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on piety

a group of large-scale,
multidisciplinary installations

a satellite exhibition for the
prospect.1 biennial



On Piety, a parallel venue to the Prospect.1 International Contemporary Art Biennial in New Orleans, showcases several large-scale, multidisciplinary installations by New Orleans' visual and performing artists, including the collective that brought the Hurricane Katrina salvaged-drawer edifice, *Floodwall*, to venues in New York, Cincinnati, Austin and Baton Rouge. They have reconfigured a fresh, sprawling installation of *Floodwall* for its homecoming and New Orleans premiere.

Mounted in an 8,000-square-foot warehouse exhibition space in the middle of the Ninth Ward, made famous by hurricane coverage, disaster tours and Brad Pitt's "Make It Right" houses, *On Piety* features contemporary, three-dimensional works by established and emerging New Orleans artists who were present during Katrina. Their work reflects an experience of loss and absence with humor, a tool of resilience for living in a world where all the arbitrary rules and straight lines have been erased.

On Piety originally featured seven works by New Orleans Artists. This catalog only features the four pieces that comprise the travelling exhibit.



The necessity to document and preserve are affirmed by Rondell Crier's *On the Streets*. A wooden silhouette of the Honda that Crier drove around New Orleans filming Katrina's devastation now projects the potent video Crier shot onto an adjacent wall. Here the utilitarian function of a car expands, transforming the viewer into a witness of catastrophe.



On The Streets by Rondell Crier as installed at 617 Piety St.



Floodwall by Jana Napoli as installed at 617 Piety St.



Floodwall appears in New Orleans for the first time at On Piety. This iteration of Floodwall is erected vertically, as a wall of drawers. It stands nine feet high, stretches 130 feet long, and reaches 20 inches at its widest. The wall refers the concrete floor as if it were a body of water, for it appears to sink into or rise out of the cement which has become the water's surface. The top halves of sofas, tables, and chairs "float" around Floodwall, giving the impression of the water's depth that you are walking on.





Jan Gilbert's *Biography of a House* hangs majestically But it is not merely a chandelier; it is also a photo album in the form of a cyclone, its circling metal frame supporting dozens of Gilbert's family photos smeared by flood waters. Illuminated from within to backlight the photos, *Biography of a House* is like each installation of the exhibition, a wholly new type of furniture, where a whirlpool of images are sucked into the spigot of memory.

Biography of a House by Jan Gilbert as installed at 617 Piety St.



Rooted by Rontherin Ratliff as installed at 617 Piety St.



Rontherin Ratliff's concrete oak tree, *Rooted*, picks up the ground we walk on, celebrating a New Orleanian resilience, which, Ratliff says, "when mixed with water, dries hard." Objects of domestic architecture (a window frame and fireplace grate among them) are conjoined to the tree, which serves as a symbol of historical roots, and announces to visitors that external landscapes have found their way inside.



On Piety is not an exhibit pasted onto the neighborhood — it IS the neighborhood. Several of the artists grew up near the warehouse in the Ninth Ward, made famous by hurricane coverage, disaster tours and Brad Pitt's "Make It Right" housing initiative. These installations are born from intensely personal experiences and evince the vibrancy of New Orleans' creative community.

Many thanks to Damon Rosenzweig for inviting Rondell Crier and Jana Napoli to be the co-curators of the original 617 Piety St. exhibition.

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Excerpts from “Katrina Deconstructed”
by Adam Falik originally appeared in
Louisiana Cultural Vistas, Summer 2009

For more information about the art
and the artists, please visit:
www.PreviouslyOnPiety.com

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previously
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contemporary arts center
april 17 – july 12, 2009

The Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in New Orleans presents an exhibition of recent work by New Orleans artists, entitled *Previously on Piety*. Each of the artists are represented by a single large-scale, multidisciplinary installation, originally shown together as part of *On Piety*, a Satellite Exhibition for the Prospect.1 Biennial.

Dan Cameron, curator of Prospect.1—the largest biennial of contemporary artwork in the United States—and Visual Arts Director of the CAC, invited a selection of these works to move to the CAC for continued viewing April 17 - July 12, 2009. *On Piety* thus transitioned into *Previously on Piety* and is now condensed further into this traveling group of installations still bearing the *Previously on Piety* title.

617 Piety Street, the Bywater address where the original exhibition took place, consisted of a raw warehouse space temporarily converted into a makeshift exhibition site. 617 Piety's impressive length and ceiling height made it possible for the artists involved to develop highly ambitious works that, while not site-specific, would have been extremely difficult to realize in a more conventional gallery setting.

Rontherin Ratliff | *Rooted*



“Resilience, when mixed with water, dries hard.”

In Rontherin Ratliff’s large-scale sculpture *Rooted*, a single tree is used to symbolize the deep historical roots of a family home. Combining elements of domestic architecture (windows, a fireplace grate, chandeliers), tree branches, and even the sidewalk in front, the visual blurring of motifs from family life and nature proposes that the narrative of people inhabiting a place is itself a kind of natural history.

“...the deep historical roots of a family home, even when the house itself is physically pulled apart.” — Dan Cameron



Jan Gilbert | *Biography of a House*



“A collaborative the tale of my girlhood home—birth to marriage—where my mother still lived, a few blocks from where my husband and I lived then and now, after a two and a half year exile with our two cats.

Jan Gilbert's *Biography of a House* takes the form of a cyclone made up of dozens of family photographs that combine to suggest the funnel and spout of the destructive winds. Illuminated from within so that the photographs are visible from the outside, the work achieves a striking contrast between the unstoppable force of nature and the human impulse to preserve a family's collective memories.

“Rounding out the exhibit is Jan Gilbert's *Biography of a House*, a sort of tornado swirling from the gallery floor to ceiling – or is that a whirlpool spinning downward?”

— Doug MacCash, *The Times Picayune*





Rondell Crier | *On the Streets*



“I built a life size version of my car and myself to reenact my experience driving and walking through the Lower Ninth Ward.”

Rondell Crier's *On the Streets* is a two-part installation consisting of the wooden outline of the Honda Passport that he drove around New Orleans during his first trip home post-Katrina. The wooden silhouette, which has been painted on one side and left bare on the other, contains a hole in the car's window through which a video projected onto an adjacent wall, documents the artist's journey through the mostly uninhabited streets of New Orleans, before the cleanup following Katrina's devastation had begun.

“Rondell Crier's On the Streets is a two-part cinema verite installation...” — Dan Cameron



Jana Napoli | *Floodwall*



“I didn’t decide to build a floodwall. The drawers came and they took me. I was trapped by fate. I was brought into a place that I didn’t have the courage to leave.”

Jana Napoli’s *Floodwall* is a memorial made from the 700 drawers of every style and construction that Napoli collected from flood debris piles during the months following Katrina. In *Floodwall*, drawers do not keep, but are kept, and provide a sacred reminder of the uncountable intimate objects, now lost, which each drawer once contained. A large-scale map of greater New Orleans covers the back wall, pinpointing where each drawer was found.

“A simple transformation where the everyday object becomes contemplative, emotive, and meaningful.”

— Houston Examiner





Thank You

Dan Cameron, Contemporary Arts Center

Doug MacCash - exhibition photography

Johnny King - exhibition photography

William Bowling and Rachel Carrico, Goat in the Road Productions

William Gilbert - sound

William Pentecost - technical assistance

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