

The New Orleans

AVANT-GARDE ©



A CITY OF ARTISTS

by Phyllis Parun

When the selling of art and music is removed from art making, culture and inner cultivation are its *pièce de résistance*. As natural as breathing in and breathing out, making art is a vital source of personal joy, of strengthening community bonds and the foundation for human compassion and inner peace. When artists allow art to grow out of the mysterious energy which imbues all life, like a leaf growing out of a tree, artists perpetuate the best from our global human ancestry.

Since the flood of 2005, New Orleans has become identified as the city of Katrina. Now that the pre-K identity as “the city that care forgot” was overshadowed, we find ourselves asking: “Will New Orleans develop beyond its image as a disaster relic or be frozen forever in time like Pompeii after Vesuvius?”

International artists of Prospect One, capitalizing on the art movement initiated in New

Orleans in early 2005, have demonstrated that the New Orleans art style, *Katachysm*, which traveled the globe and returned, has been influential, imitated and is now a brand. But will New Orleans artists succumb to the marketplace to be doomed to imitate themselves? I think not.

It takes more than dreaming of international fame and fortune to follow the dynamic “*thread running through the way*” (Lao Tzu). It takes more than craft

and educated excellence with line, color, form, word, movement or sound. It takes complete abandonment to get the whole person “Aha!” and “goose bumps” experience.

Creativity does not recycle former creations, reputations or social positions. No drink or drug will bring it around. Inspiration takes time, nurturing the inner spirit and gestation. One has to wait patiently for it to arrive in its own time. Ultimately, it is not up

to our individual personalities but left to the magical emergence of infinity within us. It is a gift from the mysteries.

The true measure of our success as artists creating in this New Orleans frontier lies with our courage to challenge our own old conventions, insight to create new traditions and willingness to invent culture again and again and finally our readiness to move to *New Orleans: A City of Artists*. ❖



UNO Gallery, St. Claude Avenue

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FEMME FEST 2010

by Phyllis Parun

March is Women's History Month. The Women's Caucus for Art of Louisiana is sponsoring several events in cooperation with Don Marshall and Mary Ann Marx, Head Librarian at Alvar Branch Library.

To join the Women's Caucus for Art of Louisiana, go to [www.nationalwca.org](http://www.nationalwca.org) and fill out the application as a Louisiana (LOU) member. ❖

**Femme Fest, a Celebration of Women's History Month**

Sponsored by The Women's Caucus for Art of Louisiana

*Opening Reception:* Saturday, March 13, 6-9 p.m.

*Women Poets & Writers Reception:* Saturday, April 3, 2-5 p.m.

*Location:* Jazz and Heritage Festival Gallery  
1205 North Rampart, New Orleans, LA

**Art Exhibits for February and March**

*Exhibit:* “Fleurage” Glass Windows by Mo Nogrady

*Exhibit:* Quilts by Cely Pedescleaux

*Location:* Alvar Branch Library, 913 Alvar Street, New Orleans, LA

# I WANT TO SEE A WEED

by Angela Weddle

I want to see a weed.

Not only a weed, but weeds - ugly, tall, plain, proud, flaccid.  
I want to see elephant ears turning into umbrellas,  
providing shade for some frog in some uptown person's yard  
on the way to Magazine St.

as I pass the Magnolia and Crepe Myrtle trees.  
I want to smell night jasmine and honeysuckle and be  
overpowered by it,  
even as the New Orleans trinity of beer, piss,  
and vomit wafts by my nose.

I want to declare a neutral ground in the middle of your  
suburbia.  
And I want to park my couch on it while saying,  
"throw me something mister."

I want to see vampires reading tarot cards  
while young black boys tap their bottle capped tennis shoes  
like a young Sammie Davis Jr. or Gregory Hines.

I want to see paintings on an iron fence  
as I pass by a donkey giving me a nod.

I want to see a weed.

Not only a weed, but a weed that will come up from your  
manicured lawn and choke you, come after you, lasso,  
wrestle you to the ground, mess up your salon hair -  
a New Orleans weed,  
the kind that laughs at weed killer, bug spray,  
and whatever else rains down upon it.

I want to see a tree.

Not only a tree, but a real Live Oak. The kind with character,  
Spanish moss, turning green on one side,  
with lots of scaly bark,  
and long branches that extend to the ground  
and beckon to children to climb.

I want to see a tree, an oak, that isn't some puny Texas  
version of a tree, that lives in some apartment complex  
named The Oaks on Park Lane.

I want to see a lane that goes through a park, a real one,  
that you can get lost in, feed the ducks in,  
fish off the bridge in.  
Not some strip of land  
that is the size of my grandma's backyard in New  
Orleans, pretending to be a park.

