

# A Heartbeat Restored

Restoration Residencies at A Studio in the Woods



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Our mission is to protect and preserve our Mississippi River bottomland hardwood forest and to provide a tranquil haven where artists can reconnect with universal creative energy and work uninterrupted within this natural sanctuary.

A Studio in the Woods, a program of Tulane University's Center for Bioenvironmental Research, located in 7.66 forested acres on the Mississippi River in New Orleans, is dedicated to preserving the endangered bottomland hardwood forest and providing within it a peaceful retreat where visual, literary and performing artists can work uninterrupted. Programming includes community workshops in the arts and environmental preservation, and an outdoor classroom where school children and university students can experience and study the natural world.

[www.astudiointhewoods.org](http://www.astudiointhewoods.org)

Cover Photo: Lisa Shattuck as "Captain Blanche Leathers" in in *Beneath the Strata/Disappearing*, written and performed at A Studio in the Woods. Photo by Libby Nevinger.



### A Heartbeat Restored...

The Carmichaels, as the dedicated founders of A Studio in the Woods, have always recognized local artists, musicians, performers and writers as the lifeblood of this culturally diverse region in south Louisiana. It was only natural that they reach out to hundreds -- even thousands-- of these creative individuals, who had lost homes and studios and were displaced.

Launched in early 2006, the month-long Restoration Residencies were established for those visual artists, musicians, composers and performing artists who experienced significant loss due to the hurricane and the failure of the federal levees. With key support from major foundations, A Studio in the Woods was able to raise awareness of their fledgling post-Katrina residency program. Substantial gifts followed from individuals all over the country, whose generosity assisted in making this project a reality.

Even though only one artist could be brought back at a time, the residencies made a meaningful impact by bringing these creative individuals back to the city and assisting them in reconstructing their lives and artistic careers in New Orleans. Individual artists who participated in this program received a stipend plus additional funding for travel and supplies, food and studio space plus a month of precious uninterrupted time in A Studio in the Woods' protected natural environment in the rustic, natural setting of a bottomland hardwood forest on the West Bank.

From 2006 to 2008, A Studio in the Woods awarded 15 Restoration Residencies to musicians, painters, writers, sculptors, filmmakers, poets, and composers. Most figured out how to stay here in New Orleans, others have moved on, but all found unexpected and profound gifts here in the woods.

*Joanna Sternberg*

#### *Co-Founders:*

Joe & Lucianne Carmichael

#### *Staff:*

Ama Rogan, Managing Director

Anne Mueller, Development Director

Cammie Hill-Prewitt, Program Coordinator

David Baker, Environmental Curator

*Notes for our Founder*

*Returning home after a hurricane can be a powerful, even life-changing experience that topples many of our assumptions about how the world works... or so it was for Joe and me as we scrambled over huge boughs to get up the driveway. I looked skyward to see our Japanese Magnolia blooming, in early October.*

*Me: "Joe, look! The magnolia's confused! Maybe the whole forest's messed up!"*

*Joe: "Before we decide that, let's ask David."*

*Environmental Curator David Baker arrived the next morning and smiled as I pointed out the "confused" magnolia.*

*David: "Lucianne, a tree is never confused. The magnolia is flowering to make seeds in order to save its species. The hurricane gave that message to every tree in the forest and it will become a stronger forest as a result. Nature never makes a mistake." David was direct, grounded and scientific. And I, thinking I knew a great deal about nature, was humbled and awed, completely and permanently.*

*The reality across the river was not miraculous... a dark, gray, colorless, motionless, silent, still, empty, city... a city without a heartbeat, a city without its artists. That evening we grieved. What could one small residency program do in the face of overwhelming disaster? The realization dawned on us, we are not helpless in the face of this storm's aftermath. Somehow we will bring artists home, one artist at a time.*

*Managing Director Ama Rogan, still evacuated, suggested we call the Alliance of Artists Communities, and 24 hours later we had the funding and encouragement to kick off Restoration Residencies.*

*Each of the Restoration Resident artists took his or her role in restoring the heartbeat of the city very seriously, creatively and industriously. The resulting work contributed both to the restoration of our city and to the artists' personal restoration, as will be revealed in the pages of this book.*

*I share with you the project of early Restoration Resident Jason Chaffin, an installation artist*

*who worked to discover and set up relationships with as many musicians as he could find around the city and their historically significant gathering places. With these musicians, Jason developed a plan for a centrally located jam session on a Sunday afternoon, after which the musicians would each return to the neighborhood corner where they grew up and simply begin to play music in these dark, bereft and seemingly vacant blocks. This was a creative leap of faith. No one knew what would happen.*

*Slowly, quietly, faces came to the windows, windows opened and folks began to come out, keeping the beat, crying and reconnecting. They hugged, danced and sang on street corners that had long appeared deserted. Each musician, still playing music, led the groups*

*to Congo Square, where there was much rejoicing...the heartbeat of the city beginning to return.*

*We at A Studio in the Woods witnessed firsthand in Jason's work the power of art to raise human consciousness of our oneness and the interdependence of all life.*

*The lessons the forest taught us after the storm were unexpected and powerful medicine for each of the Restoration Residents, providing a metaphor of regeneration and newly found strength after disaster.*

*Our heartfelt thanks to all the many generous persons and foundations whose support made these residencies possible.*

*Lucianne B. Carmichael*

*"The forest has changed. Not for the worst but for the best. Hurricane-adapted forests need the dynamic effects of high-level winds, and A Studio in The Woods received them. Adaptation comes in the form of how individual species overcome death by opening gaps in the forest for their saplings. A Studio in the Woods' forest will now be more diverse, resulting in a more dynamic forest."*

*David Baker  
Environmental Curator*



Jason Chaffin, *New Birth, New Orleans*, 2006, musical installation with New Birth Brass Band.



## Gianna Chachere

Filmmaker

January 2008

[g\\_chachere@yahoo.com](mailto:g_chachere@yahoo.com)

Gianna Chachere is the Managing Director of the Hamptons International Film Festival located in East Hampton, New York. She has extensive experience in conceptualizing and curating film, video and live performance programs for various film festivals and cultural institutions throughout the U.S. including the Pioneer Theater, the Independent Feature Project (IFP) Market, the Staten Island Film Festival, and Howl Film Festival. In 2003, she directed and co-founded the Don't Knock the Rock Film and Music Festival in Los Angeles with partner/filmmaker Allison Anders. She was one of 10 selected participants in the 2003 Producers Program, an intensive ten-week producers' program at IFP Los Angeles. Chachere is the former festival director of the Slamdance Film Festival in Park City, California where she also served as director of screenplays. A consultant working with screenwriters and filmmakers, she has developed scripts from conception to production. A native New Orleanian, Chachere spends half the year in New Orleans where she is developing several projects including a documentary entitled *MY DADDY IS GAY*, which she began as an artist in residence at A Studio in the Woods.

