

The New Orleans

AVANT-GARDE ©



NANCY C. HARRIS
A NEW ORLEANS LIVING TREASURE

On Saturday, October 9, 2010, Nancy C. Harris, poet extraordinaire, was honored with a *New Orleans Living Treasure* award by Phyllis Parun, Project Creator. Nancy Harris read her poetry and that of others who started the Maple Leaf poets venue thirty-one years ago and recounted many stories about the poets and the times. The event was funded by Poets and Writers, Inc. The award reads thusly:

The New Orleans Avant-garde hereby recognizes
NANCY C. HARRIS

For outstanding contributions in the poetic arts of New Orleans, for her unswerving dedication in hosting 21 years of poetry at the Maple Leaf Bar, for publishing local poets in the Maple Leaf Rag and for bringing poetic beauty into the lives of the New Orleans Community through her poetry, we hereby honor Nancy C. Harris with the distinction of being a New Orleans Living Treasure and a Lifetime member of the New Orleans avant-garde.

**AVANT-GARDE PEER RECOGNITION AWARDS
ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF UNO**

It was in January, 2007, at the first *Art Nite* at the Alvar Branch Library, when after recounting her days at the N.O. Public Library's Artist's Information Bureau, Phyllis Parun, artist-poet-cultural pioneer, launched her *peer group recognition awards project* by issuing twenty-six awards to all self-proclaimed avant-garde attendees. She continues to recognize the work of outstanding artists and writers in New Orleans. The 2011 award to Nancy Harris is the first to recognize anyone as a *New Orleans Living Treasure*.



Nancy Harris (right) with Phyllis Parun



Award Poets, from left: Nancy Harris, Lee Meitzen-Grue, Helen Toye, Carolyn Levy, Phyllis Parun

NEW ORLEANS NEGLECTS ITS MONUMENTAL SCULPTURE

A Photo Commentary by Phyllis Parun

For more than 30 years, I have been following the decline of our city's sculpture as did New Orleans monumental sculptor, Angela Gregory, before me (and who knows before her) as self-appointed watchdogs over the city's exterior sculpture collection. I am sorry to report that after all these years, there is still no appointed office or body who is charged with the professional conservation of that valuable body of work. Shuffled between the Streets Department, the Maintenance Department and the Arts Council of New Orleans, the sculpture is still damaged and deteriorating. When will New Orleans value its art and its artists beyond the merely superficial opportunistic endorsements? When will New Orleans become an authentic center of art?

"THE SOURCE" by French Sculptor Marie Francis was donated to New Orleans after the 1984 World's Fair where it was part of the entrance to the Fair. It is now cracking through the forehead and sometimes repaired by the maintenance department

with tar running along the crack. Ouch! This is one of the finest sculptures the city owns, in my opinion. It can be seen at Loyola Avenue, Canal Street and Tulane Avenue.



"MARGARET GAFFNEY HAUGHERY" was erected in 1884, now at Margaret's Place bounded by Camp, Prytania and Clio Street. This life-size Carrara marble sculpture by Alexander Doyle is covered with soot from automobile emissions and is disintegrating from years of being exposed to the weather.

In the *States-Item* on Wednesday, March 8, 1978, in an article by Lanny Thomas, this sculpture was photographed with a cracked base, very light soot, and less skin wear. "Miss Angela Gregory brought this sculpture to the attention of Phyllis Parun, Visual Arts Coordinator of the Artists' Information Bureau." After contacting stone experts for their advice, Parun was told that "this type of marble is affected by wet, humid climate and should be enclosed." A meeting was held between Parun, Sandra Levy, Director of Historic Districts Landmarks Commission, Geoffrey Platt, Director of Arts Council of New Orleans and Randy Gregson, Deputy Director of the Office of Property management. "Mrs. Levy said she is also concerned about other statues in the city and would like to see a complete inventory done of their conditions." Nothing was done. So much for meetings! It's now 2010, and the sculpture continues to deteriorate.

NEW ORLEANS: ALL SAINTS DAY

by Nancy C. Harris

for Julie Kane

Last night we masked
& went to the monster mash.
it was a surreal extravaganza
dreamt by Fellini, given by artists
in an old crumbling convent
conveniently located near the CBD.

two papier mache skeletons fucking
mechanically held us in thrall:
rooms revolved optically, blue, red
black & white, pinwheeling frightening
fun. we left spirited
treated to fantasy
& relieved of sinful ennui.

Hallowe'en became all saints day
later in the night at the Maple Leaf Bar
unmasking vulnerability, exposed
to occult influences both on this side &
the other. romance fizzled, led by horror
& unknown metaphysics, juxtaposed
constellations, ghosts.

spent all saints morning hungover, fearful
headache warded off by my empowered crystal
cool quartz hand soothing my forehead
unfooled by mounting anxiety foretold by the palm.

I make split pea soup chopping & sacrificing
celery, carrots, onions, potatoes, parsley

& the pungent garlic toe
whose earthy perfume I love to sniff
off my fingers all next day -- warding off
finicky lovers & god knows what demons.