I want to go to a coffee shop.  
Not some Starbucks that is on every other corner,  
but a tiny little place that is tucked away  
in a real neighborhood.

I want to be able to order a large coffee, or a cafe au'lait,  
not a venti, grande, columbian roast, double shot  
expresso drink.

I want to go to a coffee shop where people don't wear  
suits for work,  
but because they are eccentric.

I want to be able to get my astronomical chart done  
while discussing math with a guy who carries  
maps of the stars.

I want to draw the silver creamer,  
while talking about philosophy  
in a courtyard under the elephant ear umbrella,  
a stubborn weed against my sandals,  
smelling the night jasmine and magnolias,  
drinking a hibiscus tea with 8 sugars, among friends.

I want to see a weed.

To remind me that I am alive in this dead place.  
To remind me that even a weed can be beautiful.  
People treat New Orleans as if it is a weed.  
But I'd rather be a hearty weed,  
maybe without my dandelion,  
but alive nonetheless,  
than a gaudy flower that drowns with a drop of rain.

I want to see a weed,  
to remind me of home.

I want to see a weed - in the midst of some Dallas garden,  
growing defiantly above the flowers,  
like so much writing on a  
bus stop bench - "I was here."

I want to see a weed.

To say that I am not going away.



©2007 Angela Weddle, written in Dallas, Texas, was read by  
Phyllis Parun on May 27, 2009, at the Women's Spring Literary  
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# THE BIG FIREWORKS

by Bill Warren

I should stop watching those YouTube videos about 2012. I feel like a morbidly curious rubbernecker gawking at a bad traffic accident. Those conspiracy theory videos create paranoia, causing us not to trust anything or anyone. The fact that we are being lied to on a vast scale and the world is being run by a group of insane people with very dark motives brings me to a moral and spiritual dilemma. If the doomsayers are right, we will have a convergence of political, economic and environmental cataclysms. Like the encroachment of a great storm, we are then awestruck by the futility of our efforts and overwhelmed by the rapid acceleration of events. These dismal results can sponsor suicidal attitudes, which really cannot help anyone.

If doomsayers prevail, what can we do in the face of the end of the world as we know it? As I see it, we can only appreciate the absurdity of life and laugh hilariously at this supreme cosmic joke on human existence. We could surmise, then, that we were so smart we created our own destruction! Ha Ha Ha!

As artists, we could be a group force in these catastrophic times. The disillusionment that resulted from World War I gave rise to movements such as Nihilism and Dada. In Dada we might see our own predicament. After this "war to end all wars," soldiers returned to their devastated cultures in a state of disbelief having been led into an absurd war without purpose. Millions of people died, and reason was buried in the historical scrap heap. The so-called pillars of society were a hollow, cracked façade pretending to support the same national materialism that caused the abysmal descent of their society in the first place. The artists of the Dada movement saw that there was nothing to believe in; nothing made sense. Therefore *non-sense* was justified and *anti-art* was enthusiastically embraced. Art had broken away from its historic cultural moorings, which had been seen as a corrupt delusion. The Dada artists implanted the resistance flag of *anti-everything* into the swollen corpse

of society. It was a complete reevaluation of all values.

Marcel Duchamp took this to its anti-conclusive conclusion and derailed the train of art history, short-circuiting the meaning and value that critics, historians, and society had put on art. Duchamps' humorous and elegant ready-mades confront us with our concepts of what we think art should look like. His choice of an object, such as a men's urinal, created an enigmatic spiritual and aesthetic dilemma. His conceptual



Bill Warren in his art studio Photo by Jack Gurner

choices about what art is emphasized the void of nothingness. Many more speculations can be made about the implications of his work, but one thing that seems certain is that he cut the umbilical cord of the past and set the contemporary artist on a course of new creative freedom.

Now for the sake of speculation, if we view the 2012 convergence with a positive outcome and assume that there is no end of the world disaster, then we could see an end to the power structures that have run the world for the past 200 years. The previous age of materialism, consumption, exploitation, and planetary pollution would be

coming to an end. According to Mayan legend, all the fires that are to be put out must be relit for life to continue into the next age.

We have already seen the vulnerability and unsustainability of the present system. The disastrous events of Hurricane Katrina should be a harbinger to the world of how fragile social fabrics are during a time of upheaval. In a sense, we can look at New Orleans as a precursor of things to come. Hopefully, we have learned something about dealing with chaos when civilization as we know it ends.

Other great civilizations of the past such as the Mayan and Egyptian left physical evidence in the form of monumental stone sculptures and bas-reliefs as encyclopedias of their civilizations' history. Their artists played a profound role in these ancient civilizations. Future generations like us are only now beginning to understand these hieroglyphic texts. The scope of their knowledge is amazing, not to mention the fact that these carvings still exist.