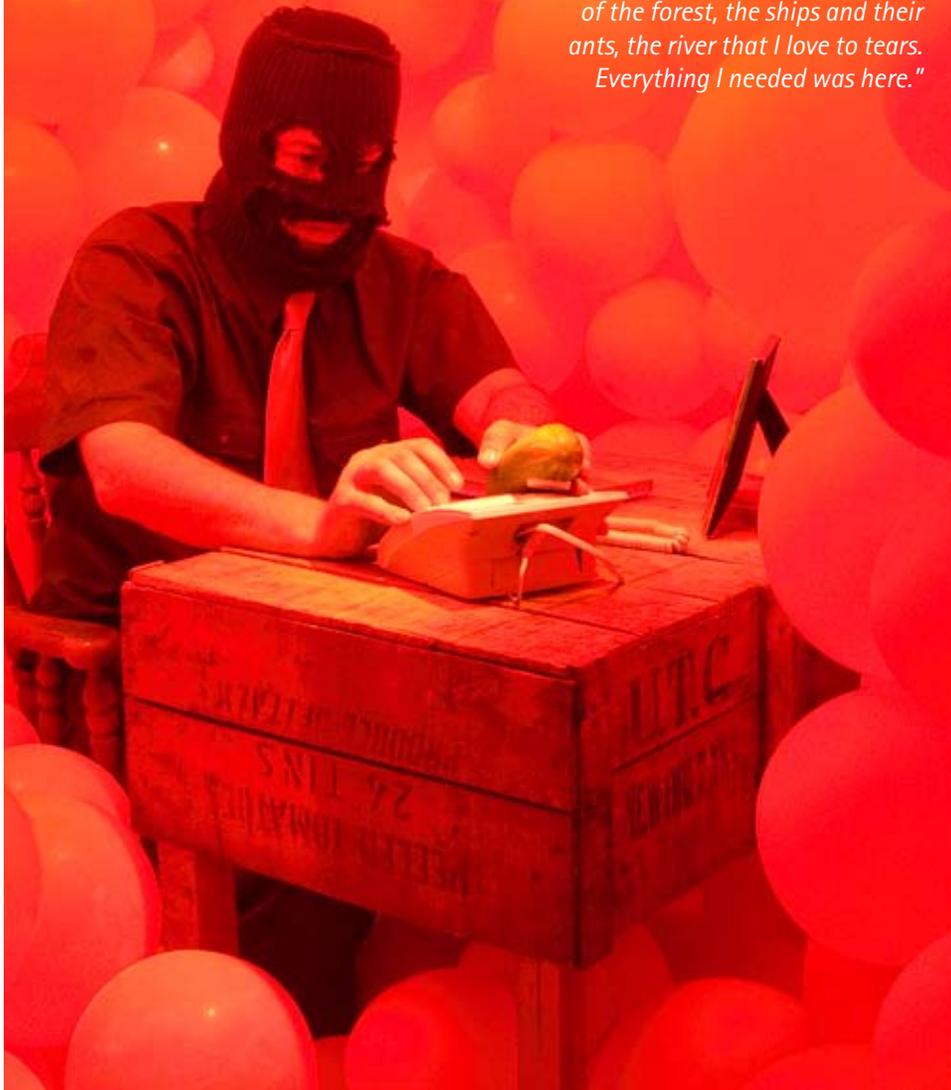


*MY DADDY IS GAY*, 2008, film stills.



*"Until my time at A Studio in the Woods, I hadn't fully understood what an amazing experience it is to be told, in the most clearly non-verbal way possible, that your day's work is simply, purely, and fully to dedicate yourself to your art. People don't receive this message very often. It is a gift."*

*"The inspiration from the Studio is everywhere. The batturement: walk it as far as it goes and be amazed. The river: sit and never want for looking. The ships: peruse their industrial majesty. The forest, at day and night: alive with sound and activity and awe-inspiring post-storm geometry and paradigm. There is no shortage of source for inspiration. For me, the tranquility and interaction of the forest, the ships and their ants, the river that I love to tears. Everything I needed was here."*



## Jason Chaffin

Installation Artist, Musician

February 2006

[www.chaffincontainer.blogspot.com](http://www.chaffincontainer.blogspot.com)



Jason Chaffin grew up across 36 states and four countries. He received his BFA in photography from Kansas City Art Institute and is currently an MFA candidate at the University of New Orleans. His work is based upon his diversity of personal experience regarding the agreement and disagreement of the truths of the individual social and environmental systems of our world.



*this page: New Birth, New Orleans, 2006, musical installation with New Birth Brass Band designed to promote the healing and rebuilding of New Orleans using its native soundtrack.*

*opposite page: The artist in current work, Secretary of the Interior, 2008, mixed media installation.*

Photos by the artist.



## Jon Gross

Composer, Musician

February 2008

nolajon@hotmail.com

Jon Gross began playing the tuba when he was 9 years old. A scholarship to Loyola University's College of Music landed him in New Orleans, where he currently makes a living playing with several different bands and as a freelance tuba player. He is passionate about educating others on New Orleans' rich musical heritage while doing his part to preserve and promote Louisiana's traditional music.

