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Land of the Blue Virgins

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Land of the Blue Virgins

by Mark Charleville
May 1 - June 30, 1999

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The Artist and His Art

Mark Charleville is a multimedia artist living in Bossier Parish, Louisiana. He has over twenty years experience producing graphics in broadcast and print. He also produces drawings and paintings in traditional media, having shown throughout Louisiana. He has work at The Blue Moon Gallery in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

He has taught college level art, worked in the oil fields of Louisiana, built maps and charts for oil companies and universities, has drawn illustrations for archeologists, produced videos, and volunteered for The Nature Conservancy. He has traveled to Costa Rica, Peru, Venezuela and Vancouver Island.

Mark was born in Port Allen, Louisiana. He has lived in various Louisiana communities; Livonia, Natchitoches, Lafayette and now lives with his wife, Lilly Daigle on a bluff on Red River outside Benton, La.



Land of The Blue Virgins



In South Louisiana a unique cultural event is occurring. Many Catholic communities honor The Virgin Mother, yet no other community celebrates the image of The Virgin as do the people of South Louisiana. Statues of The Virgin Mary have long been associated with hidden gardens, flowers, and healing plants, yet in Louisiana this icon of The Virgin has become something more.

A traveler in the bayou land will notice blue clad virgins along the roadways. These Virgin statues, no longer confined to secret gardens, proudly guard the front yards of the region. Why are people displaying the Virgin Mother in this manner? Italians tell stories of The Virgin protecting homes from storms and gulf winds. A devastating fire ravaged New Orleans in 1812. The nuns of the Ursuline Convent in New Orleans placed a statue of Mary in a window of the convent and were miraculously spared. The people

of Pierre Part built an island shrine of The Virgin Mary after the town was spared from a hurricane. The Virgin Mary has been known as the protectress of Christians since ancient times, but what is the reason for the abundance of these statues in this area?

The statues have become an integral part of the landscape with explanation, story or belief explaining The Blue Virgins. The images shown are a combination of these statues and visions of the landscape in which they reside.

Media Used

Originally, each print is a photograph digitally enhanced with color and montage elements and then printed by a digital ink jet printing process known as "Gicl'ee." The resulting images have a soft, almost velvety appearance of texture, which immediately suggests the mists and fogs of the bayou setting as well as the dreamlike quality of a vision or religious experience.

What is equally fascinating about this collection, however, is the realism of the individual statues. The variety of the pieces in material, style and execution is remarkable, as well as the occasional architectural settings in shrines or niches. The state of preservation also claims attention, ranging from brand-new unpainted through various stages of wear-and-tear to downright neglect.

In Charleville's state-of-the-art technology, he gives us a sensitive overview of cultural and religious custom fairly wide spread in the French-speaking areas of Louisiana.

Works on Display

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<i>Sad Eyed Lady of The Lowlands</i>	<i>Virgin Dream</i>	<i>White Castle Mary</i>	<i>Up the Drunken Virgin River</i>
			
<i>Southern Virgin</i>	<i>The Lady of Bayou Fleur de Lis</i>	<i>Lawtell Mary</i>	<i>Mary of the Chacahoula Swamp</i>
			
<i>Virgin of the Cedars</i>	<i>Brusly Virgin</i>	<i>Delta Lady</i>	<i>The Virgins of Port Barre</i>
			<p>The Marian Library International Marian Research Institute 300 College Park Avenue Dayton, OH 45469-1390 (937) 229-4214</p>
<i>Our Lady of the Gulf Wind</i>	<i>Tears of the Virgin</i>	<i>Pecan Island Shrine</i>	

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