An initiative of the

Creative Renewal

Gulf Coast Artists
Hurricane Relief Program 2006
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What will they do now?
This is the question everyone who witnessed Hurricane Katrina wonders. The explorations of artists, suffering the same tragic loss and displacement as an entire population, are particularly revealing. It is often artists, as members of a community, who process and present information in a way that can inform others and lead the way to greater understanding. The artists of the Gulf Coast have found themselves swept up in a powerful life-changing force, a common experience that gives their art a new relevance and a new voice, one that is revealed in the following pages.

Learning from national tragedy through the lens of creative thinkers is a typically Californian approach. The desire to understand what is happening in the Gulf, what our government is doing, how people have responded, and what this means to our country inspired The James Irvine Foundation to partner with the Alliance of Artists Communities to create the Gulf Coast Artists Hurricane Relief Program.

Of the twenty-five artists who participated in this program, many have developed work that sheds new light on Hurricane Katrina, its aftermath and its cultural significance, while others have continued work that reflects the history and traditions of the Gulf Coast. All have shared their experiences, as well as their artwork, helping to bring understanding to such an unfathomable tragedy.

By providing the time, space and support for twenty-five artists to focus on their work, to reflect and take a break from the struggle to rebuild their lives, the Alliance of Artists Communities and The James Irvine Foundation support their endeavors to reinvent themselves and the culture of the Gulf Coast.

The 2006 hurricane season caused massive destruction to the entire Gulf Coast of the United States, recognized as our nation's worst natural disaster. Gulf Coast residents were devastated by the loss of not only their homes and businesses, but also their culture and community.

An initiative of the Alliance of Artists Communities
Supported by the James Irvine Foundation

Consortium of California Artists Communities
Djerassi Resident Artists Program, Woodside
18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica
Exploratorium, San Francisco
Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito
Kala Art Institute, Berkeley
Sally and Don Lucas Artists Programs at Montalvo Arts Center, Saratoga
Marcy Hinand Cady  
Program Director, Arts  
The James Irvine Foundation

New Orleans is one of the cultural centers of the country, best known for its music but for other areas as well. It has a rich folk tradition. We knew there was a unique aesthetic that the Gulf Coast artists were going to bring and share with California artists.

Once the devastation of Katrina became apparent I began working with officials from the Louisiana Division of the Arts to determine how the Foundation might assist the region’s devastated arts community. One of the most pressing needs was helping artists who had lost significant parts of their collections. The Foundation already had a grant to the Alliance of Artists Communities, which includes many artist residency programs in California. So we agreed on a plan to offer residencies as a way to help artists displaced by the hurricane rebuild their work.

Deborah Obalil  
Executive Director  
Alliance of Artists Communities

The Alliance of Artists Communities is proud to be the national link that made these relief residencies possible. From our experience in coordinating a consortium of California residency centers through our Visions from the New California project, we were able to quickly adapt that structure to assist Gulf Coast artists. We aim to continue creating partnerships, enabling this type of programming and funding in the future.

Morgana King  
Program Coordinator

It has been such a pleasure to work with and support some of today’s best Gulf Coast artists. Working with the Alliance of Artists Communities, the six artists’ residency centers in California, while also having the time to develop my own artwork, I have learned and grown during my time in Rhode Island, as all the artists have during their residencies. This program has changed my life, afforded me the chance to develop in new directions and enabled me to help myself while helping others. I couldn’t have asked for more, and would like to give a big THANK YOU to The James Irvine Foundation and the Alliance of Artists Communities for making this program possible!

How did it work?
The aim of the Gulf Coast Artists Hurricane Relief Program is to support and promote the work of outstanding individual artists from the Gulf Coast, expose them to a diverse community of California artists, and foster a unique cultural and creative exchange. Artists were identified by nominators from the Gulf Coast region’s arts councils, museums and galleries, as well as through an online form for self-nominated applications on the Alliance’s web site, and selected for residencies based on need, impact, and artistic merit. Artists indicated their choice to attend one- or two-month residencies and were then matched with the six participating residency centers and scheduled in available time slots. This would not have been possible without the enthusiastic work of all six residency centers to make the time and space available on such short notice. The lead-time for these competitive programs—from when an artist applies to the start of a residency—is normally eighteen to twenty-four months; to accommodate the Gulf Coast artists, the participating programs made arrangements for them within a few months of their application. Once in residence, each participant received a $5,000 stipend to facilitate the creation of new work, replace damaged supplies or equipment, and support their continuing career. Special funding and accommodations were also made for artists to bring their families and pets, as necessary.