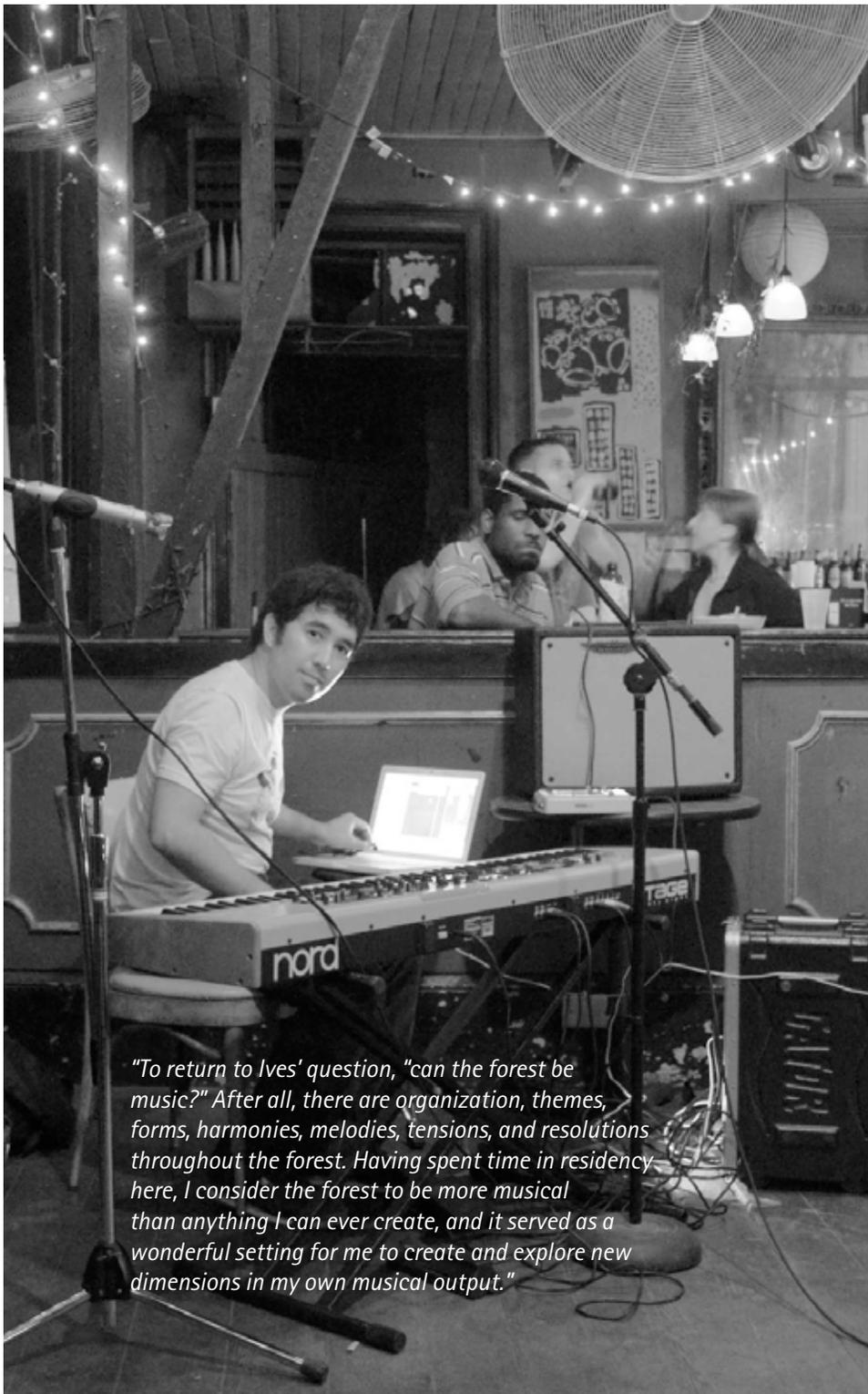


*"On my first night there, my attention became focused on a lizard that was hanging by the studio door. I was intrigued by his little ribcage expanding and contracting... I let myself get lost in the rhythm of his breathing. Only then did I realize that his breathing was completely in sync with the sounds of the frogs and insects in the woods. It was the same rhythm. When the sounds sped up, so did his breathing rate... One rhythm for thousands of creatures! They aren't worrying about the human condition... or bills... or ANY of the complex thought patterns that we as humans drown ourselves in daily. They are simply feeling the rhythm of their surroundings and priding themselves on belonging and doing what it takes to be a part of their ecosystem. Because of them and A Studio in the Woods, I have learned that even complex times have a simplicity within them... it's just up to me to find that simplicity and embrace it just as the animals embrace the simplicity of their world."*



*this page:* Panorama Jazz Band rehearses original score by Jon Gross, composed at A Studio in the Woods. Photos by Joe Carmichael.

*opposite page:* *Lizard Rhythm*, 2009, c-print by Rafael Santos.



*"To return to Ives' question, "can the forest be music?" After all, there are organization, themes, forms, harmonies, melodies, tensions, and resolutions throughout the forest. Having spent time in residency here, I consider the forest to be more musical than anything I can ever create, and it served as a wonderful setting for me to create and explore new dimensions in my own musical output."*



## Brigham Hall

Composer, Musician

March 2008

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

Brigham Hall is an active pianist, composer, and music educator. After completing his bachelor's degree in music education at LSU, Hall became an instructor at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and also served as a piano accompanist for the St. Louis King of France Choir. Currently, Hall serves as a piano instructor at the Louise S. McGehee School located in uptown New Orleans, and he recently received the prestigious Reynolds Foundation Fellowship at the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University. Starting in the fall of 2009, Hall will attend the Harvard Graduate School of Education as a 2010 Master of Education candidate studying technology, innovation, and education. By next summer Hall plans to launch "Calliope," an online music education website that will assist public school teachers in addressing and teaching national curriculum and assessment standards.



Photos from group improvisation show at the Dragon's Den in New Orleans, LA.

The artist, at left, discusses score with saxophonist David Polk.

Photos courtesy of Sidney Besse.



