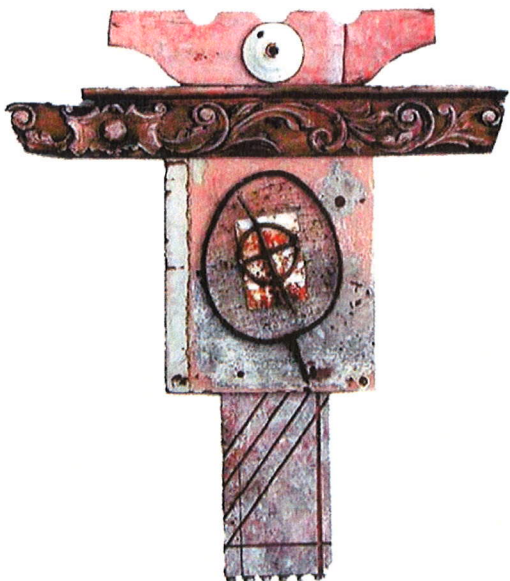




THE ARTS ARE THE HOPE THAT CANNOT BE LOST OR BLOWN AWAY.

Malcolm White, Executive Director
Mississippi Arts Commission



IN 2005, THE HIGHEST STORM SURGE EVER RECORDED IN THE UNITED STATES OCCURRED DURING HURRICANE KATRINA, ON THE MISSISSIPPI COAST. THE TOWNS OF CLERMONT HARBOR, ANSLEY, LAKESHORE, AND WAVELAND

were completely destroyed; others were inundated. Washed away in the debris were more than just homes and businesses. Art galleries, art museums, artist's studios and private art collections were also gone. Before Katrina, the coast of Mississippi was home to a vibrant art community, with traditions encompassing such famous artists as Walter Anderson and George Ohr. What has become of the art and artists in the three years since the deluge? Have the arts and culture been rebuilt alongside the homes and casinos?

Mississippi was fortunate to have someone like Malcolm White, who understood the importance of including the arts and culture in the rebuilding process. White declared, "Reweaving the massive fabric of arts, music, food, and celebration is an overwhelming project. They must not be allowed to erode or be excluded from the redevelopment and rebuilding, because the traditions and customs of several lifetimes will be washed away as well."

Saving those traditions and customs became the goal of the Mississippi Arts Commission. Federal grants to help businesses were out there, but obtaining the funds from the Federal Government took some ingenuity. The United States Department of Labor had to be convinced to reclassify and recognize self-employed artists as small businesses in order to be eligible for the Business Recovery Grant Program.

"The really fascinating piece of it all is that the federal government has actually recognized artists as small businesses and has acknowledged their significance in the revitalization of a community," said Sallye Killebrew, Arts Recovery Coordinator for the Mississippi Arts Commission. The Commission was chosen to



Works by Artist Lori Gordon who lived in Clermont Harbor Mississippi when in 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf coast. Pictured on opposite page top left to right: A-5 Northeast Quadrant South; Photo of Artist Lori Gordon; and A-10 Angel of St. Rose. Bottom of opposite page A-2 Counter Clockwise. Above left to right, Father and Carnival.

administer the grants. Including private grants as well as federal, by February of 2008 the Commission had granted \$1.2 million of funding to artists, craftsmen, and arts organizations and institutions, including \$150,000 from the prestigious Warhol Foundation.

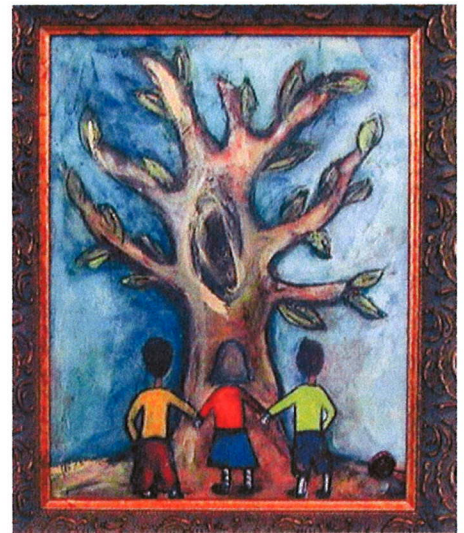
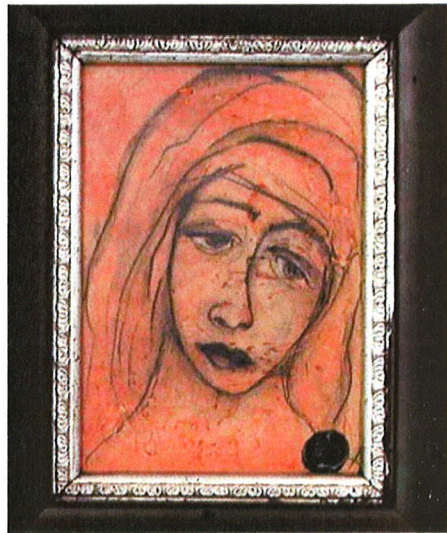
The Mississippi Arts Commission and the Arts Recovery office still operate daily as a resource center for individuals, organizations, and institutions in the rebuilding and renewal of arts and culture. The grants and other programs have started showing results, as more and more artists and art institutions are regaining their footing on the scrubbed Mississippi coast.