Cultural Exchange: Gulf Coast/West Coast

The arts and cultural traditions found throughout the United States are often as diverse as from one nation to another, and the cultural communities of California and the Gulf Coast are no exception. Bringing individuals together from these different regions will have a lasting influence on both the Gulf Coast participants, who gained exposure to a world of new opportunities, and the California communities who welcomed them. Abram Himmelstein, a resident at Headlands, said, “California was inspiring. We were there during the 100th anniversary of the 1906 Earthquake, and seeing what San Francisco has become during those hundred years gave perspective to what New Orleans can make itself to be. I was especially into the thoughtfulness with which San Francisco approaches matters of government, and the civic-mindedness of the people I met.”

Expanding Horizons

These kinds of eye-opening experiences are essential for artists, and now, with the metamorphosis of the Gulf Coast, it is more important than ever to expand the region’s vision of the future. While at Kala, Vicki Niclot noted “that we are more socially isolated in Southern Mississippi. I hope that as the Gulf Coast rebuilds, we will be more open to external influences and the valuable opportunities of diversity.”

New Collaborations

Dialogue between artists who would in other circumstances never meet is a unique and valuable benefit of artists’ residencies. Theater and performance artist Kathy Randels remarked after her time at Djerassi that “the residency...has enhanced my future plans, opened new doors of possibility, such as touring new work to California, and new collaborations.” The gift of a new audience and new community to support an artist’s work is priceless, something that will last throughout one’s career, providing the opportunity for continuous creative renewal.
### THE GULF COAST ARTISTS

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The mission of the Djerassi Resident Artists Program is to support and enhance the creativity of artists by providing uninterrupted time for work, reflection, and collegial interaction in a setting of great natural beauty, and to preserve the land on which the Program is situated. Miles of hiking trails lead artists-in-residence to more than forty site-specific sculptures created on the land by former residents. The Artists’ House and Artists’ Barn provide housing and studios for groups of eight to ten artists who share a residency period and work in a genuine retreat atmosphere.

Rashida Ferdinand
January 3 – February 3

Michael Patrick Welch
January 24 – February 17

Kathy Randels
February 2 – February 26

Sean LaRocca
February 2 – February 26

My time at Djerassi provided me with images, moments, beauty, and revelations in my own work that I will carry with me always.

Kathy Randels
Rashida Ferdinand was the first artist to participate in the Gulf Coast Artists Hurricane Relief Program, jumping on the opportunity to attend Djerassi in the winter of 2006. While still in FEMA and insurance agency limbo, she was able to retreat to a place of relaxation and clarity and create pieces for an upcoming exhibition. “Through my creative process, I affirm my belief in God, the interconnection of life forces, and power in our universe,” says Rashida. She intuitively sculpts ceramic vessel forms, and creates conceptual installations that transform spaces into distinct and unique environments. These “sculpted spaces” for contemplation and reflection are created out of a variety of materials; tape, earth, shells, fired clay, wire and glass are used to create womb-like forms, eyes, eggs, and umbilical cords. While at Djerassi, Rashida completed 250 ceramics eye forms, the first phase on an installation piece called March of the Tapetum Lucidum, which was shown in July at Atlanta’s Contemporary Art Center.

March of the Tapetum Lucidum (installation detail)
2006, ceramic/mixed-media

I will remember the warm people, the exemplary staff, the beautiful landscape, and the space and time to work as I have needed to do for so long.

I feel like Djerassi has become a new community to me and I look forward to returning in the future.

Sticks and stones may break our bones but words do hurt. 2005, ceramic

Rashida Ferdinand
Ceramics/Sculpture, New Orleans, LA
www.thecontemporary.org/pics/RashidaFerdinand/index.html
They don’t hire just anyone to paint Mardi Gras floats. Until this year. I applied the past two seasons, but these jobs have historically been coveted, the den bosses picky. This year the difference was made, for me, by Katrina. Because the disaster interrupted float painting for months and many artists never returned, our den’s new ‘desperation crew’ consists of the music booker for a temporarily-closed Frenchmen Street nightclub, a Jackson Square painter short on tourists, and a graffiti artist once profiled in *The Times-Picayune*—all of us playing a real part in history! Just a 38-second bit—the average time each float is seen by parade-goers—but an honor nonetheless.

Mardi Gras dens are gray warehouses in gray areas. But their insides, secretly cramped full of each krewe’s entire parade, make Wonka’s factory look subtle. Our den was comprehensively flooded; Lake Ponchatrain painted a thick brown stripe four-and-half-feet up the side of all our floats. It felt like sacrilege, painting jokes about the flood over that stripe. But I was given the honor of concocting the jokes! Jokes which included: dead refrigerators, blue tarps, crawfish, FEMA trailers, MREs (shrimp jambalaya), plasma screen TVs, dead catfish (with “CAT 3” stitched on their athletic jerseys), hypodermic needles, a can of Tony Chacere’s, a bottle of Paxil, and a sign reading `Bienvenidos a Nueva Orleans’. We’re not supposed to discuss the float’s motifs, but the world surely assumes that this year’s parades will share a drowning theme.