November 1st & the white roses are blooming
in gargoyle profusion against the front porch.
I snip some with pinking shears
& look down the side yard
where I see one or two rose pink ones
scraggily trying to resurrect.
I collect them, entwining them
with the creamy ones in the round rosy glass vase
on the mantel of my rented home --
built, my landlady tells me in 1868.
so I present all the dead spirits at my address
with an incensed, fragrant bouquet -- an altered gift
on all saints day to remind them to go away & stop
haunting us living ones who don't want to be
reminded.

my prayers, I hand over to the living
ignoring the raps in my wall.
I fall asleep early to disconcerting dreams
whose wormy symphonies dance to my lies.

my unclothed eyes rotate REM stelliums
& dutiful relatives all over the city
paint vaulted graves stark white.
astonished angels of naked stone archly
point to the skies

we are uncostumed, unloved & undead ...



©Nancy C. Harris. Nancy Harris was born in New York City and moved to Mississippi in 1964. She holds a B.A. from Newcomb College in English, 1971; attended graduate school at Tulane University with an M.A. in English, 1974. She was employed at D.H. Holmes and Times-Picayune in advertising for most of her career. Nancy is the author of *The Ape Woman Story* and *Mirror Wars*. She has organized the weekly Sunday poetry readings at the Maple Leaf Bar since 1989 after the death of poet Everett Maddox, who began the readings in 1979. Nancy can be found at Maple Leaf Bar every Sunday at 3:30 p.m.

r é d a c t i o n

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MAGIC NEW ORLEANS IN THE RAW, SCAB1

by Phyllis Parun

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEFFREY HOLMES

Phyllis: Jeffery, tell me how this St. Claude Arts Biennial project idea got started.

Jeffery: It happened quite spontaneously. After the postponement of the P2, I began to hear a lot of local artists and galleries were upset as they had already been planning and working on events for the P2. One day when I was in a conversation with Lord David of Skull Club and Andy Antipas from Barristers and simply said, "Why don't we just do our own biennial?", within ten minutes they had basically convinced me that it needed to be done and I should be the one to do it (thanks, guys).

Phyllis: What is the mission of the SCAB1 Biennial?

Jeffery: To showcase the local talent that makes up our arts community. To give a spotlight to all the art forms that we are fortunate to have surround us, including writers, musicians and performers as well as visual artists such as fashion designers and filmmakers.

Phyllis: What sort of events are planned?

Jeffery: It's almost overwhelming the amount of art that will be presented in under 48 hours within the 20-block corridor. November 13, The MultiSpecies Swarm, the Collective World Art Community Juried Art Show, the Marigny/Bywater Open Studios Tour, Bywater Art Lofts 'Automatic Everything' show, A SCAB1 Pre-Party show at L'art Noir, the Opening Exhibitions of the entire St. Claude Arts District and a Block Party featuring Coco Robicheaux *Tableau Vivant: A Wandering Retrospective*, organized by New Orleans Airlift and performed on St. Claude Avenue, and even a P1.5 party at The New Orleans Candle Factory. The second weekend is the Fringe Festival, which is an absolutely incredible event. The third weekend of the SCAB1 is dedicated to Film and Fashion with several events in the works. The fourth weekend is 'Word', dedicated to the written and spoken word and finally the second Saturday of December, where most of the St. Claude Arts District (SCAD) galleries are holding photography exhibitions in conjunction with the Photo NOLA.

Phyllis: Since Dan Cameron is sponsoring Prospect 1.5, do artists feel split loyalties over this division of effort?

Jeffery: It's hard to say a split in loyalties as

most artists I know don't feel as though he has ever been loyal to the local art scene. The Prospect spent millions to bring outside artists to our city, and the locals were mostly cast aside. I know I was as well as my gallery and many others. The art patrons that were to be here never came through 90% of the SCAD galleries. Any Second Saturday will show anybody what local artists are capable of doing. Keep in mind that the SCAD was already garnering national and international recognition. As you can see by our opening weekend, the P1.5 is just a small part of our event.



Jeffery Holmes, Director of St. Claude Biennial 1
Photo by Phyllis Parun

Phyllis: What do local artists hope will come out of the Biennial?

Jeffery: Just a chance to show off the talent that we call our neighbors. The artists who live here and help make this that artistic utopia we enjoy every day is equal to anywhere else in the world. I personally hope that this shows off our resilience and passion to create no matter what fate throws at us.

Phyllis: Are there any plans by anyone to market local art?

Jeffery: We are all shameless promoters in ourselves, and the computer has become a powerful marketing tool for those of us without a six-figure advertising budget. I have been utilizing this to spread the word

and hit every media outlet that I've been able to find online, but if any art organization in the city or elsewhere would like to help us with funds for print advertising for the SCAD, just give me a call.

Phyllis: Do you feel Prospect 1.5 can increase art buyers for St. Claude galleries and help local artists market their art?

Jeffery: With the lineup we have for Saturday, November 13, the SCAB1 will be more of an asset for the P1.5 event happening that night. After that, P1.5 is no longer in the SCAD area.

