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ADVISER



ART | Prospect.1 New Orleans

The Big Easy's Art Gumbo

Three Years After Katrina, New Orleans Stages Its First Biennial of International Contemporary Art

BY CHRISTINA S.N. LEWIS

THIS WEEKEND, the Big Easy will try to find art in the aftermath of a disaster with the start of Prospect.1 New Orleans. The exhibition bills itself as the largest biennial of international contemporary art ever held in the U.S.

The new biennial—an art show staged every two years—may seem an odd match for a place that is still pulling itself back together three years after Hurricane Katrina flooded 80% of the city in 2005. The organizers see the event as a way to promote New Orleans. The exhibition will take place throughout the city and include 81 artists from more than 30 countries, all of whom were invited to create new work in response to the destruction. Although the famous French Quarter has been fixed up in Katrina's aftermath, virtually every neighborhood that was flooded still has boarded-up homes. Organizers say that the biennial's estimated 50,000 out-of-state visitors will have to tour the city in order to fully experience the show and hope they will be inspired to stay longer and sample the local attractions.

"New Orleans is in a delicate state," says Dan Cameron, who left his post as senior director for New York's New Museum to found U.S. Biennial Inc., which oversees Prospect.1. "And I wanted

the artists who were participating to respond dynamically to what they saw on the ground here."

Many artists in the show confront the disaster directly. A light sculpture by collagist Wangechi Mutu depicts a full-scale house that was going to be built by a Katrina survivor who says her contractor laid a foundation but left without finishing the home. Srđjan Loncar, a local artist, is building a pile of fake money, and creating gold-painted carrying cases filled with thousand-dollar bills that visitors can buy. In the Lower Ninth Ward, Los Angeles painter and former hair dresser Mark Bradford has built a wooden ark from detritus gathered in the district.

Other artists in the show address subjects beyond the deluge. Bradley McCallum and Jacqueline Tarry, a husband-and-wife team whose recent work uses imagery from the civil-rights movement, will exhibit a new series of 106 oil paintings (pictured above) based on mug shots of protestors from the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus boycotts in Alabama, including images of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks.

Prospect.1 New Orleans is one of the latest in a growing number of biennial art events. Such shows are spreading because of the expanding global interest in art and the market's emphasis on new works, which such exhibitions typically showcase. The Whitney Biennial is perhaps the

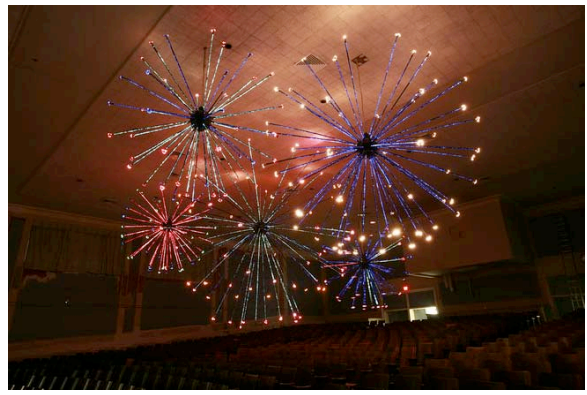
most well-known event of its kind in the U.S. The Istanbul biennial draws roughly 65,000 visitors. Other biennials in Venice and Sao Paulo, Brazil, attract hundreds of thousands of visitors.

The New Orleans exhibition appears to have successfully gotten the attention of art lovers who travel the world for art-related events. Forty-five museum groups from around the world, including the Guggenheim, the Whitney and the Art Institute of Chicago, have confirmed they are sending groups of top-level patrons, says Mr. Cameron. High-level curators and collectors are going as well. Philippe Vergne, the recently appointed director of New York's Dia Art Foundation, plans to fly down today for a two-day trip along with his wife, curator Sylvia Chivaranonond. Donald Rubell and his wife, Mera, who are among Miami's most prominent collectors, will also attend. "I hear it's going to be great," said Mr. Rubell this past Monday while attending the Studio Museum in Harlem's annual fall gala in New York. "It seems the artists really engaged with the work. We'll definitely visit, but not during the opening. Just flew back from FIAC [International Contemporary Art Fair] in Paris."

► See a slideshow of works at the New Orleans Biennial at WSJ.com/Lifestyle.



Mithra, a three-story ark by Mark Bradford in the Lower Ninth Ward, was built using detritus gathered from the district, which was among the most devastated by Katrina.



Cai Guo Qiang's fireworks installation at the Colton Studios.



Sanford Biggers works on his "Blossom" installation at the Louisiana State Museum. The piano references New Orleans' rich musical history.



An installation of paintings from Bradley McCallum and Jacquelline Tarry's "Evidence Not Seen" at the African American Museum.



These oil paintings are based on police booking photos of civil rights activists that were found on file in Montgomery, Ala. The photos were taken during the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-1956.



Mel Chin's "Safe House" at KKprojects is one of several unofficial exhibitions taking place during the New Orleans Biennial.