*Most days I worked for seven hours. Even on the rare days I totally didn’t feel like working at all, I accidently wrote for hours. In all, I completed enough of Transport Instinct, my new collection about post-flood New Orleans, to give to my agent to begin the submission process.*

*I wrote a book because of Djerassi.*
Sean LaRocca
Music, New Orleans, LA
www.artspotproductions.org

Sean LaRocca is a composer, music producer and publisher, and performing musician. He composed and performed music for ArtSpot Productions’ Checkov’s Wild Ride, Maid of Orleans, Venus Vulcan Mars, Rumours of War, and The End and Back Again, My Friend. He and Kathy Randels are frequent collaborators and spent much of their time at Djerassi working on a new site-specific performance piece, Beneath the Strato/Disappearing, which will debut at another Alliance member location, A Studio In the Woods, in New Orleans.

Kathy Randels
Performance Art, New Orleans, LA
www.artspotproductions.org

Kathy Randels, a native New Orleanian, is a theatre artist/educator and the artistic director of ArtSpot Productions. A performance artist who writes and produces her own work, Randels has performed her renowned one-woman show Rage Within/Without nationally and internationally since 1991. She believes that all voices within a community need to be expressed, and that performance is an essential element of collective healing for all communities, especially those whose voices are not often heard. Through her performances, Kathy presents stories and compelling moments which allow the artists and the audience to come together to witness and share their collective dreams, sorrows, joys and lives.

I have already applied some of my knowledge accrued at Djerassi to my life in New Orleans. I am allowing ideas to marinate before setting them in stone. There is a place inside that I can go to in memory when the pressures of New Orleans life become too overwhelming.

The most important benefit of the time for me was that I was able to slow down, to meditate in that beautiful place, to sit in such silence and watch the sun go down or the snow fall, to walk at length through the hundreds of unspoiled acres. It was a poignant reminder to listen beyond the surface sounds, which has already proved very helpful for our new piece.

It is the first time in my artistic career that I have felt such freedom and such attentiveness. I learned to trust myself and trust the dynamic of time and work to bring unexpected inspiration.
18th Street Arts Center is a nonprofit residential arts center in Santa Monica that supports artists and arts organizations dedicated to issues of community and diversity in contemporary society. 18th Street seeks artists who demonstrate social consciousness and spiritual awareness in a well-developed art making practice, manifest the spectrum of approaches to contemporary ideas, and reflect the diverse population of Los Angeles. 18th Street Arts Center aspires to be an artist-friendly gathering place, providing a physical center in a city characterized by its de-centralization.

Darryl Montana
May 2 – 30

Dona Simons
May 1 – June 31

Shawn Hall
July 5 – August 31

My introduction to the art community via 18th Street Arts Center widened my horizons as it relates to networking and the possibility to collaborate with other artists.

Darryl Montana
Darryl Montana, at the early age of six, knew what it was to string the pearls that don the stunningly majestic costumes of his father, Big Chief Allison “Tootie” Montana. Darryl was taught to sing the songs the way the “old timers” sang them and to dance with emphasis on the swift movement of the feet. At the age of 11 he created his first Mardi Gras suit, all on his own. Now he is Chief of the Yellow Pocahontas “Hunters” Mardi Gras Indian Tribe, as his father was before him. This is an on-going African-American tradition and culture which is uniquely New Orleans and began in Darryl’s family in the late 1860s. Using sequins, beads, colored stones, poster board, canvas, feathers and marabou he creates 10+ feet tall, three-dimensional Mardi Gras Indian suits. “Hurricanes Katrina and Rita destroyed four pieces from different Mardi Gras Indian suits. The crown of the white suit (2004), whose theme was water, was my interpretation of a vision that my late father said he always wanted to create. At the 14th Street Arts Center I created a 3-foot doll and replicated the white suit with meticulous attention to re-create the fine details of the original suit. I felt that it was important for me to recreate a suit that I felt artistically was one of the best that I’ve created thus far and had sentimental meaning.”

The residency allowed me to sew without distractions, and provided me with support by having people work on pieces for the Mardi Gras 2007 suit while I worked on the doll project. The residency afforded me time and space to fully concentrate on my craft. The space was peaceful and it gave my wife and I a time to “breathe.”
Dona Simons
Painting, New Orleans, LA
www.members.aol.com/DSpaintings/intro.html

Dona Simons painted underwater scenes long before the levees broke and flooded her Lakeview studio and home. Her detailed and colorful depictions of New Orleans musicians floating in the sea now appear prophetic of their own demise. Combining technical skill, imagination and a passion for Louisiana, her work richly reflects New Orleans culture. She also experiments with progressions of paintings, animating the process and bringing to life some of her creations online. One unique benefit of Dona’s residency was 18th Street’s proximity to The Getty Conservation Institute where she was able to get expert advice on techniques to restore her flood-damaged paintings.

