



**PREVIOUSLY ON PIETY**  
**CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER (CAC)**  
900 Camp Street, New Orleans, LA 70130  
[www.cacno.org](http://www.cacno.org)  
APRIL 17 – JULY 12, 2009

Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) presents an exhibition of recent work by five New Orleans artists, entitled *Previously on Piety*. Each of the artists will be represented by a single large-scale installation, originally shown together as a Satellite Exhibition for Prospect.1. The five participating artists are **Gerard Caliste, Rondell Crier, Jan Gilbert, Jana Napoli, and Rontherin Ratliff**.

*Previously on Piety* derives its name from 617 Piety Street, the Bywater address where the original exhibition took place. 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.



The five installations in *Previously on Piety* share a reference to New Orleans in the immediate post-Katrina era, and some deal directly with the aftermath of these flooding and its effect on families, homes, and neighborhoods.

Of these, the best known is **Jana Napoli's Flood Wall**, a freestanding wall made into 32-foot sections, into which the individual drawers from hundreds of individual chests of drawers, scattered and/or strewn about by the hurricane and subsequent floodwaters, have been salvaged and positioned as part of a continuous façade. Although widely exhibited and written about since 2007, Previously on Piety will mark the first time *Floodwall* has been exhibited in New Orleans in an institutional setting.



In **Gerard Caliste's work Walking on Water**, the walls and floor of a single room are painted to give the visual impression of a neighborhood in which the inhabitants are gathered around the periphery, holding vigil while a house sinks into the water.



A single hand reaching from a hole in the houses attic attempts to grasp at a rope suspended from a helicopter the latter indicated only by a hole in the painted clouds on the ceiling.

**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 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.

**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.



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.

## ARTISTS' BIOS



**Gerard Caliste** was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana. In 1994, he became involved with Young Aspirations/Young Artists (YA/YA), through which Caliste produced art for a long list of private collectors, and for companies, organizations and celebrities, including MTV, Swatch Watch, The New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and Oprah Winfrey. In 1994, Caliste was one of 700 artists commissioned by the United Nations to design seat covers for the General Assembly Room in honor of the United Nations' 50th anniversary in 1995. Caliste attended the Savannah College of Art and Design on a portfolio scholarship and Presidential scholarship.

His series, *Waterlines*- more than two dozen paintings, poems and sculptures - was previewed at Le Mieux Gallery in New Orleans, Louisiana. His *Magicity* series will be exhibited at the Lois Lambert Gallery in Santa Monica, California in April 2009.

*Walking on Water*, the whole-room installation that Caliste contributes to *On Piety*, is an extension of *Waterlines*, for it is based on imagery drawn from the Katrina floods. *Walking on Water* is an ambitious, multi-media and three-dimensional installation, employing painting, found objects, and sculpture. It is installed on the exterior walls of a room within the warehouse space, and covers the walls and floors of the room's interior. The exterior of the room references the exterior of a house. Awnings, an architectural detail typical of houses in the Upper 9th Ward, hang above the door and windows. The centerpiece of the room's interior is a scaled-down, three-dimensional version of a rooftop, approximately three feet high and four feet wide, which appears to be the only visible portion of a miniature house submerged in floodwaters. The floor and walls are painted on directly, like an encasing mural. The floor is covered in oil-painted rooftops, which simulate houses under water. The walls' paintings include figures with three-dimensional faces made out of clay, and three-dimensional shotgun houses held in the painted figures' hands.

Caliste viscerally replicates an essence of his Katrina experience by depicting various phrases of the aftermath of the storm - which, as a young man raised in the Upper 9th Ward, is still a daily reality.

<http://www.gerardcalistart.com/>



At age 14, **Rondell Crier** joined Young Artists / Young Aspirations (YA/YA), a youth arts organization in his hometown of New Orleans. As a YA/YA artist, Crier worked on hundreds of art commission projects, traveled, and exhibited nationally and abroad. In 2002, Crier became the Executive Director of Programs at YA/YA, fulfilling an organizational goal to have directorship by a YA/YA alumnus. Currently, he serves as the Creative Director of YA/YA, and continues to practice art through personal and group projects working in several mediums - wood, stone, metal, fabric, video, and graphics. He holds an Associates of Arts degree from Delgado Community College, and studied art at both Dillard University and the

School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Crier's experience on the streets of New Orleans after the storm was something he could not put into words. So he took pictures. Even the 500 plus photos he took were not enough to represent the mass destruction. He mounted a camcorder on his car and videotaped as he drove around the city; this still

wasn't enough to capture the devastation: things rusted from the salt water, ceiling fans with bent wooden blades from mold and moisture, houses in the middle of the street, a child's toy doll laying in the street never to be played with again, broken plates from a kitchen bursting out of a huge crack in the corner of a house, a car buried under sand and dirt with only the roof exposed, and a beautiful tile floor of a home -- lit by the sun because the rest of the house was completely gone.

Looking through his viewfinder, Crier realized that while people were absent from his shots, life was not. He saw that life was in these things, all of them a part of our lives because we hand picked them and loved them. He realized that he could explain the magnitude and meaning of loss through objects, asking others to connect directly on a personal level.

Crier collaborated with Jana Napoli on [Floodwall](#), breathing life into the drawers by creating a digital, interactive installation. He and Napoli have worked to identify many of the drawers' owners and to gather their recollections. These oral histories form an audio component to Napoli's installation.

Crier also contributes his original video installation to the *On Piety* collection.

