



OPPOSITE PAGE: VISIT SAN ANTONIO; THIS PAGE: THE WITTE MUSEUM

DIVERSITY ON DISPLAY

San Antonio's museums showcase the art and history of an inclusive city

BY LINDSEY WILSON



Opposite page: The Witte Museum in Brackenridge Park. **This page:** The People of the Pecos exhibit takes up the second floor of The Witte Museum and includes life-size dioramas and rock art depicting artistic expression.

● A traditional marker of a cultured city is a strong art museum, though typically that means classic European or modern American paintings, sculptures and drawings. San Antonio certainly has that in the form of the McNay Art Museum, with its 22,000-strong collection, and the most comprehensive ancient Greek, Roman and Egyptian art collections in the southern United States at the San Antonio Museum of Art. But just as San Antonio's history and culture are vibrant and varied, so are its museums—art and otherwise. The unique exhibitions, programs and displays showcase an area that has played host to numerous viewpoints and societies over its several hundred years as a city (and for thousands of years before that). And they tell the stories

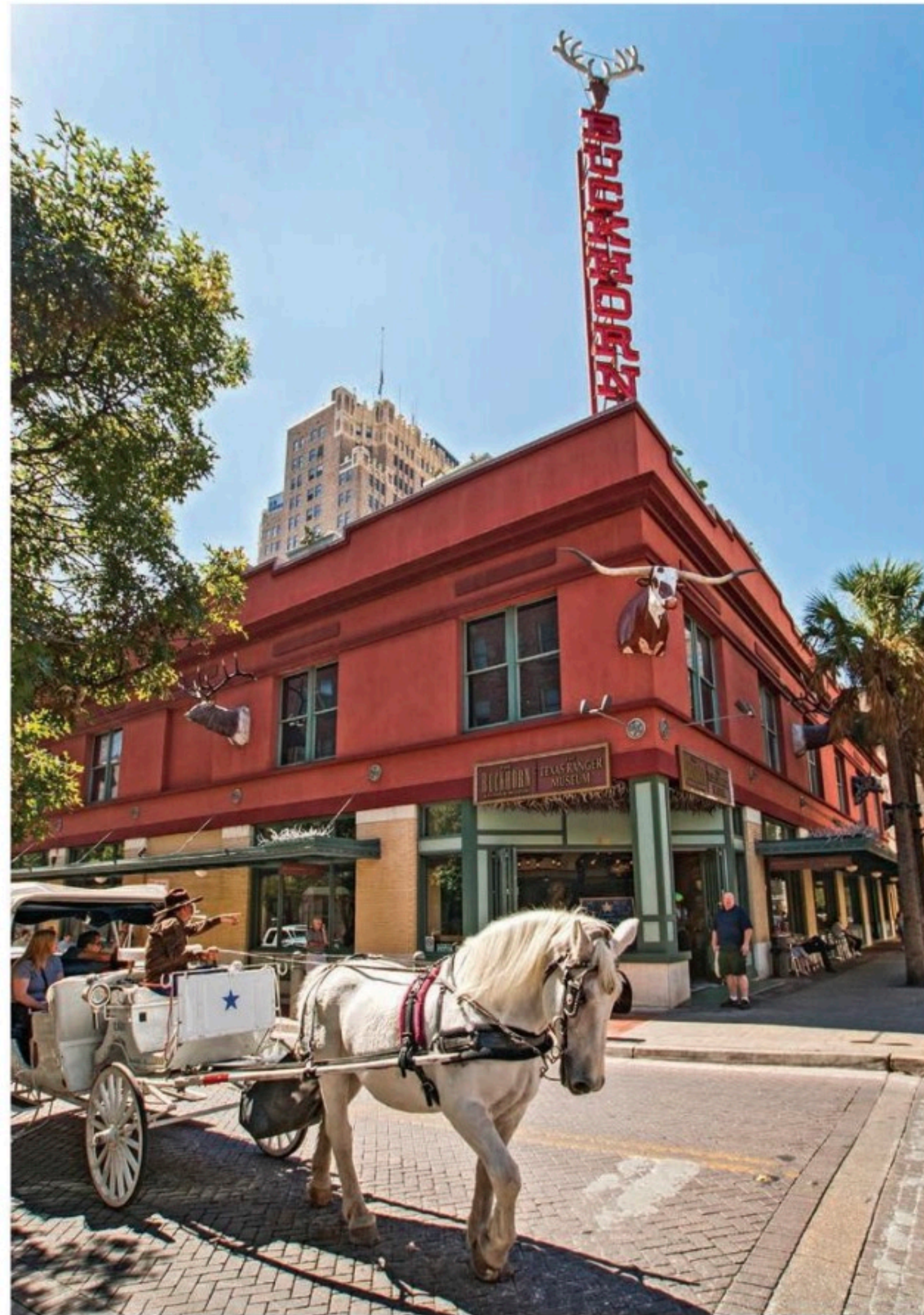
of each group that has helped shape San Antonio into the multifaceted place it is today. Before being colonized by Spain, Mexico and Anglo-American settlers, San Antonio was occupied for thousands of years by indigenous tribes. You can explore the pre-historic way of life for these “People of the Pecos” at The Witte Museum, which dedicates an entire wing to life-size dioramas of their everyday activities. Spanning the museum's second floor, the Kittie West Nelson Ferguson People of the Pecos Gallery shows how thousands of years ago these residents hunted, cooked and socialized. It also projects images of rock art that span nearly 4,000 years of artistic expression. Special exhibits at the nature and science-focused Witte Museum

often focus on Fiesta, the city's signature event since the late 19th century that honors the memory of the Alamo and San Jacinto battles.