I will remember having inspiration and the ability to work return to me after not having either since Katrina. I will remember that it is possible somewhere sometimes for things to be that good. While it will never be possible to regain the life I had before Katrina, it at least gave me the feeling that I am alive again and hope that I can begin a new life.
Shawn Hall
Painting, New Orleans, LA
www.shawnhall.org

Shawn Hall works in painting, video, set and costume design. She commonly presents her work in multiples, mainly pairings of interchangeable, large paintings, and large groups of small paintings, that serve as a series of connected thoughts and speak with each other like pages of a book. Shawn says, “Things work for me when there are layers of meaning, although there are often literal layers as well. My work explores subconscious/conscious responses to the world around me and places these in the context of a biology/alchemy of living and breathing. Most of the large work is poetic, perhaps literary, with thoughts about sex, death, religion, social hierarchy, and the natural world. The small work tends to reflect the language of all that—symbol/sign, gesture, and figure—separated out from the more complex larger work.”

While at 18th Street I’ve worked on a body (40+) of 12” square watercolor paintings, shot some digital images for an ongoing project documenting flora as seen by light in the context of sky in places where I spend time, and worked on a new video piece as well as some older unfinished pieces.

The time alone in a studio has been great for me. I’ve had a chance to relax and work on a lot of things and understand their interrelatedness.

For a short period of time it has been a really easy and good life. I am filled up going back to New Orleans to face the challenges that await, rather than depleted. It’s really been a wonderful time and opportunity.
I had never been to the Exploratorium before and I was informed that the studio space was “unconventional.” I liked it because the space is sort of like a mad scientist inventor’s room.

Matteo Neivert

Housed within the walls of San Francisco’s landmark Palace of Fine Arts, the Exploratorium is a collage of hundreds of interactive exhibits in the areas of science, art and human perception. It is their mission to create a culture of learning through innovative environments, programs and tools that help people nurture their curiosity about the world around them. From its beginning, the museum has used the observations made by scientists and artists as a means of expanding visitors’ understanding of nature, culture and natural phenomena. In the words of Exploratorium founder Dr. Frank Oppenheimer: “Both artists and scientists help us notice and appreciate things in nature that we had learned to ignore or had never been taught to see. Both art and science are needed to fully understand nature and its effects on people. The art in the Exploratorium is therefore blended with the science as part of the overall pedagogy.”

Matteo Neivert
April 1 – May 28

Christian Champagne
June 1 – August 1

Daphne J. Loney
June 19 – August 18
Matteo Neivert
Painting, New Orleans, LA

Matteo Neivert’s recent work combines computer prints, photocopies, wallpaper and old books into a collage, upon which he builds semi-abstract mixed media paintings. “My work explores nature as the ultimate force. Humans have a stance of superiority towards nature. My work serves as a lamentation for the things that are lost when we accept this assumption,” says Matteo. The Exploratorium was the perfect place to expand on these themes and discover new ways of working. He originally intended to create an interactive mural to explore weather patterns and their effects on habitats, but was inspired by the museum and became interested in “biology, microscopic imagery, and how water as a tidal force provides energy for life.” He divided his time between direct cinema animation, mixed-media painting with microbial/plant/human/animal hybrids, Winogradski Column/terarium ecosystems, boat sculptures with epiphytes, and digital video work of water and ocean environments.

The change of location helped me feel like I could take risks and learn new things. It helped separate the emotional challenges of New Orleans and provide a safe and interesting place to work and grow. I was surrounded by scientists and artists—which formed a very creative energy. The museum was very inspiring.

Being in California has made me feel more open to technology as a tool but also its downfall and dependence on energy/electricity/oil to survive. For example, when the hurricane hit the Gulf—all technology was instantly wiped out and made impotent. Computers, lights, trains, etc. were useless. The artifice of energy was silenced. Biological needs were suddenly most important. In California, I was made aware of the sheer beauty of the landscape, of the natural environment and the local people’s respect for nature, plants, and of course the culinary.
Christian Champagne
Satirist/Poet, New Orleans, LA
www.christianchampagne.com

Political satirist and poet, Chris Champagne makes fun of the past, current and future political and social landscape of New Orleans. The residency in San Francisco allowed him to see the country’s culture in a broader sense. “The unique, sometimes subtle ways that Americans interpret the everyday modern world lends itself to what I do,” said Chris. “It was good to be able to spend more than a week observing another slice of America. I worked on new poetry, wrote a play about San Francisco, and worked on a future show dealing with the aftermath of Katrina. And I attempted to adapt my latest show about Katrina, titled Cirque de Dogris into book form.” Chris has staged shows at Le Chat Noir in New Orleans, performed both his poetry and satire to national audiences, and has a new book of poetry coming out this year on Portals Press.

I will remember the kindness of all the people, artists, staff at the Exploratorium and the freedom the residency allowed me. For the first time in my life it gave me the opportunity to work exclusively on my art. The opportunity allowed me to get more work done in a shorter time than ever before.