Lori Gordon is a Mississippi Gulf coast artist who is a part of the rebirth. Lori, who lived in Clermont Harbor, had to adjust to her whole community and

way of life being obliterated.

"Before Katrina ravaged our coast, I used to drive down streets just to marvel at the beauty of my surroundings. I spent countless mornings on the beach, sitting in the sand with a cup of coffee as I watched the sun rise over the Gulf. My favorite evening activity was to bicycle down the beach road at sunset, luxuriating in the cool breeze coming off the sound. I could not paint enough local landscapes, or stand to stay away from my studio for long.

"In the aftermath of the storm which ripped our lives apart, I did none of those things. Instead, I swept the slab where my home used to stand. I picked among the rubble of splintered wood and rusted metal where my studio rested amidst a beautiful grove of bamboo. I looked for signs of life in



Work by Artist Michelle Allee of Pass Christian Mississippi. From top left to right: Picasso Revisited; Woman in Orange; and Majestic. Bottom row left to right: Michelle Allee; Mourning; and Rebirth.

what used to be my community, and I waited. I waited for the insurance adjusters to come and I waited for the county to allow me to go back home and I waited for some sign that things were really getting better. I waited for the moments of anger, sorrow and fear to pass. I waited for nights in which I could sleep, and for the cessation of troubled dreams which I didn't understand. I waited for the clock of our lives to start ticking again."

After a couple of months, Lori's life clock started ticking. She made art out of despair. Literally. Lori began to make pieces of art from the debris left by the storm. "While my paints and canvases had disappeared along with my house and studio," she said, "I had an enormous amount of new materials available to me in the form of mountains of debris. From this refuse, The Katrina Collection was born. Now

numbering nearly 700 pieces, I have sold these mixed media assemblages, which incorporate storm debris, to persons and corporate entities all over the world. To date, over 80% of the collection has been sold." Has there ever been a more "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade" story?

Michelle Allee, who lives in Pass Christian, is another artist who is recovering on the Mississippi coast. She feels that the storm caused her painting to have more depth and emotion. She also found that art is "very healing and wonderful therapy. The end result is strong, emotional, and very evolved. Experiences tend to do that to one's work."

The long days after the storm required some transformations, also. "It was friends helping friends during this crisis, and those friends were mostly complete strangers that just wanted to do

the right thing. Katrina was a real equalizer for everyone. It was a very humbling experience. It is much easier for most of us to give than receive, and we had to learn how to humbly and graciously receive help from others. We were all in this together, some lost more than others but in the end, we all lost not only our 'stuff', but our community and way of life as we knew it. I am much stronger than I ever realized.

"We have had incredible help sent in the form of art supplies, rebuilding of studios, and offers of gallery space out of town. There were offers of lending studio spaces from other artists as well. The emotional support from all the volunteers has been incredible."

Both artists see the Mississippi coastal art community rebounding. According to Lori, "The art scene on the Mississippi Gulf Coast is vibrant. There was a period immediately after the storm when artists, like everyone else, were expending all their energy on the all-enveloping task of survival, but that has passed. There are monthly 'art walks' all along the coast, numerous galleries may be found in all the communities, and the annual ArtsAlive! Studio Tour in Hancock County is a popular and well attended

event, drawing people from around the country."

According to Michelle, "For the first couple of years, folks were buying sheetrock and necessities only. Art seems to be a luxury these days, but I feel like we are turning the corner. Sales are slowly but steadily rising."