Both traditional and contemporary Chicano, Latino and Native American arts and culture are on display at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. Founded in 1980, the center is responsible for many of San Antonio's most impressive festivals, including the annual Día de los Muertos celebration; CineFestival, the longest-running Latino film festival in the United States; and the Tejano Conjunto Festival, which was recently recognized as a National Treasure by the Smithsonian Institution. You'll also find such year-round events as Ballet Folklórico and Spanish flamenco dance presentations, concerts of mariachi and Tejano/Conjunto music, theatrical productions, film screenings, art exhibitions, artisan craft markets and more. In addition, the GCAC is responsible for the historic Guadalupe Theater, a 350-seat Mission Revival/art deco jewel that opened its doors in 1942. The theater's history encompasses more than 75 years of film screenings, dance and theater productions, live music concerts and special events that showcase regional, national and international Latin American arts and culture.

At the San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum, the local African American experience is told through compelling digitized, audiovisual exhibits. Located in the city's historic Dignowity Hill neighborhood, the nonprofit museum reaches back to the early days of the Spanish colonists and Texas Republic to reveal the untold history of the area's African American descendants, whose narrative is intricately tied to the Spaniards, Mexicans, Germans and Canary Island populations who helped build the city. The archive is community-driven, meaning that it's always evolving and open to all—whether you're looking to contribute or learn.

The Institute of Texan Cultures opened at the 1968 World's Fair, dubbed HemisFair '68. Known then as the Texas State Exhibits Pavilion, it showed in a time of great civil unrest the contributions that outside cultures have made to the state's character through music and dance, food, stories, religion, artisan skills and ways of life. After the World's Fair, the museum was turned over to the University of Texas San



Antonio to continue as a platform for diversity, multiculturalism and education. Today, only a few short steps from The Alamo and the River Walk, the institute gives a voice to the experiences of people from across the globe who call Texas home. Through 65,000 square feet of exhibits—plus programs and special events the institute shows how the uniqueness of many cultures has helped make the city what it is today.

In the 1800s, one man was especially instrumental in shaping San Antonio: José Antonio Navarro, a Texas patriot

The Buckhorn Saloon and Museum has an exhibit, including artifacts, honoring the Texas Rangers.



who served on the committees that wrote the first two Texas constitutions and was also one of only two native-born Texans to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence. His original adobe and limestone home, Casa Navarro, is the last remnant of the historically Mexican west side of San Antonio, known then as Laredito, and among the oldest adobe structures left standing in San Antonio. The site was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2017. Explore the 1.5-acre property on the corner of Laredo and Neuva streets and learn about the rancher, merchant and advocate for Tejano rights through his own photographs, documents and artifacts.

For many, Texas brings to mind a lawless Old West governed by the Texas Rangers. Tucked inside The Buckhorn Saloon and Museum, where Teddy Roosevelt was rumored to knock back a few with his Rough Riders, is an exhibit honoring these early law enforcement officials, with such



authentic artifacts as automatic handguns, shotguns, badges and photographs. Opened in 1973 by the Fomer Texas Rangers Association, the museum pays homage to this

group and several of its notables. The museum even includes a life-size recreation of San Antonio at the turn of the century called Ranger Town, and a replica of the famous getaway car driven by outlaws Bonnie and Clyde (where they ultimately met their demise at the hands of the Rangers in 1934).

Another tribute to the American West can be found at the new Briscoe Western Art Museum. In nine galleries across three levels, you can see such art and artifacts as Pancho Villa's saddle, a diorama of the Alamo, an authentic chuck wagon, and works by Frederic Remington and Taos Society of Artists. From Native American pottery through to the latest acquisitions, in the first-floor New Works Gallery, and even bronze sculptures depicting iconic figures of the American West outside in the McNutt Sculpture Garden, the museum is an ever-changing repository of pieces created and inspired by Texas' unique geographical placement in history.

No trip to San Antonio is complete without a visit to the San Antonio Museum of Art, which offers an excellent collection of folk art in the Nelson A. Rockefeller Latin American wing, along with works from the ancient Americas to the present. Notable Texas and regional art shares space in the contemporary gallery with internationally recognized artists, showing that it takes a little of everything to create the diverse, colorful destination that is San Antonio.

Top: A replica of the getaway car driven by outlaws Bonnie and Clyde can be found at The Buckhorn Saloon and Museum. **Bottom left:** Paintings and drawings at a Día de los Muertos celebration.

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