Running for Office 2006
Chris ran for mayor, mocking New Orleans' post-Katrina politics.
This residency gave me the opportunity to fully spend my time on my ideas and to begin re-planning my future. Without this time I would have been unable to devote my time to making art work. I feel that the things I saw and experienced will influence work for a long time to come. I feel honored to have had such time to work and be inspired.

Daphne J. Loney
Sculpture, New Orleans, LA
web.mac.com/daphnejeanne

Daphne Loney’s multimedia sculpture addresses her views on popular culture, gender and religion. Daphne has begun working with everyday materials like clothing, magazines, books, and personal letters, and she often uses words—as both visual and conceptual elements—in her sculpture. At Exploratorium, Daphne began work on a new garment with the fairy-tale character Rapunzel sewn onto it using hair extensions. Daphne also started her first kinetic pieces, including a small house of cards that collapses and then rebuilds itself, a short video, and a piece with two puppets that slap each other continuously.

The museum itself was such an anthill of activity. The movement and interaction between participants and the exhibition especially influenced me. How a sculpture appeared one way but when manipulated it became something else. I found this most influential to me and I know it will become extremely relevant in my work for the next several years!
At Headlands, day and night are your own. The only request is to attend the group dinners five nights a week. This part of the residency was a pleasure.

Rachel Breunlin
A long-time new media artist, born in the UK and now living in America, Paul Higham has used digital technology in his art for over twenty years. Since the early ‘70s his endeavor has remained consistent—to propagate a new form of sculpture based on theories of artificial life. Using GPS technology, rapid-prototyping, and binary data to write computer code, Paul creates works that deal with the commodification of information and the dynamics of data itself. He calls this work “Datasculpture,” and explains it as, “the exploration of discrete commonalities of function, entropy and form found in artificial and ‘natural’ structures; speaking more to the rules behind the structures of organicity itself and illuminating self organization, hysteresis, synthesis, turbulence and ‘noise’ within culture in real time.”

During my residency, I built an interactive installation and showcased it in The Rodeo Room at Headlands Center for the Arts. Golden Gate-Geodesic Headlands Suite consists of a real time computer kiosk with interactive interface. (GPS plateaus within data matrices/Quartz oscillator N37°46.7616, W122°26.0352.)

One memorable journey as part of my practice was to cross the Golden Gate Bridge itself. This involved the GPS mapping of several excursions around the Golden Gate and Headlands with a hand held GPS device with which I recorded the events and created a series of timelines from the GPS data.

It felt very much like a community and as an artist who has ploughed a solitary furrow for many years, I was happy to see I could participate in that.
Rachel Breunlin
Writing, New Orleans, LA
www.neighborhoodstoryproject.org

Rachel Breunlin is co-director of the Neighborhood Story Project (NSP), a community documentary program in New Orleans, which teaches high school students how to write books about their neighborhoods. Rachel is also a researcher and writer interested in how place is remembered, constructed and re-imagined in cities. Describing her month at Headlands she says, “I worked on a life history project on Joseph ‘Papa Joe’ Glasper, the proprietor of a small barroom and jazz club in New Orleans called Joe’s Cozy Corner. I also spent time developing programming ideas for a corner store the NSP is renovating for a writing workshop and gallery space in the Seventh Ward. I went to spaces around San Francisco to explore how other groups have set up their galleries, and talked at length with residents about how nonprofit spaces can be successful.”

The residency stripped back a lot of the pain of the last ten months. So much of my work is place-based—directly about the city of New Orleans—that I was in a state of manic grief after the storm. I have wanted to return to this life history project for the last year and a half, but with the work of the NSP and recovery overloading every day, I haven’t had much time to get my head around it. This time at the Headlands allowed me to refocus—comb through old interviews, weave together pieces I had been working on, and work on new pieces of writing.

People have offered all kinds of help since the storm, but this residency has been the most important in terms of providing a space to regroup, to rethink how an organization like the Neighborhood Story Project fits into the rebuilding of the city and into the daily lives of the downtown neighborhoods of New Orleans.

I really liked that there were artists of different mediums all trying to communicate and explain their work to each other. I got to think about my own work in ways that I hadn’t previously had the chance to consider.

This residency was a chance for me to put this levee failure into some sort of perspective, as in “one of the defining moments of my life,” but maybe not the center of my entire universe.

Abram Shalom Himelstein
Writing, New Orleans, LA
www.neighborhoodstoryproject.org

Abram Shalom Himelstein is the co-director of the Neighborhood Story Project, and the author of Tales of a Punk Rock Nothing, and What the Hell am I Doing Here? The 100 T-shirt Project. He has been teaching in New Orleans Public Schools since 2001, while moonlighting on projects like the New Orleans Bookfair and receiving his MFA from University of New Orleans. Abram is employed by the Literacy Alliance of Greater New Orleans, working on Literacy Projects including One Book, One New Orleans. Abram’s latest book, Decatur Street Stories, will be published by Garrett County Press in July of 2007.

