A Slew of Live 'Gators, a $10,000 Prize for Jesus and $20 Clock Canvases: Museum folks, top collectors and arty types go wild at the Texas Contemporary Fair Opening Night

CATHARINE D. ANSPON COVERS THE BOOTHS AND THE BUZZ. PHOTOGRAPHY JENNY ANTILL.

Fair-Rama Drama

When the Texas Contemporary Art Fair rolled into town for year two at the George R. Brown Convention Center this October, our art world held its breath. How would the lively, brash upstart do, coming a mere five weeks after the Houston Fine Art Fair, also in year two?

No one need to have worried. Here are our picks from some of the most scintillating sightings at the Texas Contemporary. As they prove, the TC was filled with excitement, a frisson of importance and a vitality that felt so very Houston. Most everyone surveyed agreed that this fair — developed by artMRKT dynamos Jeffrey Wainhouse and Max Fishko, advised by our top gallerists Fredericka Hunter and Kerry Inman — is here to stay. The talk of the town: Will both fairs ever merge dates and share weekends? Stay tuned. We'll be following developments in 2013. Meanwhile, here are the top three things we loved at the TC 2012.

1. The bestowing of the $10,000 inaugural Texas Contemporary Art Award on accomplished Pop painter and University of Houston Art Department professor Rachel Hecker for her series of portraits of actors who resemble (are you ready for this?) Jesus. Curator Franklin Sirmans returned to town from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to join the CAMH's Bill Arning in casting the decisive votes.

2. The brilliant, cheeky Texas art Web site Glasstire should also get into the biz of devising art installations. They are two for two, their tacky-teriffic, compelling, Cajun-inspired bar/booth/performance piece was once again the place where everyone congregated. Those who attended Opening Night were rewarded with the chance to get up close with a family of gators at the GT Watering Hole; the amphibious trio later were returned to their home swamps at a special preserve south of town. We loved seeing founder Rainey Knudson and ace writers Bill Davenport and Kelly Klaasmeyer hold court amid the art and reptile action.

3. Rice Gallery's booth really ticked — literally. Connecticut-based talent Jane Miller reprised one of her site-specific installations from the early days of Kim Davenport's fabulous university space. A wall of vintage timepieces from all eras, canvases of clock and watch faces to be had for $20, and rolls of wonderful wallpaper and some lovely time-inspired multiples made this space for commerce truly charming and ultra-democratic.

What did you acquire at the Fair? Fave booth shots? What awed you? E-mail seth@papercitymag.com and see your pic(s) from the TC convergence on PaperCity's Facebook page, or we may tweet you.