (pictured with Damon) is on exhibit at The Jung Center, Houston, through 10.31.26.

With their collaborative sculpture “**Migrations**,” Thomas creates rotating casts of different species of creatures in fired clay, which will change seasonally over the duration of the

exhibition. A flock of bright red birds in spring. A parliament of owls through summer. A colony of bats in time for fall and Halloween. Another surprise for winter. Keith Crane's 3-D puzzle-like tree form of welded, oxidized mild steel and stainless steel carriage bolts gives creature comfort to, and a 360-degree view of, these multi-changing inhabitants.



MARK NELSON, Houston [Heights] “MARBLEOUS GfG BUCKET CORRAL”

In the summer of 1994, after witnessing a terrifying close call involving his five-year-old son and some carelessly-discarded shards of glass in a public park near their home, **Mark Nelson** decided to do something to bring attention to and alleviate the chronic issue of dangerous glass debris lurking in public spaces where children and families gather to relax and play. That next year, at Art League Houston, he exhibited a sculptural work called “110 Lbs. of Park Glass,” and for his NYU Fellowship, Nelson established and ran a public art project called GLASSfreeGROUNDS (GfG)—creating 36 workshops held over time at City parks where children and adult participants painted and decorated a thousand GfG art buckets—then using them to gather broken glass. In 2000, 1,500 pounds of that glass were melted down at a marble making factory in Reno, Ohio, producing 180,000 cobalt blue “MARBLEOUS” marbles. His True North 2026 installation “**MARBLEOUS GfG BUCKET CORRAL**” is composed of 80 of these buckets, inviting us to study each piece’s unique and whimsical artwork and reflect upon the dangerous issue of illegal glass usage and litter in public spaces. Nelson earned his BFA at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, and MFA at University of Houston. Presently, he maintains his art practice and lives in the Heights with his wife, Maria



HANS MOLZBERGER, Houston / Hilmsen, Germany “Mantis with Saddle”

Hans Molzberger was born in Höhr-Grenzhausen in Germany’s Rhineland region where his family has lived and worked in the manufacture of industrial ceramics for many generations. A multi-media artist and an arts educator, Molzberger started a studio in Wendland, Germany, in 1982, and mounted his first museum exhibition in 1991. In 1993, he founded Atelierhaus (*studio house*) Hilmsen, Germany, a professional arts and humanities residency and nonprofit organization, and during the academic season, he returns to Houston as an Artist Affiliate at Houston Christian University. Molzberger was a True North artist in 2015 with the Texas-themed (and sized) sculpture “Retired Cowboy Clown.” This year’s behemoth and deadly serious **“Mantis with Saddle”** has traveled the seas from Germany to its spot on Heights Boulevard. Molzberger tells us, “Insects mirror us with astonishing clarity. Some live in perfectly organized societies—ants, bees—highly structured, highly cooperative, the individual absorbed into the whole. Others live alone. No division of labor. No shared responsibility. Only themselves. The praying mantis has chosen this path. It survives through invisibility. Through patience. Through precision. Motionless. Silent, Alert....”



SUZETTE MOUCHATY, Houston

“Folly in the Park: The Famous Adventure of the Enchanted Pole and Some Other Things Worth Knowing”

Suzette Mouchaty says, “Nature inspires awe, that sense of wonderment that brings us into the moment and helps us know our humanity.” Her colorful and enchanting “Monument to Sea Slugs” for True North 2024 shed light on one of the many phenomenal creatures of the sea facing extinction. Mouchaty’s 2026 work, **“Folly in the Park: The Famous Adventure of the Enchanted Pole and Some Other Things Worth Knowing”** is an abstraction of a microscopic aquatic



organism—the hydra. This sculpture combines the form of the hydra with that of an emerging egg—a symbol of hope for the future. In this work she has magnified a creature so tiny as to be invisible into an imposing and charismatic form and mimicked the raucous patterns and entrancing colors of marine creatures to assert its presence. Mouchaty earned a BS and MS from University of Alaska, Fairbanks, a Ph.D. in Genetics from Lund University, Sweden, and a Junior Fulbright Fellowship to Sweden. After a long career in academia, she began her formal art studies at Art League Houston and Glassell Studio School, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, before earning an MFA from University of Houston School of Art.



JAMES D. (JIMMY) PHILLIPS, Houston “beyond reach”

During the week Sputnik was launched, **James D. Phillips** was born the fifth of six children to a Scotch-Irish father and Italian mother in Houston. Phillips says, “The extent of my art education included my mother, who taught me to draw as a child, and my middle and high school art teachers.” Fifteen years ago, after a 30-year hiatus from making art, he tells us he was cutting down a tree and began doodling with a chainsaw on the fallen trunk. As a recognizable form emerged from the log, he was amazed, and the experience remains magical for him today. Within a year of that fateful day, his works were being selected for juried art shows, and on a trip to Galveston to collect wood from the removal of trees killed by Hurricane Ike’s storm surge, he was introduced to a woman who wanted to turn the dead trees into public sculptures. Phillips was soon selected to sculpt the first works for Galveston City Hall, the Galveston Tree Sculptures went on to become a huge sensation, and his works can now be seen scattered throughout Texas. His True North 2026 sculpture “**beyond reach**” playfully depicts a giraffe, stretching hopefully for the sustenance of a nearby tree. Elements of the work—its head, tail and mane—represent the artist’s iconic woodcarvings, and the body’s composition reminds us of an instantly recognizable and nostalgic assembly of popsicle sticks.



JIM ROBERTSON, Trinity “Sanctuary”

Soon after **Jim Robertson** graduated from his high school in Houston, he served our country for three years—two in Vietnam—then earning his BFA from University of Houston and MFA from University of Texas, Austin. After a beginning in painting and drawing, his interests gradually branched out toward three-dimensional works, and in the early 1990s he took metal working at The Glassell School of Art, MFAH, welding at Lone Star College and began experimenting with steel and found metal objects. Robertson says, “I spent a lot of time cruising industrial salvage yards and had access to several dumpsters at metal fabrication shops.” A few subjects recur in his work: surrealistic vehicles, fanciful weapons, animals and architectural structure. Other works are conceived from scratch, without found objects, non-objective and more formal in nature, using readily available steel material. An example of this was “Zig Zag,” his bright teal, monolithic sculpture for True North in 2022. His True North 2026 sculpture **“Sanctuary”** is a creative mashup of architectural icons—Egyptian pyramids, Gothic pointed arches and towering minarets. With its almost ghostly translucence—especially from a distance—the artist has chosen bright teal to shimmer against its natural background. Robertson was Professor of Art at Lone Star College for 29 years and has a full-time studio in Trinity. He’s often spotted cruising the art car scene in his sleek and futuristic stainless steel creation, Jet Car.