Wardies Ashley Nelson (project assistant, 6th Ward), Rachel (7th Ward), and Abram (5th Ward) flash their ward signs.
I expected to work on choreography. I did not expect, however, that I would connect and collaborate so quickly with another artist to develop my work. The collaboration with Maw Shein Win produced two additional layers, set and poetry. And as a continuing lesson I was reminded that with an open mind and heart creativity is waiting to whisper.

I am glad to have crossed paths with such a diverse and dynamic group of people. It was like having a collage of worldly perspectives converge on Headlands for a fleeting moment that will never repeat.

I will remember the time in my life following Hurricane Katrina when my spirit needed lifting most. I will remember the time in my life when I woke up one morning at Headlands Center for the Arts smiling.
The artists were all incredibly nice and generous. One night they sat around and twisted pipe cleaners for me to help alleviate some of the more tedious parts of my work. Their contributions were a great addition to my piece.

Sally Heller
Mixed Media / Installation, New Orleans, LA
www.sallyheller.com

Sally Heller sets out to create unique structures that are at once familiar and strange. Her work involves putting together low-end consumer goods to make over-the-top gardens that reflect our mass-market culture. Everyday materials, such as pipe cleaners, PVC pipes, netting and chains are re-contextualized and transformed into complete environments. Heller’s painterly use of these materials literally and metaphorically re-directs their original use and recycles them into organic forms, repositioned in a gallery setting.

I will take with me a memory of being in a beautiful landscape with my own space to create and reflect in. It has allowed me to focus, to realize how much it means to me to work.

The interaction with other artists, the studio space I received and the level of seriousness towards ideas was greatly appreciated. Being here brought me back to the intensity of art making that I haven’t felt since living in NY; I think it will change me in a lot of ways.
I expected to work in a more structured atmosphere and was pleasantly surprised that I was free to work as much or as little as I wanted or needed. The facilities were state-of-the-art, and I was able to work at my own pace.

Vicki Niolet
At the moment, my life is in complete turmoil so having some kind of stability and support really helped my mental state of mind.

Srdjan Loncar
Sculpture/Digital Photography, New Orleans, LA

Srdjan Loncar is a native of Croatia who moved to New Orleans and in 2003 received his MFA from the University of New Orleans in photography and sculpture. His current work investigates the exploitation of images in contemporary culture. Using a process that consists of carving forms out of Styrofoam and covering them with close-up photographic/digital images of the objects’ surfaces, he reveals complexities of observation, recording and representation. At Kala, Srdjan completed a life-size installation, this time adding an audio element, where “nature has curiously been replaced with a dazzling digital substitute.” His work has been shown in the New Orleans Museum of Art, and is part of the Fredrick R. Weisman Art Foundation Collection.
I now feel more open to establishing possibilities for exhibiting and selling work in other areas of the country. I currently travel to regional shows, but after my residency, I feel more comfortable reaching out to national venues.

The change of scenery and the challenge of new surroundings rejuvenated my enthusiasm. I was able to forget the clean up and rebuilding efforts of the Gulf Coast for a few weeks and concentrate purely on creative work.
I completed a series of eight silk-screened prints, each in an edition of five to ten. The series is tentatively titled House Conglomerations. The prints originated in pictures I had taken of damaged houses in the Lower 9th Ward. I collaged various houses and parts of houses into new constructions that were then translated into six to eight color silk-screens.

I love New Orleans so much, but I was really impressed by the Bay area. On the one hand, I think it gave me a sense of perspective to hopefully push myself further to make more and better work and to get involved in bigger and better projects. On the other hand, it made me realize how important my work can be back in New Orleans.
Kyle and I want to spend more time on our own work, and to use the press as vehicle for more conceptual endeavors. We’d really like to initiate a visiting artist’s program here in New Orleans.

Jenny LeBlanc
Printmaking/Performance/Installation, New Orleans, LA
www.hotironpress.com

Jenny LeBlanc is co-founder of Hot Iron Press, an independent letterpress and silkscreen shop in New Orleans. When speaking about her work she says that, “whether on paper and canvas, or on the ground where we tread, everyone makes marks. Marks prove our existence and give us influence. My work investigates how the marks we craft tell a story, the trails we generate show a path, the traces we leave have a history, and the lines we create reflect a time.” At Kala, Jenny researched marks made by New Orleans’ floodwaters by sampling and growing bacterial and fungal cultures. She completed a stop-motion animation video using the samples as drawing media, as well as a collection of drypoint intaglio prints on wallpaper that resemble mold growth patterns in a series titled Souvenir.

I think this residency and the set up at Kala in particular contributed greatly to what I made there. I would never have attempted to make this kind of print in our home studio, but was very eager and happy to re-familiarize myself with this process and the presses there.