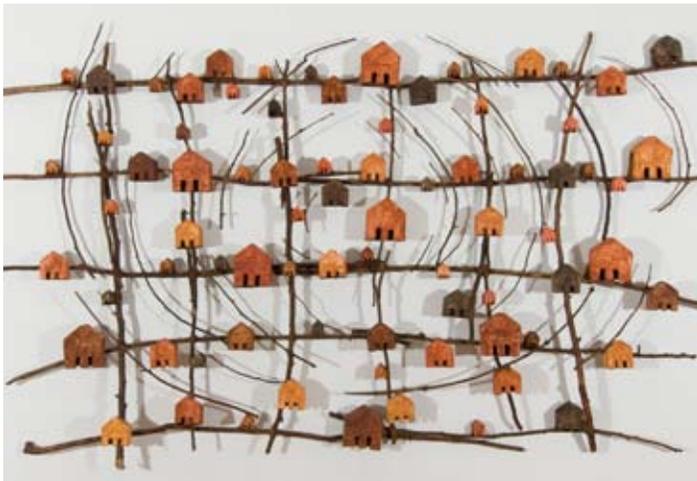
## Jane Hill

Sculptor

June 2007

tendtocreation@yahoo.com

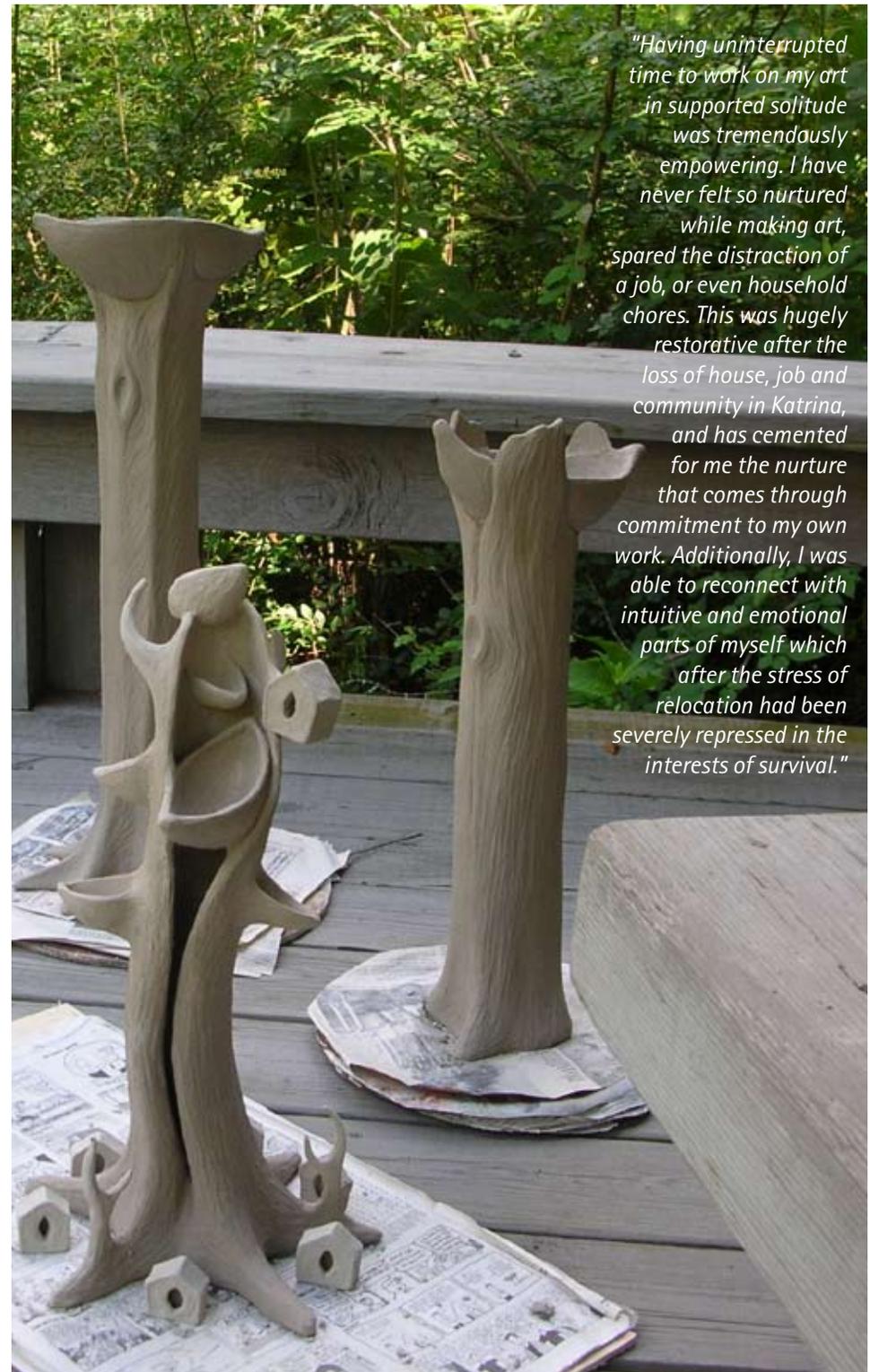
Jane Hill was born in Washington, DC, and grew up in Baltimore, Maryland. She received a Bachelor of Science in painting from Towson University and an MFA from Pratt Institute of Art. In 1991 she moved to New Orleans to teach in area public school Talented Art Programs, as well as at numerous other venues in the city. After losing her home in Hurricane Katrina, Hill temporarily relocated to Baltimore, where she held a solo show about Katrina at Baltimore's Creative Alliance at the Patterson. She worked extensively as a teacher in a range of art schools and community programs in Maryland. Hill is a recipient of an Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation Grant and a Joan Mitchell Gulf Coast Artist Grant. In the summer of 2007, Hill returned to New Orleans as a Restoration Resident at A Studio in the Woods. She returned full-time in 2008 and now teaches art in the Jefferson Parish Public School system. She regularly travels to Austin, Texas to sing with the Hildegirls and is writing a book about drawing practice.



*this page:* Landfall, 2006, mixed media.

*opposite page:* Sculptures drying on the studio porch during Hill's 2007 residency.

Photos by the artist.



*"Having uninterrupted time to work on my art in supported solitude was tremendously empowering. I have never felt so nurtured while making art, spared the distraction of a job, or even household chores. This was hugely restorative after the loss of house, job and community in Katrina, and has cemented for me the nurture that comes through commitment to my own work. Additionally, I was able to reconnect with intuitive and emotional parts of myself which after the stress of relocation had been severely repressed in the interests of survival."*

in water bathed, on water born  
the water our blood to water returns  
thrice round i turn then bow to the ground  
to ask you your permission  
hail to you, mother of all rivers  
for this cup we take our lives to save  
cleanse us of our iniquities  
wash away our sins  
a benediction on this holy night  
Water of light  
bless us with your might; be our connector  
our riverblood, let us heal one another  
and bring us home...

full circle



## Raymond "Moose" Jackson

Poet, Musician

April 2008

[www.myspace.com/illusionfields](http://www.myspace.com/illusionfields)

Raymond "Moose" Jackson is a performance poet whose work is not content to live in poetry readings and literary events. He regularly performs with a rock band, in theatrical settings, with jazz groups, at festivals and in the street. He has continued to perform both poetry and music throughout New Orleans at venues ranging from The French Market (kicking off the Prospect.1 Biennial with local jazz band, Magnetic Ear) to the Ladder Branch Library to Snug Harbor and recently performed poetry at The State of the Nation festival. His work can be heard regularly on WWOZ and on the internet. After his residency at A Studio in the Woods, Jackson joined Dakota Sioux poet Tatanka Ohitika (Strong Buffalo) at the headwaters of the Mississippi at Lake Itasca, Minnesota and released five gallons of blessed Mississippi River water to complete a series of performance rituals meant to heal the river and carry the intentions of Gulf Coast residents to the source. He is in the process of collaborating with ArtSpot Productions and Mondo Bizarro to write an epic poem about the Cajun legend of the werewolf known as the "Loup Garou."



*"It is impossible, I think, to begin to comprehend the cultures of New Orleans and South Louisiana without experiencing the ecosystem that they are entwined with, built upon and answerable to. It becomes apparent that our contrived landscapes are built upon highly unstable edge zones. The long-term vision inherent in other places doesn't always function well here. Life moves to wilder rhythms and A Studio in the Woods really brings that message home, where the fragile threads that tie us back into the source of life are busy being mended."*

*this page:* The artist performing a healing ritual for the Mississippi River at Voodoo Fest in New Orleans. Photo by Robin Walker.

*opposite page:* *River Blessing*, 2008. Written and performed at A Studio in the Woods.



## Jenny Kahn

Painter

April 2006

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

Jenny Kahn was born and raised in New Orleans. She studied painting at the Gerritt Reitveld Academie in Amsterdam and The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia. She has exhibited in New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans and elsewhere. Kahn was living in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina swept through the city. She lost her home, her studio and much of her work. She evacuated to San Antonio with her husband and their two cats, eventually relocating to the San Francisco Bay area in the fall of 2006. She is currently represented by the Cole Pratt Gallery in New Orleans.



this page: *New Orleans in Pieces*, 2006,  
acrylic on multiple canvases.

opposite page: *Saint Expedite*, 2006,  
mixed media on paper.

