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## Coupland-based artist has a 'vision'

mark@mlsfineart.com | Posted: Wednesday, July 5, 2017 9:38 am

Most visual artists are visually oriented, of course. They see with their eyes and create works based on their unique ways of seeing.

However, a few artists have not only optical "vision" but also have "a" vision. That is, these artists envision some kind of special idea about the world.

Some of these visionary artists not only make their works in light of their individual visions, but they make a concerted effort to promote their visions to other artists and to all those interested in creativity and its role in human society.

Artist Letitia Eldredge has a vision. She wants to bring artists together to share their ideas about art with each other. So, in 2012, she founded and became the Executive Director of a nonprofit organization called "Arts Convergence" in Coupland, Texas. The backside of her business card states that the intent of the institution "is to serve community through arts production, education, and promotions to benefit cross cultural exchanges of ideas."

It is currently located in Eldredge's home, where she is also working to create a surrounding garden that will add an outdoor space for the organization's gatherings and events. She welcomes any volunteer help with that project. It is rumored that she is an exceptionally good cook, a fact that may encourage volunteering by notoriously-hungry artists.

One of the ways Eldredge desires to serve the broader art community is to encourage the collection of archives that document the work of "avant-garde" Texas artists. Her interest in assembling such archival resources dates back to her work with the Fort Worth Library Foundation. For this and other intentions of the organization, the artist has brought together like-minded artists to the developing institution in Coupland.

Meanwhile, Eldredge has continued her long career in the arts by creating new works. She is best known for her colorful and intriguing ceramic masks. Over the years, she has made dozens of them. Beginning in 1972 in Austin with "Baby Rita", she creates each mask as a specific "fantasy character" in a



### Letitia

Coupland-based artist Letitia Eldredge's masks are not just for decoration. She was a storyteller and poet early in her career, and utilizes her artwork in performance-art events and dances.

mythology — “The Changing Stories Child” – that she has written, based largely on her dreams. Rooted in her deep interest in the psychology of the spirit, she became a storyteller and a poet early on in her career.

Her masks are not just for viewing on the wall. She has used them in performance art events and dances of her creation. In this sense, they go back to ancient Greek plays and before. As you can see in the photograph of her wearing “Rita”, they exude a powerful presence.

The artist also applied beautiful images to the backsides of the masks, making them double-sided. She has used her expertise at ceramics to create a set of 7-inch-diameter spheres with colorful imagery that roll on the stage to induce stories from her “China Ballet.”

Eldredge also creates paintings on canvas and paper, as well as on the ceramic tiles she attaches to furniture designed and fabricated by collaborator Lee Benner. Some of her imagery is abstract, but much of it involves the human figure. Given her experience as a dancer and performance artist, the body is never far from her iconography. Perhaps that sensual connection is why her work is so full of Eros. The shapes and colors she uses, and the ways they interact with each other, give her works a vigor and vibrancy that is very palpable.

The artist is no self-trained “Sunday painter.” She studied drawing, painting, ceramics, sculpture, dance, and performance art at Sophie Newcomb College at Tulane, and the University of Texas at Austin, where she studied under sculptor Charles Umlauf and painter Vincent Mariani, and earned her Bachelor of Fine Art at the Cleveland Art Institute.

She has done graduate work at Texas Christian University, and worked in New York City in the LaMama Experimental Theater Club, and performed in Paris at the Theatre d’Orsey. She was invited by the legendary American ceramicist Peter Voulkos to go to Los Angeles to work with him in his studios, where she studied under his mentorship. She has had exhibitions of her work and performances at museums and galleries around the country and abroad, including the Ukraine and Costa Rica, among many other locations. She is the recipient of grants from The Texas Commission on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, the International Theater Institute, and others.

Eldredge is passionate about helping to make Coupland a visual-arts destination, as opposed to a village of antique stores. In addition to Eldredge, several other artists have located in town.

The historic Coupland Inn may help bring additional attention to this small town that lies about halfway between Elgin and Taylor on Highway 95. If this artist’s energetic devotion to her vision is any

indication, the odds are that Coupland may grow into an even bigger spot on the Texas art world map.