

8 from '08: A great year in Austin arts

By Jeanne Claire van Ryzin

AMERICAN-STATESMAN ARTS CRITIC

Looking back at eight great things from the past year in the arts, many of which will be felt into 2009 and beyond:

1 The Long Center for the Performing Arts. Nothing topped this year's cultural news more than the opening of Austin's first civic performing arts center. And nothing has or will continue to shape Austin's cultural landscape like the Long Center. After decades of imagining and 15 years in planning, Austin finally got what it so long deserved: an

architecturally distinctive, environmentally smart, downtown civic landmark.

2 Arthouse renovation. Nothing says progress like infrastructure. With the unveiling of an innovative design for a \$6.6 million renovation to its historic downtown building, Arthouse, the contemporary arts center, signaled that it is raising the bar for Austin's visual arts eco-system. Not only will its multifunctional design bring multimedia contemporary art to downtown, but it's an expansion project that's very achievable in scope. And with \$3.7 million already raised and more pledged — and a committed board and institution with a sharp mission — its an arts building that will be realized.

3 Landmarks, University of Texas Public Art Program. In an innovative program with the venerable Metropolitan Museum of Art, UT entered a five-year loan agreement to bring 28 sculptures by such noted 20th century artists as Louise Bourgeois, Jim Dine and Tony Smith to the campus for public display inside and out. And with other public art initiatives planned, the new Landmarks program gives the UT campus a distinctive — and much-needed — aesthetic profile.

4 Dr. Ernest and Sarah Butler's gift of \$55 million to the University of Texas School of Music. For years, Sarah and Ernest Butler have been devoted and generous supporters to Austin's cultural institutions, shoring up their long-term survival through important donations to endowment funds and buildings. This year, with the Butler's \$55 million gift to

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Austin artist Yoon Cho's exhibit of video and photo-based art at Women & Their Work explored her identity as a Korean American woman navigating life in the suburbs.

nated chorus netted two more Grammy nominations for its sparkling and sublime CD, "Threshold of Night." But just as important, Conspirare chose to record the mesmerizing music of a rising star 30-year-old composer. After all, what's creative progress if it's not nourished by the new?

7 'The Bat,' Austin Lyric Opera. Yes, it was totally goofy. And sure, hard-nosed opera aficionados wrote it off. But by infusing Strauss' "Die Fledermaus" — surely the goofiest confection of an opera — with all things Austin, the clever writers from Esther's Follies and Austin Lyric Opera sent one big, fun, fabulous, operatic mash note to their hometown.

8 Eight jewel-like exhibits and performances. ■ "Reimagining Space: The Park Place Gallery Groups in 1960s New York," Blanton Museum of Art. A bril-

liant American West by one of Austin's most thoughtful visual artists.

■ "Death of A King's Horseman," ProArts Collective and St. Edward's University. A collaborative effort resulted in a powerful production of a masterpiece of contemporary African theater.

■ "Women's Work: Reconstructions of Self," Andee Scott. An elegant dancer created an elegant, multimedia exploration of the creative process.

■ "Yoon Cho: Nothing Lasts Forever," Women & Their Work: A wise and irreverent body of multimedia art that plumed the realities of contemporary American family culture.

■ "Passion at Play," American Repertory Ensemble. Smart, polished contemporary ballet with live inventive chamber music. What could be better?

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