*"I had been forewarned that the woods had been damaged. My first assessment was that with all of the fallen trees, it looked like the rest of New Orleans; ruined. On a walk through with the botanist, Dave Baker, I learned that this particular kind of forest has evolved to survive hurricanes and flooding. Far from being ruined, creation was happening everywhere and at breakneck speed. Suddenly exposed to the sun, new trees were shooting up so fast you could practically watch them grow. All of the surviving trees lost their foliage. Now fully exposed to the light they were sprouting leaves from head to toe! I was very moved to think that this kind of growth and regeneration was possible in my own life. In fact, there is a chance for all of us to weather this storm and evolve into something stronger and better. This felt very empowering and inspirational."*



*"After having experienced the uprooting of my family and the community which had become second nature to me, my senses, during those unpredictable times, were heightened to the point where every encounter was filtered through my psyche like the discovery of a foreign world. Nothing was just what it was. A spoon became a drumstick. A leaf became a spoon. Lucianne and Joe Carmichael stood for my grandparents who had passed away less than five months after the storm. A Studio in the Woods was my home when I no longer had a home in New Orleans."*



## Monique Moss

Choreographer, Dancer

May 2006

mossms@aol.com

A native of New Orleans, Monique Moss graduated from New Orleans Center for Creative Arts in Dance and then attended Tulane University where she earned a BA in French and a MA in Latin American Studies. Currently an Adjunct Professor of Dance at Tulane University and an Artist-in-Residence at Studio at Colton, Moss is Artistic Director of her dance company Third Eye Theatre. Her accomplishments include a Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher Fellowship, Fulbright-Hays Teacher Fellowship to South Africa, and Big Easy Classical Arts Awards. She has performed in Colombia and Haiti and held residencies at Headlands Center for the Arts and A Studio in the Woods. Her choreographic works have been performed at the Essence Festival, the Houston Black Dance Festival, the Jazz and Heritage Festival, the National Dance Educators Organization Conference and the Kennedy Center.



*this page:* Moss' stay at A Studio in the Woods nurtured choreographic inspiration for the creation of a new work titled "Katrina Cranes" that documents and preserves the real-life, survival stories of children of New Orleans. Moss (standing, far left), the dancers, and audience after the premiere of Katrina Cranes at A Studio in the Woods. Photo by Joe Carmichael.

*opposite page:* My Name is Mud, 2007, site specific performance at 1429 Leonidas Street in New Orleans, choreographed by Monique Moss and performed by Christine Barona and Rebecca Delery. Premiered at Dramarama in 2007 at the Contemporary Arts Center. Photo by the artist.



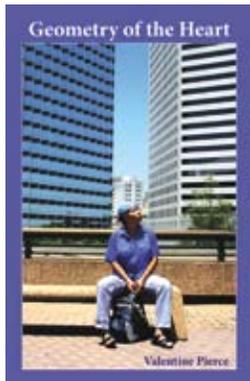
## Valentine Pierce

Poet, Photographer, Graphic Designer

June 2006

<http://poetsense.blogspot.com>

Valentine Pierce is a poet, writer, photographer and graphic designer who is very active in the New Orleans art scene. She has been writing for more than 30 years, and her creative and journalistic work has been published throughout the United States. She works full-time as a graphic designer, journalist and photographer and spends most of her free time performing or creating. Her interests are varied, and her hobbies include numerous handcrafts, especially embroidery, sewing, crochet, and knitting. Future projects include *Stories from My Mother*.



*"I can't tell you how good this has been for me. My life has been so chaotic, even before Katrina, that I was beginning to think I would never get settled again. I was homesick and longing for summer rains, red beans, and the lyrical sounds of our myriad dialects. And even though I am not in New Orleans proper, as we are wont to say, I am home. My first week here, we had red beans. About a week after I got here, the rains started. How I have missed rain and I am going to miss A Studio in the Woods but I look forward to coming back next summer as a volunteer, to do whatever I can to help ensure it continues to offer artists a place of calm, peace, respite and sheer delight as they experience the joy of living and breathing their art."*

*this page: Geometry of the Heart, published 2007 by Portals Press, a collection of poems including several written while in residency at A Studio in the Woods.*

*opposite page: After the Storm, 2009, multimedia "poemograph" with photography and poetry.*

## After the Storm

I get lost in the imagery we have become,  
we poets after the storm now duly informed  
of our duty to self and city.  
Our duty to country washed away  
by flood waters polluted with remains left  
by okra-slick politricksters who don't know  
their behinds from a hole  
in the ground—I mean—levee.

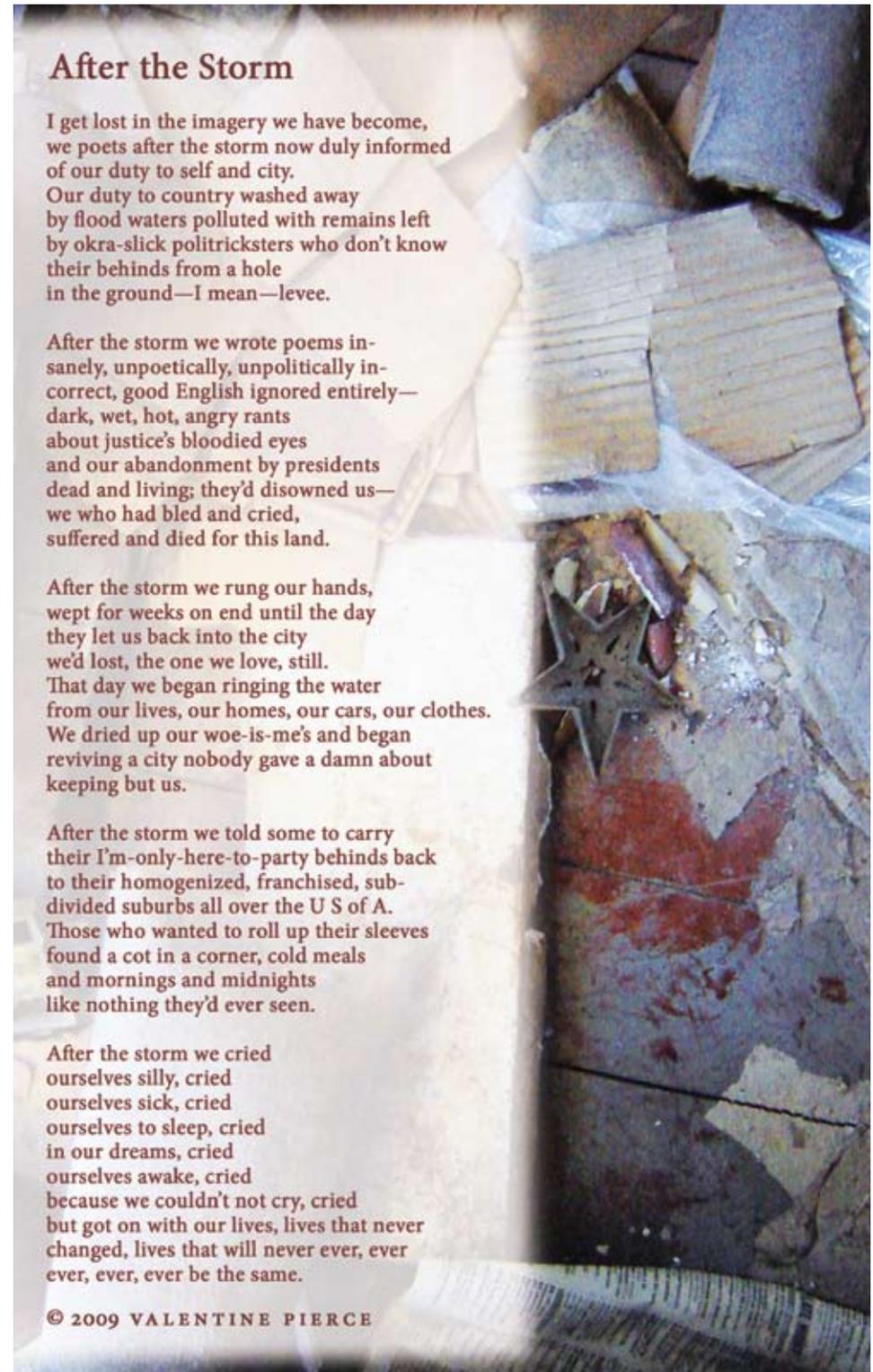
After the storm we wrote poems in-  
sane, unpoetically, unpolitically in-  
correct, good English ignored entirely—  
dark, wet, hot, angry rants  
about justice's bloodied eyes  
and our abandonment by presidents  
dead and living; they'd disowned us—  
we who had bled and cried,  
suffered and died for this land.