Hopefully the artists of today's world can also be the archivists of our civilization for future generations after whatever global breakdown occurs. Digital information, being too vulnerable to power and computer failures, would not be reliable libraries in the face of a world cataclysm. Historical cultural legacies would be forever lost. History testifies that the remains of any culture must be made physically tangible, i.e. in stone, metal, etc., in order to survive for millennia. ❖

*Bill Warren, born and raised in Princeton, NJ, graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design. In 1997, after 25 years of teaching and arts community development in Providence, RI, Bill moved to New Orleans where he and his wife, Pati D'Amico, ran The Waiting Room Gallery in Bywater from 1997-2007, exhibiting avant-garde artists in the spirit of fostering alternative venues for artistic expression. They now live in Water Valley, MS, where Bill has focused on ©The PAN NOLA Project, dedicated to the development of better towns and cities. Bill may be reached via email at Puppettecode2@gmail.com*

**Alvar Branch Library Fact:** Fable has it that Marc Cooper, a resident of Bywater in the 1970's, a carpenter by trade and later the Director of the Vieux Carré Commission, chained himself to the Alvar Branch building in the upper ninth ward in an attempt to reopen the branch, seeking media attention that never materialized. The building was saved, has been restored twice and serves the active, creative community of Bywater. Enthusiastically embraced by Head Librarian Mary Ann Marx and the dedicated staff, programs for adults and children include Art Nites every third Tuesday at 7pm, writers' workshops, performances/spoken word, art exhibits and more. BECOME A FAN OF ALVAR BRANCH LIBRARY ON FACEBOOK!



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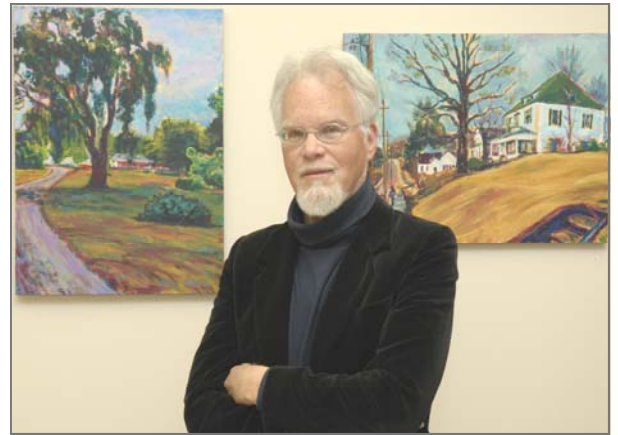


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## ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER CHANCE

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Another day brings another chance to say "I forgive,  
Another day brings another chance to be forgiven!  
Another day brings another chance to lift up a bowed down head  
and say, "Oh! I want to look up and live!"  
Another day brings another chance to wake up to a new day  
To help some distressed person along life's rough pathway.  
Another day brings another chance to give someone a smile  
Encouraging him to walk another mile  
And to hold the unsteady hands of a child  
As he passes this way!  
What great things can come our way  
If we would have the courage to face just one more day!



"Hog Heaven", 1995, by Jim Sohr

acrylic on canvas 3'x4'

[www.JimSohr.com](http://www.JimSohr.com)

### FACTOID: FOOD AND DISEASE

After 40 years of nutritional research, author T. Colin Campbell's findings are that *animal proteins increase cancer tumors and cholesterol and are linked to breast cancer and colon/rectal cancer. Plant-based foods decrease risks.* The best diet for reducing risks of developing the seven deadly cancers and cardiovascular disease is a whole food, plant-based diet. (T. Colin Campbell, *The China Study*, [www.tcolincampbell.org](http://www.tcolincampbell.org))

### AVANT-GARDE TRIVIA

According to Carolyn Wilenzick Levy, who can remember events from her beloved *Brigadoon* better than most, the title "The New Orleans Avant-Garde" was coined by Phyllis Parun in the early 1960's to name a group of creative student colleagues at LSUNO.

The first evening of The New Orleans Avant-Garde was held on Sunday, December 11, 1983, by Lee Meitzen Grue, Carolyn Wilenzick Levy, Marian Owen, Helen Toye and Phyllis Parun at the First Backyard Poetry Theatre. The invitation read: "*Prologue: Young and in New Orleans, you went to college at LSUNO. The rest of life would never sink to the mundane, for you and New Orleans comprised 'a movable feast'.*" And so we began!

In January, 2007, after opening *Art Nite* at the Alvar Branch Library, Phyllis Parun recounted her days at New Orleans Public Library's Artist's Information Bureau Community Relationship Department and issued 25 New Orleans Avant-Garde certificates to attendees. And so we continue!