When we are in New Orleans, there are always dauntingly long lists of rebuilding related tasks to accomplish. There is rarely any spare time for artistic endeavors. Spending a month in the studio was a real pleasure.

Good Sign 2006, sample #15 grown on nutrient agar

Souvenir (detail) 2006, drypoint intaglio print on wallpaper

Kyle and I want to spend more time on our own work, and to use the press as vehicle for more conceptual endeavors. We’d really like to initiate a visiting artist’s program here in New Orleans.
I usually don’t have any plans coming in to a residency, but the photo booth project was the only work on the burner when I arrived. The residency was incredible; the staff at Kala is amazing, knowledgeable, and available. The facilities can only be compared to a kid in a candy store! I feel this is among the most powerful work I’ve made to date.

I have acquired an arsenal of new techniques and processes, and more importantly new friendships.
In 1939, Montalvo created its first Artist Residency Program. Since that time, more than six-hundred artists from twenty countries have participated. In October 2004, Montalvo opened the Sally and Don Lucas Artists Programs, replacing the original artists’ residency program. The new $10.5 million facility, designed by six teams of artists and architects, is comprised of ten discipline-specific live/work studios and one commons building. The Lucas Artists Programs offer facilities and staff supportive of the creative process, state-of-the-art technology and an environment conducive to both individual practice and the energetic exchange of ideas among international and culturally diverse fellows.

Claude Black
April 1 – 30

Marc M. Arentsen
May 2 – 31

Rachel Perkoff
May 17 – June 30

Scott Slapin
June 1 – July 1

Yvette Sirker
June 31 – July 31

Montalvo is so conducive to working, and it is such an artist environment, that even were I to have all the tools I need at home, I doubt that I would have accomplished so much.

Scott Slapin
For thirty years Claude Black made painting part of his daily life, until Katrina came and stopped all routines, all normalcies. His house and studio, two-thirds of a mile from the beach, took on water and all thought of painting was washed away, until he and his wife Jennifer were able to attend Montalvo. “During these days I worked on five 78” x 60” unstretched canvases painted on both sides. Ten paintings, five objects: some are dialogues, one feels like a diptych, one is the same abstraction from opposite directions, one seems like you can see through the painting from front and back; one seems to speak history then prehistory. What narrative is left is driven by the painting rather than the painter,” said Claude of his work in residence. His paintings are narrative, large-scale and abstract, and he often combines them into multiples or suites of paintings. “Since returning from Montalvo,” Claude said, “I am back in the studio on a regular basis which restores a balance in my life that had been lost since the hurricane.”

It has been a difficult time for all of us on the Gulf Coast, recovery is consuming. Providing artists an opportunity to leave for a time and concentrate on work again was an inspired concept for a support program.

All our needs were met and we were left to ourselves to paint for thirty days; but the heart of the Montalvo program is the dinner served each night by a resident chef working with mostly local food and wine. These always stimulating evenings coupled with the solitude of the day in the studio is unique in my experience.
My residency at Montalvo did change my future plans. Though many have tried to talk me out of it, I now feel encouraged to press on with the dance company. After all of the hardship of the hurricane as well as the period of time leading up to it had caused, I guess I had given up on the idea of continuing my career in the arts.

Marc M. Arentsen
Dance, Jackson, MS
www.polaritydance.org

Marc M. Arentsen is the founder and artistic director of Polarity Dance Theater, a contemporary dance company based in Jackson, Mississippi. As an international dancer, designer, master teacher and prolific choreographer, he has appeared in, produced and collaborated on numerous acclaimed dance and theatre works in Asia, Europe and North America. Marc was able to bring his family to Montalvo and says, "It was a key opportunity for us to be together in a completely different context, where the important things were important and where we could be recentered as a family, to a degree." Of course he also found time to dance, spending six to eight hours in the studio a day, expanding his vocabulary and extending frames of reference which led to ideas and motifs for new work. Marc found the studio "to be a safe haven, a place to molt or to cocoon. Free from most distractions and encumbrances, it was a place to think, write, journal, remember, discover, and create."

As for me personally, it has been a time of rest, a time of reflection and a time of rediscovery. Unlike some of the other artists here, I did not have a project to finish. On the contrary, most of the evidence and record of my work has been lost and my company’s dancers were dispersed. I felt as if I had to find the beginning again. I had to find out what makes me tick and why I do what I do, besides re-evaluating how I do it. At Montalvo, I’ve attempted to rediscover the things that get my imagination started.
I felt respected, supported, nurtured. They really catered to the creative person/process. I felt honored to have this experience. I also met some interesting artists that I hopefully will stay in contact with.

I am so impressed that The Irvine Foundation and the artists’ communities took action to acknowledge the magnitude of this disaster and the importance of art. That they witnessed the impact this had on my life and chose to support me validates me as both a human and an artist, and has turned this tragedy into one of the best experiences in my life. I don’t know what I would have done without this support.