After the storm we rung our hands,  
wept for weeks on end until the day  
they let us back into the city  
we'd lost, the one we love, still.  
That day we began ringing the water  
from our lives, our homes, our cars, our clothes.  
We dried up our woe-is-me's and began  
reviving a city nobody gave a damn about  
keeping but us.

After the storm we told some to carry  
their I'm-only-here-to-party behinds back  
to their homogenized, franchised, sub-  
divided suburbs all over the U S of A.  
Those who wanted to roll up their sleeves  
found a cot in a corner, cold meals  
and mornings and midnights  
like nothing they'd ever seen.

After the storm we cried  
ourselves silly, cried  
ourselves sick, cried  
ourselves to sleep, cried  
in our dreams, cried  
ourselves awake, cried  
because we couldn't not cry, cried  
but got on with our lives, lives that never  
changed, lives that will never ever, ever  
ever, ever, ever be the same.

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ArtSpot Productions is a New Orleans-based nonprofit organization dedicated to the creation and production of original multidisciplinary performance works for local, national and international presentation. Founded in 1995 by Kathy Randels to produce her solo performance work, the company has expanded to include collaborative works with artists of different disciplines. Through audience development and performing arts education for artists of all ages and backgrounds, they seek to build a culture in New Orleans that participates in and supports live original performance work.



*"The joy of site-specific performance work is finding physical gestures and movements that accompany the landscape, learning about the history of the land itself, its stories, the stories of the people who have inhabited the land, and how those two are interconnected."*



*this page:* Ausetua Amor Amenkum as "Earth." Photo by Libby Nevinger.

*opposite page, top:* Dominique Townsend, Gabrielle Turner, and Stephanie McKee as three dancing kalindas. Photo by Craig Morse.

*opposite page, bottom:* Aja Becker playing the bunny in "Earth's" home. Photo by Libby Nevinger.

All photos from *Beneath the Strata/Disappearing*, written and performed at A Studio in the Woods.



*"With no home in New Orleans to return to for the rehearsal and production process, A Studio in the Woods provided me with a month-long safe landing while I went through the painful process of re-entering my ravaged community. Close enough to New Orleans to allow me to go about the pre-production process, A Studio in the Woods turned into a much-needed quiet place, in a damaged but still beautiful natural setting. I was able to dash into New Orleans for production meetings, then return to this very peaceful setting, a stone's throw from the Mississippi River. My days began with a pot of tea on my porch swing, overlooking a lovely pond complete with singing frogs to serenade me. I watched in wonder as spring burst through the shocked limbs of trees healing themselves from the ferocious hurricane winds that rendered them bare seven months before. My hours and hours of writing were accompanied by many species of birds singing praises to the arrival of spring's rebirth."*



## Yvette Sirker

Playwright, Director, Actor

March 2006

[ysirker@msn.com](mailto:ysirker@msn.com)

Yvette Sirker's one-act play, *Hay Outta Hell*, written while in residency at A Studio in the Woods, recently premiered Off-Off Broadway and was very well received by New York City audiences. As a result of the success of *Hay Outta Hell*, she has turned the play into a full-length work called *Hell and High Water*, which is set to premiere Off-Broadway in 2010. Currently Sirker is a playwright, actor, director and teaching artist at Enchanted Circle Theater (ECT) in Western Massachusetts. She is actively working to revive the Zhoux Zhoux Theatre Company, a nonprofit arts organization devoted to women and people of color, the office and headquarters of which were destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.



*this page:* Sirker hosts early cast reading of her play, *Pink Collar Crime*, at A Studio in the Woods.

*opposite page:* Sirker as Purl in *Pink Collar Crime*.



## Christy Speakman

March 2007 Resident

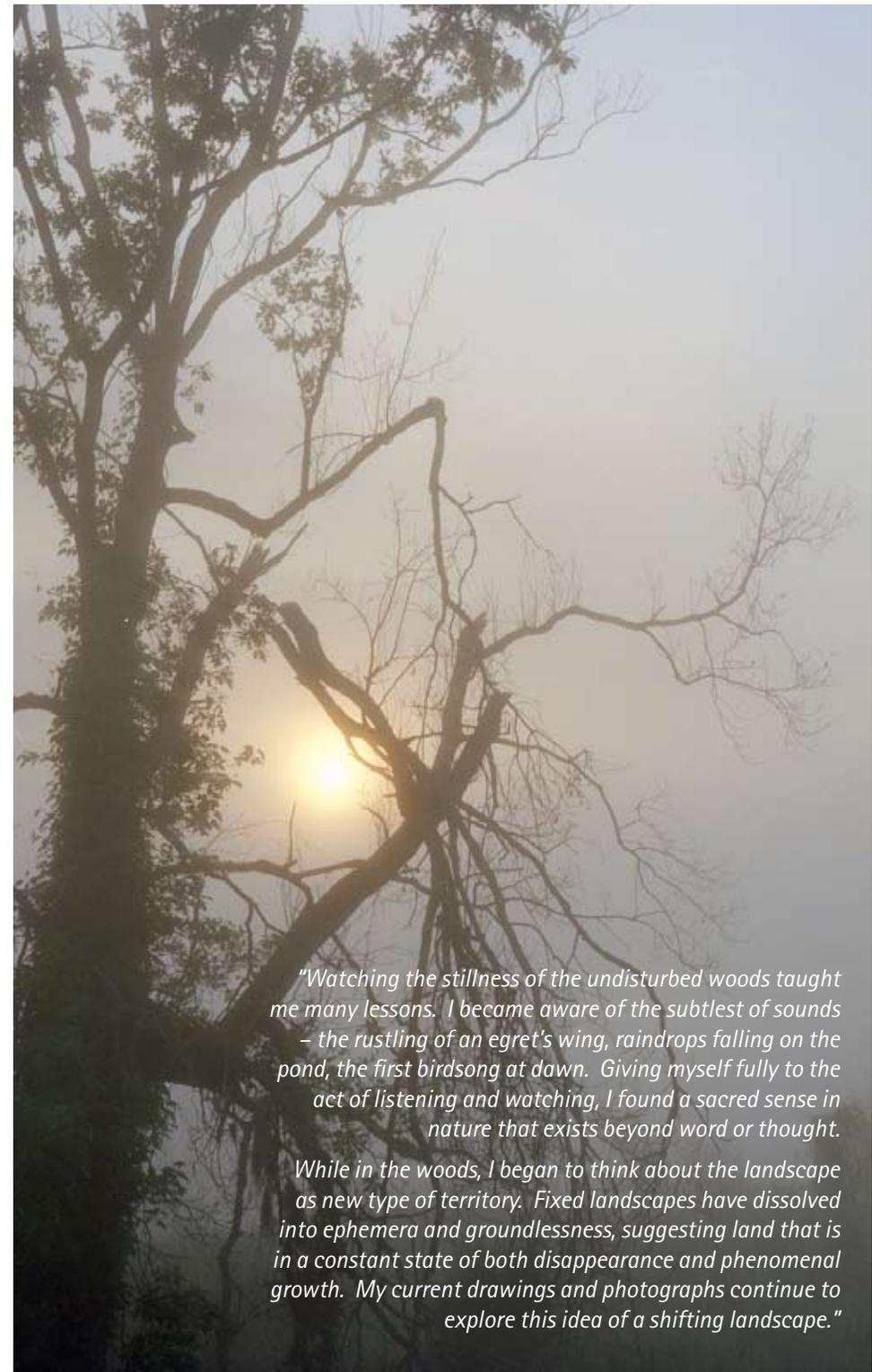
[www.christyspeakman.com](http://www.christyspeakman.com)

