Artistic, educator, inventor and naturalist, Charles Franklin Reaugh is one of the Southwest's earliest and most distinguished artists. Acknowledged as the "Dean of Texas Artists," Frank Reaugh (pronounced Ray) devoted his career to visually documenting the vast, unsettled regions of the southwest in pastel and paint as he had experienced it before the turn of the century.

“It is my hope that my pictures portraying those times, aside from any artistic merit that they may possess, will tell their story, and will be preserved because of historical value; the steer and the cowboy have gone, the range has been fenced and plowed and the beauty of the early days is but a memory.”
Frank Reaugh, December 1936

In 1876, at the age of fifteen, Frank Reaugh moved with his family by covered wagon from rural Southern Illinois to Terrell, Texas, thirty miles east of Dallas. There, on the family's cotton farm, Reaugh developed his artistic skills by copying the works of European masters from magazines and from illustrations found in large-animal anatomy books. In the early 1880's, Reaugh met cattlemen Frank and Temple Houston who provided a once in a lifetime opportunity for Reaugh to ride with them during the great round-up. Both men exposed him to the realities and the romance of those golden years on the trail and may have extended financial support to further his artistic studies. Between 1884 and 1889, Reaugh attended fine arts schools in St. Louis and Paris; exposure to fine examples of the pastel medium at the Louvre greatly influenced his development. In 1890, he moved with his family to the new and growing community of Oak Cliff, south of Dallas. There, Reaugh and his father built a metal studio building in the back yard called "The Ironshed." Over the next decade, Reaugh's work would gain attention and deserved national recognition through juried and invitational art exhibitions such as the Chicago (1893) and St. Louis (1903) World Fairs.

Like any artist, Reaugh had specific ideas about a functional and well-designed studio environment. In 1928-1929, Reaugh built his now famous concrete and stucco studio, El Sibil (the Vault) which still stands at the corner of Fifth and Crawford Streets overlooking Lake Cliff Park, south of Dallas. Influenced by Southern Mediterranean and Mayan architecture, El Sibil contained a storage vault for paintings, a studio and music performance space, classrooms and living quarters. The open air Cicada art bus, which carried Reaugh and his intrepid crew of art students thousands of miles throughout the Southwest on sketching trips, was "Reaugh-designed" from its Model T Ford frame up. It contained fold-out seats for sleeping and a chuck box at the rear for camp cooking as well as storage for water, gas, and trip supplies, limited to 30 pounds per person. The roof carried the autographs and graffiti of artist and student passengers. Reaugh also invented a number of industrial items such as the Limacon Pump, a revolutionary rotary design whose variations could pump air, oil and water for a variety of industrial uses. The pump and the lap easel designs both carried U.S. patents. Reaugh also created and marketed his own brand of pastels, blended to color match the region's native flora. Each pastel was cast in a hexagonal shape for ease of handling and packing in the field.

“I came to know Frank Reaugh along in the 1930’s on his visits to Austin from Dallas, chaperoned by some admiring lady. He was bent on having the University of Texas accept a collection of his longhorn pictures… He saw the longhorn as a rather exquisite animal, not rangy at all. While beautiful and distant, his longhorns suggest open ranges, ranches and ranch people associated with them…”
J. Frank Dobie, April 20, 1963

Historians J. Frank Dobie and J. Evetts Haley admired Reaugh and included him in their publications.

In 1937, eight years before his death, Frank Reaugh gave a portion of his private collection of pastel and oil paintings to The University of Texas at Austin. The Ransom Center holds over 200 art works created by Frank Reaugh including pastel landscapes, charcoal sketches, pen and ink drawings, and oil paintings.

*summary above excerpted from Harry Ransom Center’s Reaugh biography*