Rachel Perkoff
Documentary Film, New Orleans, LA
www.anotherlostangel.org

Rachel Perkoff is the filmmaker/director/producer of Another Lost Angel. Currently in postproduction, the movie is a feature-length documentary about the poetic life and violent death of Kat Perkoff: writer, runaway, drug smuggler, bar owner, local icon... and Rachel’s older sister. Comprised of archival footage, interviews, and “dreamlike recollections,” the film began as a personal journey of sibling loss and quickly grew into a full-scale investigation of a life lived on the margins. Another Lost Angel explores notions of fate, identity, and memory as well as the seedy world of the New Orleans lesbian mafia subculture of the 1970s.

Video stills from Another Lost Angel
Scott Slapin is a violist and a composer whose solo CDs and original compositions have received critical acclaim. He is the first person to have recorded the complete cycle of J. S. Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas for Violin on viola, and he has committed to disc many new and previously unrecorded works for viola on the Eroica Classical Recordings and Red Mark labels. He and his wife, violist Tanya Solomon, often perform as a duo, and they have played together throughout the United States and South America as members of the Philadelphia Virtuosi, the Sao Paulo Symphony Orchestra (Brazil), the Louisville Orchestra and the Louisiana Philharmonic in New Orleans. Scott and Tanya can be heard on their duo CD, Sketches from the New World: American Viola Duos in the 21st Century, and a newly released CD, Recital on the Road: What We Did On Our Summer Evacuation.

During my residency here, I composed two pieces of chamber music, and I prepared the entire set of Bach Sonatas and Partitas for a recording next month, to be released by Eroica Classical Recordings. We also performed for the other artists, and I performed a piece I never planned to play for viola and juggler! The interaction with the other artists was great, to hear how they worked, and to see their work. It really opened my eyes to a whole new world of what goes on outside of music.

I’ve learned the importance of taking a break, even when outside concerns seem to warrant my full attention, to concentrate on music.
The residency has been very healing. I was delirious with exhaustion when I first arrived at Montalvo. Post-Katrina has been a very difficult year. This was the perfect antidote to the stress of living through this epic disaster. California has given me peace of mind.

Yvette Sirker
Theater, New Orleans, LA

Playwright, actor, producer and director, Yvette Sirker is founding artistic and executive director of Zhoux Zhoux Theatre Company. For the past ten years her work has been rooted in the tradition of Southern storytelling, based on her own experience as a contemporary Southern woman of mixed race heritage (Latin-American and East Indian). Active in the field of theater education, Yvette has taught acting throughout New Orleans and created the Shakespeare Festival at Tulane University’s Apprentice and Intern Program. Her work ranges from drama to multidisciplinary productions that include a strong focus on theatrical movement. Recently, Yvette gained the spotlight for her play Pink Collar Crime which premiered in May 2006, and forewarned the effects a major hurricane would have on New Orleans. It addresses the culture of greed in America that has led to global warming, which in turn has led to the environmental backlash such as devastating hurricanes. This play was written before Hurricane Katrina with the expectation that such a hurricane was inevitable.

I had planned to focus solely on Pink Collar Crime, but was so strongly inspired to create a new work that I began working on A Late Summer Night’s Dream, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. This work utilizes Shakespeare’s text to address man’s relationship to nature with a focus on the character of Titania, Queen of the Fairies, who mourns the earth’s catastrophic response to the disharmony of its inhabitants. This is a multimedia work that will include footage of Hurricane Katrina and other global disasters.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This program comes to an end on the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. As we all reflect on the struggles of the past year, this program stands apart as a blessing and life-changing opportunity for those of us fortunate enough to take part. The Gulf Coast is still a long way from recovering and we urge you to continue to support rebuilding and recovery efforts by visiting, volunteering, helping individuals and organizations, and most importantly keeping us in your hearts and minds. Laissez les bons temps rouler encore.

We would like to thank:

The James Irvine Foundation, for seeing how their mission to support Californians could extend to a project that gave Gulf Coast artists refuge in California. Marcy Cady, Arts Program Director at The James Irvine Foundation, for having the vision and persistence to make this program possible. Jeanne Sakamoto, Arts Program Officer at The James Irvine Foundation, for being a continual advocate for artists’ communities and their support of artists.

The directors and managers of the residency centers who came together to make this program a reality: Dennis O’Leary, Judy Freeland, Archana Horsting, Pamela Winfrey, Peter Richards, Gordon Knox, Kathy Walkerstein, Clayton Campbell, Jan Williamson, Gary Sangster, Blair Winn, Linda Samuels, and Holly Blake. Thank you for being flexible, compassionate, and welcoming, and for making these residencies a joy for all the artists.

The numerous nominators and organizations that tracked down artists, shared resources, and were a crucial link in making this program come together on such short notice.

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