Christy Speakman received a BFA in Fine Art from the University of New Orleans in 2002 and an MFA in Photography from Ohio University's School of Art in 2005. She has participated in artist residencies at Sandarbh US in 2008, The Santa Fe Art Institute in 2006 and The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in 2005-2006. In 2007, her drawings, photographs and videos were shown in a solo exhibition at Chashama's 461 Gallery in New York City. In 2009, she was included in New Directions 2009 at Wall Space Gallery in Seattle and AIM 29: Living and Dreaming at the Bronx Museum of the Arts.



*this page:*  
*Liquid Land, 2007,*  
*photography*

*opposite page:*  
*Cosmic Territory*  
*(detail), 2009,*  
*video.*



*"Watching the stillness of the undisturbed woods taught me many lessons. I became aware of the subtlest of sounds – the rustling of an egret's wing, raindrops falling on the pond, the first birdsong at dawn. Giving myself fully to the act of listening and watching, I found a sacred sense in nature that exists beyond word or thought.*

*While in the woods, I began to think about the landscape as new type of territory. Fixed landscapes have dissolved into ephemera and groundlessness, suggesting land that is in a constant state of both disappearance and phenomenal growth. My current drawings and photographs continue to explore this idea of a shifting landscape."*



## Elizabeth Underwood

Multimedia Visual Artist

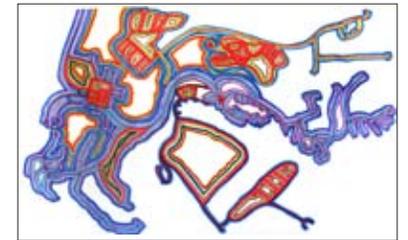
February 2007

[www.elizabethunderwood.net](http://www.elizabethunderwood.net)

[www.aortaprojects.blogspot.com](http://www.aortaprojects.blogspot.com)

Elizabeth Underwood is a visual artist, activist, writer and long-term resident of New Orleans. In pursuit of "the art of relationships," she focuses on site-specific installation and performance as well as formal work in photography, collage, and drawing. Her poetry, personal memoir and essays have been widely published. She spearheaded AORTA Projects in 2006 (formerly ARTinACTION) as a vehicle to advocate for and collaborate with struggling post-disaster communities. Through intimate engagement, AORTA aims to activate the creative process' capacity to connect people and initiate social change. AORTA has produced 37 sites, and Underwood has taught workshops, published and lectured nation-wide on her experiences.

*"With my Restoration Residency at A Studio in the Woods I have very literally been given a lifeline. Not only do I experience this gift as a great validation of my creative work and subsequent risky choices but as literal fuel for ARTinACTION. On every level, this residency provides the Katrina survivor with the specific tools we need for healing – peace, respect, physical and spiritual nourishment, financial support, a safe place to reflect on one's wounds, and the chance to experience nature as a wise teacher. By not clearing away the destruction to the landscape wrought by Katrina, A Studio in the Woods offers the visitor a very clear picture of the natural order of things. The inherent message is how to not just survive but thrive while enduring deep wounds. I am being honest when I state that my time here is saving my life – I am inspired, comforted, and renewed beyond expectation."*



*this page:* A New Hypography, 6 ft x 4 ft, paint marker on paper.

*opposite page:* Field Guide, 2008. AORTA Projects collaboration with Jacqueline Bishop, 5,500 hand-painted indigenous Louisiana birds on the driveway of Milne Boys Home, Gentilly, LA.



# Monique Michelle Verdin

Photographer, Filmmaker

May 2007

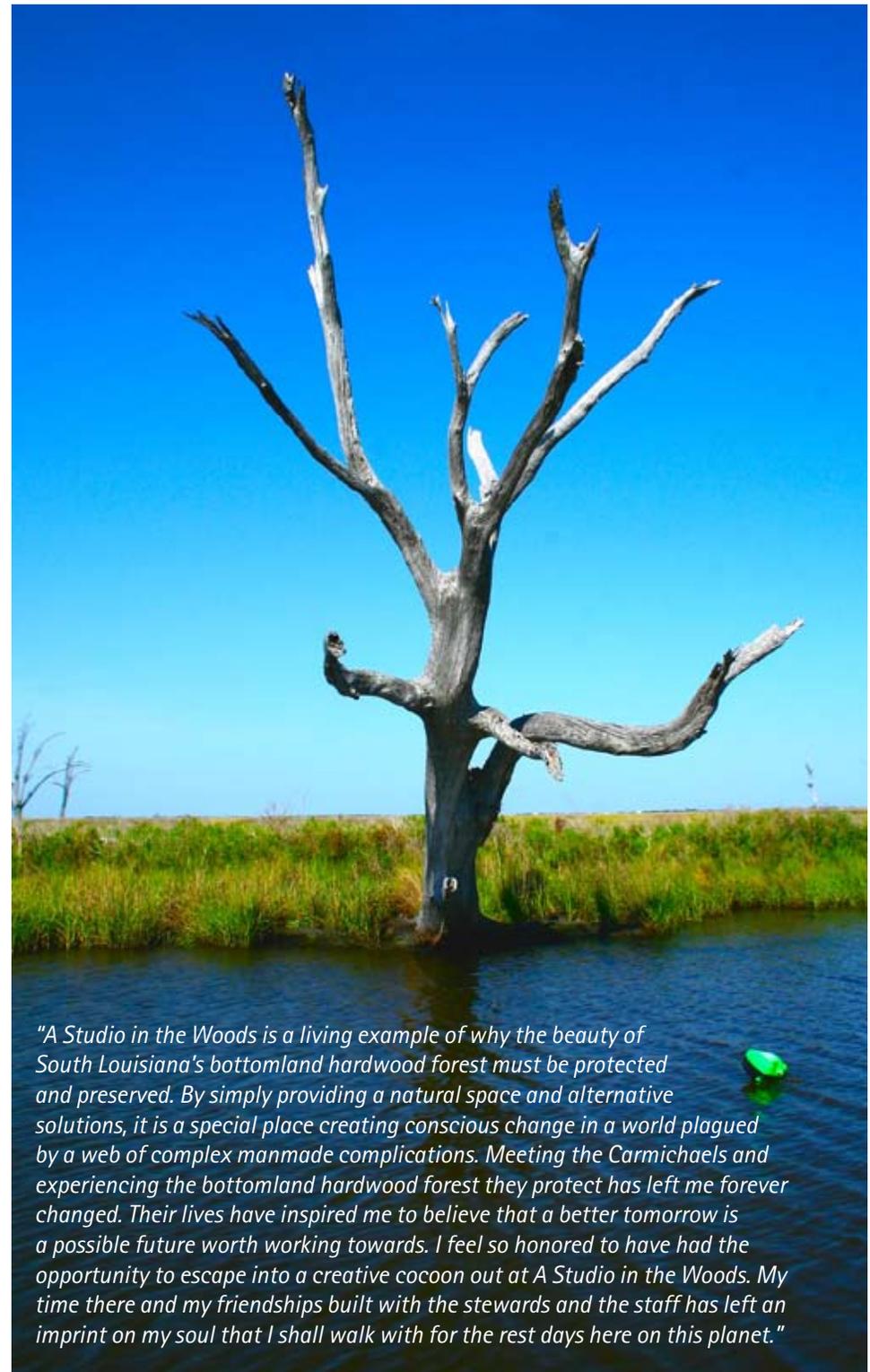
[www.moniquemichelle.com](http://www.moniquemichelle.com)