Phyllis: What is your dream for the future of this event?

Jeffery: That this one day becomes an Arts Biennial like no other in the world. Showing the many different forms of art that we have to offer. Encompassing Film, Fashion, Music and Theater, Contemporary Art as well as Outsider Art, Lowbrow Art and any other sub-genre of art that does not fit into the 'mainstream contemporary' art world. This is not a Biennial that is being held in a business district or convention center; this is our home and our neighborhood. The fact that you're walking amongst our Muse, that you're seeing and hearing and reading the art coming directly from this, is simply magical! It is something that cannot be bottled and shown elsewhere. It is not something that can be boxed and shipped in. It is us in the raw.

Phyllis: Is there anything you want our readers to know?

Jeffery: We would love for one day that an arts program or foundation would come forward and help us take the message to the world. We have been studied and filmed and documented by just about everybody from the Joan Mitchell Foundation, the Warhol Foundation and countless others, and yet not a single arts organization from the city or elsewhere has ever come forward to see what they could do to help our arts community. Some of these organizations are even moving here, yet have never bothered to contact us. Even trying to make contact with the Prospect has proven very difficult. If all these groups could work with the SCAD

(continued, page 4)

STREET PERFORMERS' RIGHTS WORLDWIDE

by Vince Conaway

New Orleans natives are used to seeing street performers, also known as “buskers”, on Royal Street and throughout the French Quarter. Several European languages refer to us as “street artists”, and though it is a tradition with a long history, its legal status varies widely by location.

No matter the country, regulation of busking is almost always a local/city matter, but it's possible to make national generalizations. In the U.S., for example, buskers often run afoul of anti-panhandling statutes; the government cannot make distinctions between people asking for money because of the First Amendment. The fact that few American cities are pedestrian-friendly is also a hindrance.

In Italy there are often very strict regulations on buskers in major tourist areas, particularly Florence and Venice. Other cities vary widely, from those with stringent permit requirements and many forbidden areas to others, often in cities with a major university, where juggling fire in a busy pedestrian zone isn't unacceptable. In Rome no one seems to know what the law is from day to day; I've been told to move along from almost every place I've performed, but far more often have been ignored in those very same places by passing *polizie*.

Germany has a reputation for being incredibly strict in its permit requirements, and for that reason I've yet to attempt busking there. Austria, however, is like Italy

in its wide divergence from city to city, although in places where there are rules, they seem to be much more strictly enforced (I'm pretty sure that I managed in Salzburg only because I didn't get caught). Canada is known for firm but sensible permit processes.

Southeastern Europe is a different matter entirely; I have never been confronted by police while performing in Croatia, and in Greece I was told to move along only once, when the street needed to be cleared for a series of Good Friday religious processions in the Cretan city of Heraklion. It was the gentlest “shifting” I've ever experienced; the officers were incredibly polite, almost apologetic, and one of them tipped me.

Complicating factors are that immigration law varies by country as well. In Canada, the U.S., and much of Europe, a work visa is not needed for street performing, but in Australia and the UK they often are. This complicated web of national and local laws makes international busking a confusing business, but it can be quite fulfilling.

Vince Conaway has been voted **Favorite Lane Act** by the Greater St. Louis Renaissance Faire at Wentzville (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009), **Favorite Lane Entertainer** by the Louisiana Renaissance Festival (2005), and named **Best Music Group** by Kansas City Renaissance Festival (2002). vconaway@vinceconaway.com



(continued from page 3)

and SCAB1, I feel that the local artists of our community would finally get the recognition that they deserve. Just take a look at what we have done so far.

Phyllis: It seems to me that locals don't need or want interference for programs as they are doing that well enough as independent artist-performers. So specifically what kind of help do you feel locals need, and how do you see those unaddressed aspects developing with organizational support without gentrification or dictation of programs? Funding? More buyers? What?

Jeffery: I don't think that the locals need or want interference. It's just that we have been watching what help is out there go to a small niche of artists. If you are not part of that little niche, then you simply don't get the time of day from these programs. I have had just about every arts group and foundation come through my space studying what I've done, yet none will even respond to my emails. That is why the majority of local artists simply have no faith in any of these organizations, as we feel like they have no interest in actually helping us, only co-opting the path we have laid for them. What I would like to see is funding for the St. Claude Arts District so that we can develop our website and a full marketing campaign. I have a concept that would be open and fair to all galleries and artists in the community in keeping with the cross-promotion concept of the St. Claude Arts District. It would promote our arts community as a whole, giving everyone a fair chance of getting their local art and name out to the rest of the world. We have an arts community like no other in the nation if not the world, and it has not been properly given the attention it deserves, by that I mean the people who live and create in this community. Instead of bringing artists from elsewhere to bring attention to us, let's show the world the talent that we get to witness on a daily basis.

For more info: <http://www.scab1.com/>



Photo by Jack Gurner

PATI D'AMICO WITH HER ARTISTS' BOOKS
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