<http://www.rondellcrier.com/>



**Jan Gilbert** is a lifetime resident of New Orleans, Louisiana. Her multimedia artworks are commemorative and most often deal with memory, loss, and healing. Gilbert cofounded the New Orleans-based artist/writer collective [The VESTIGES Project](#) as well as HOME, New Orleans?.

[VESTIGES: Think Tank](#) currently is a 3-year roving residency sponsored by the Contemporary Arts Center of New Orleans in recognition and celebration of VESTIGES' 25 years of working together.

HOME, New Orleans? is a community-based, arts-focused network of organizations, universities, schools, artists, and neighbors that brings diverse constituencies together to create positive change in New Orleans.

Her 300-foot long *Biography of a House* tells the tale through photos and sound of four generations' 53-year occupancy of an ordinary Lakeview tract home (Gilbert's residence from her birth through the time of her marriage). The work's inaugural presentation laced the family home at the 8ft. floodline as part of [LakeviewS](#), the June 2007 sold-out bus tour of art, performance, music and food. The *On Piety* iteration finds itself as an upside down wedding cake chandelier - referencing upside down funnel clouds, spiral stairways to heaven, and much more. The collaborative team responsible for this site specific reinterpretation includes *On Piety* artists Napoli, Bowling and Carrico, as well as original collaborators Gilbert's composer nephew (William Gilbert) and Helen, her 87-year old mother via audio recitation of her own poem "Rose or Blue."

Additionally, Gilbert will be curating another Prospect 1 parallel offering sponsored by the CAC and the Newcomb College Center for Research on Women, at NCCROW on the Tulane University campus entitled [Loss. Ritual. Relic. Residue: The Archive](#).

Gilbert has taught art at Tulane and Loyola Universities and lectured widely on collaboration and transcultural exchange, public art, and artist's books. Gilbert has been awarded numerous fellowships and project support from foundations (Ford, Warhol, Pew, Rockefeller, Pollock/Krasner) Foundations

and The NEA, National Association of Artists' Organizations, Louisiana Division of the Arts, The Trust for Mutual Understanding and Art Matters, Inc. She received her undergraduate degree from the University of New Orleans (1980) and her Master of Fine Arts degree from Tulane University (1982).

<http://www.jangilbertart.com/>



**Jana Napoli** was born and raised in New Orleans and continues to live there. Originally trained as a painter, Napoli is a mixed-media artist and a creative entrepreneur deeply concerned with civic and community engagement. In 1988, she founded the internationally acclaimed non-profit arts and social service organization, YA/YA Inc. (Young Aspirations/Young Artists), and served as its full-time Creative Director for 12 years. YA/YA seeks to empower creative young people to become successful adults by providing educational experiences in the arts and entrepreneurship, and by fostering and supporting their ambitions. Napoli has exhibited both nationally and internationally and has received several awards for her work, among them, the Oprah Winfrey "Use your life award" (2002) and a President's Committee on Arts and Humanities award (1999).

[\*Floodwall\*](#) continues her long-standing dedication to the intersection of art and community-building but also integrates the themes of the unspoken and the unseen that are part of her own artistic preoccupations.

*Floodwall* is a site-specific installation created from 710 household drawers collected in the wake of Katrina. The first installation of *Floodwall* lined the Liberty Street Bridge, overlooking the World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan. Close to a million viewers witnessed the 250 feet of drawers, arrayed on the bridge like rows of tombstones. It has also been exhibited at the Louisiana State Museum in Baton Rouge, the Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, Texas, and at the Clifton Cultural Arts Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.

*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 water's surface. The top halves of sofas, tables, and chairs "float" around *Floodwall*, giving the impression of the water's depth.

A [Curriculum Packet](#) [PDF] was created for school and museum educators to allow students to further explore *Floodwall*.

<http://www.floodwall.org/>



**Rontherin Ratliff**, a native of New Orleans, is a multi-faceted artist, working in such diverse media as carpentry, mural, and graphic design. Fifteen years ago, he joined the youth artist collective, Young Aspirations/Young Artists. As a member of YA/YA, he was contracted to restore chairs for a private collection in Sanselpocro, Italy (1997); his interior design project was exhibited as part of *Artpenry* at the Louisiana Children's Museum in 2002; and he designed murals for the City of Hammond (1999), Café du Monde (commissioned by the Vieux Carré in

1999), Harrah's Casino and MTV's *The Real World* (2000). In 2007, Ron designed and painted YA/YA's *Coming Home* mural series, which was painted on the wall of the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans. Currently, Ron is working on a YA/YA sculpture project titled *Sounds of a Crescent City* as the lead artist and mentor for YA/YA youth artists.

As a proprietor and designer of Majestic Lines, LLC, Ron has also designed murals for Jefferson Parish (2007) and City Arts in New York, NY (2005). In 2000, Ron co-founded WhyFive Studio, which creates two-dimensional textile designs. WhyFive Studio has already been repeatedly commissioned to create concert posters, product advertisements, and festival banners to promote commercial and non-commercial arts events.

Ron's *On Piety* installation is *Rooted*, a sculpture/installation that takes the form of a oak tree, typical of New Orleans. Largely consisting of found objects, the tree evokes images of the city and of New Orleanian culture; it addresses themes of rebuilding and community and their concomitant issues of equality and neglect. The tree's roots act as an undeniable force of its culture breaking through a cement sidewalk. The sidewalk is lit from below, symbolizing what was, what is, and the hope of what can be.