Monique Michelle Verdin uses imagery to expose the reality of a Louisiana lost and the Louisiana left behind. More folk artist than photographer, more storyteller than visual artist, Verdin has captured, collected and exposed an intimate perspective into the survival of her indigenous French-speaking clan who still inhabit the endangered bayou communities of southeast Louisiana. Her story has been shared and exhibited at the University of California, Georgia College and State University, Mesa College of San Diego, the Social Public Art Resource Center in Venice, California and at a number of other galleries along the Gulf Coast. Verdin currently resides on her family land in lower St. Bernard Parish.

*this page: Container & Crane, November 2008, photography. Verdin's current work includes converting a 40-foot shipping container into a sacred studio/living space. Here crane operator, Big John, attaches straps to the container in order to lift the 10,000 lb steel box onto its foundation.*

*opposite page: Bayou Pointe au Chien Oak Skeleton, May 2007, photography. Dead Oak tree skeletons line the eroding banks of Bayou Pointe au Chien in southern Lafourche Parish.*

Photos by the artist.



*"A Studio in the Woods is a living example of why the beauty of South Louisiana's bottomland hardwood forest must be protected and preserved. By simply providing a natural space and alternative solutions, it is a special place creating conscious change in a world plagued by a web of complex manmade complications. Meeting the Carmichaels and experiencing the bottomland hardwood forest they protect has left me forever changed. Their lives have inspired me to believe that a better tomorrow is a possible future worth working towards. I feel so honored to have had the opportunity to escape into a creative cocoon out at A Studio in the Woods. My time there and my friendships built with the stewards and the staff has left an imprint on my soul that I shall walk with for the rest days here on this planet."*



*"On Blue Crescent I feel that I was able to reach a new level of expression for traditional jazz improvisation through new works, which create a mosaic of New Orleans culture, history, people and spirit. None of these songs, the resulting recording, or my new heightened sense of artistic direction would have been possible without the Restoration Residency. I now understand what the "restoration" residency means: restoration of one's soul, spirit, dignity, self-confidence, lost gifts...and life."*



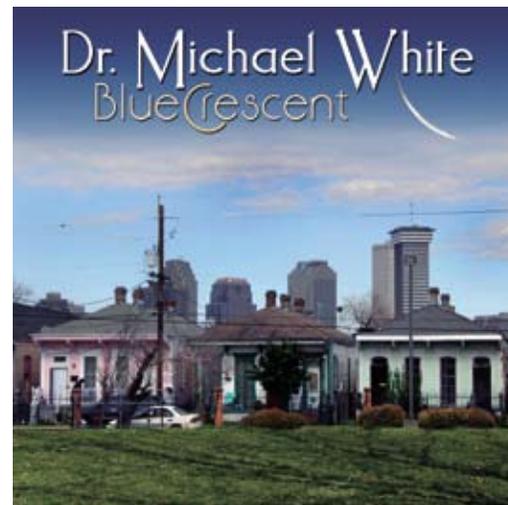
## Michael White

Composer, Musician

December 2007

[mwhite@xula.com](mailto:mwhite@xula.com)

Dr. Michael White, a renowned clarinetist, composer and jazz historian, has been a pioneer in perpetuating the origins of traditional New Orleans jazz. Among the most respected musicians in the Crescent City, White is one of only a few clarinetists to explore and develop an original manifestation of the unique New Orleans clarinet tradition. White's album *Blue Crescent*, his first post-Katrina CD, features 12 original compositions written while in residency at A Studio in the Woods. Currently, Dr. White holds the Rosa and Charles Keller Endowed Chair in the Humanities/ New Orleans Music and Culture at Xavier University, where he has taught for over 20 years. Dr. White frequently lectures, publishes and is a consultant for numerous jazz programs, documentaries and feature films.



*this page:* CD cover of *Blue Crescent*, released in 2008 by Basin Street Records.

*opposite page:* Dr. White plays at RiverFest™ 2009, an outdoor concert in historic Algiers Point, New Orleans. Photo by Rafael Santos.

Artist portraits taken by:

ArtSpot – Libby Nevinger  
Chachere – The artist  
Chaffin – Brian Civallo  
Gross – Alexei Kazantsev  
Hall – Ama Rogan  
Hill – Liande Wainie  
Jackson – Shawnda Wilson  
Kahn – Joe Carmichael  
Moss – Joe Carmichael  
Pierce – Courtesy of Portals Press  
Sirker – Joe Carmichael  
Speakman – Adam Flores  
Underwood – The artist  
Verdin – Samer Tamimi  
White – Courtesy of Basin Street Records

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Many thanks to all of the individuals who supported Restoration Residencies

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Thanks to all those who gave of their time and of themselves as jurors, volunteers, and supporters of Restoration Residencies

Nancie Biver	Dan Etheridge	Beverly Rainbolt
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	Valentine Pierce	

And we could not have produced this catalogue without the help of

Cammie Hill-Prewitt  
Valerie Robinson  
Joanna Sternberg

Restoration Residencies are funded in part by the Alliance of Artists Communities, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Ford Foundation, Acadiana Arts Council, Allen Gerson of the Art and Artists Restoration Fund, New Orleans Our Hometown, and Howard Read of the Cheim & Read Gallery. Supported in part by a grant from the Louisiana Division of the Arts, Office of Cultural Development, Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism, in cooperation with the Louisiana State Arts Council. Funding has also been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal Agency.





A Program of Tulane University

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