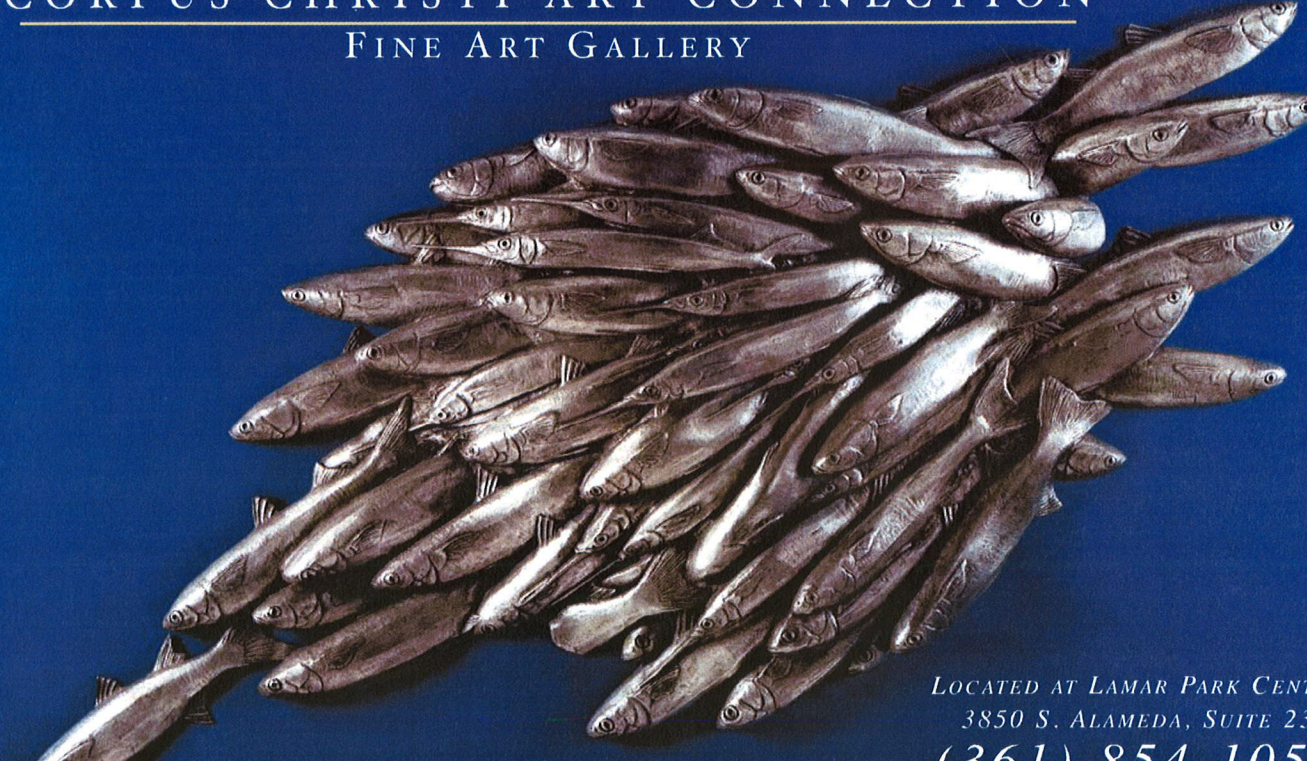
Michelle continued, and added, "The Mississippi Arts Commission has also been incredible, making available business recovery grants, and informational sessions on art as a business. They continue to be a real lifeline for the coast artists, as they want us to succeed as business folks as well as seeing what an important draw the arts have in regard to tourism. As we grow as artists, so does our community. It's a win-win situation."

If you'd like to be a part of the win-win situation, you can view Lori's work in Albuquerque in August. Every February, she hosts her annual Epiphany Show at Gallery 220 in Bay St Louis, Ms. Visit thekatrina-collectionbylorikgordon.blogspot.com for updates.

Michelle is currently contributing to the "Displaced Gulf Coast Artist" exhibitions nationwide. She can be reached at (228) 452-1365. 🐟

CORPUS CHRISTI ART CONNECTION

FINE ART GALLERY



Ocean's Silver by Kent Ullberg
32" x 59"

LOCATED AT LAMAR PARK CENTER
3850 S. ALAMEDA, SUITE 23
(361) 854-1057
ULLBERG@SBCGLOBAL.NET