

## **JAN GILBERT ART**

### **About the Work:**

Nationally recognized interdisciplinary artist Jan Gilbert mines memory, loss and transition, pushing boundaries of all sorts by forging objects, installations, rituals and networks. Her universally compelling works are simultaneously personal and collective, public and private, local and global.

Scale and scope range from an intimate bookwork tribute using her youthful correspondence with a Vietnam War soldier, *Memorial to Bobby* (1991), to the 300 foot long *Biography of a House* (2007), a ribbon of embalmed family photos encircling her mother's flooded post-Katrina home and a part of the acclaimed *LakeviewS Sunset Bus Tour*.

Her works have been shown widely in galleries, museums, and cultural centers across the United States and abroad, but early in her career, when the 1984 World's Fair came to New Orleans, Gilbert realized her strong need to step outside of the gallery walls and engage more directly with a public that wouldn't be inclined to visit sanctioned and safe art spaces. Her public art has tackled tough issues of AIDS, breast cancer, war and death, as it regularly finds its way to city streets across the globe. A few such projects, often collaborative, include: *The Subject is War* (1991), using bus shelters; *Borders, Boundaries & Bindings* commissioned to commemorate Boston's Leather District as one of the first of the Central Artery Art Projects' of the Big Dig in the streets of the South End (1993); *Lunch EnCounter* (2004), a Tacoma, Washington, installation and performance on desegregation; *On the Line/Sur la ligne* (2010) installed at 571 Projects Gallery and on the High Line in the Chelsea Arts District of Manhattan; and her

[30 Years/30 Blocks: a retrospective installation of place and public art work](#) (2012), which appeared both inside and out at The Front in New Orleans' St. Claude Arts District and is available online as a bookwork.

### **About the Artist:**

Jan Gilbert has been awarded individual artist's fellowships by the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Southern Arts Federation/National Endowment for the Arts, Louisiana Division of the Arts, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and Art Matters. Her projects have received support from the NEA/Rockefeller Initiative for Interdisciplinary Artists, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Ford Foundation, Trust for Mutual Understanding, and National Association of Artist's Organizations.

In 2013, The Arts Council of New Orleans honored her with a Community Arts Award recognizing artistic excellence, sustained contributions, unusual achievements, perseverance, and a deep commitment to the arts and the cultural community.

Gilbert received her undergraduate degree from the University of New Orleans with distinction (1980) and her Master of Fine Arts from Tulane University (1982). She has taught at Tulane and Loyola Universities, Delgado Community College and as an artist/mentor with graduate students of Vermont College.

### **About Working with Collaboration, Community and Culture:**

Based in and deeply influenced by her native New Orleans, Gilbert employs tools and processes of collaboration to create this host of widely varied projects with wildly diverse partnerings: her documentary filmmaker husband, Kevin McCaffrey; poet/writers Andrei Codrescu and Yusef Komunyakaa; experimental theater directors Richard Schechner, Julie Hebert and Kathy Randels; and Swiss cultural psychiatrist/anthropologist Jacques Arpin.

Gilbert is a co-founder, with artists Debra Howell and Kristen Struebing-Beazley, of the artist/writer collaborative The VESTIGES Project. Throughout her tenure with VESTIGES, Gilbert has directed, produced, and participated as a core artist in a vast variety of projects that include video, performance, site/community interactions. In recognition of its 25th anniversary, the collective spent three years working under the auspices of a roving residency with New Orleans' Contemporary Arts Center (2006-2009).

Lessons learned during intensive exchange projects (*VESTIGES: A Valorization of the Anonymous*, Boston/New Orleans, 1993-04; *Scattered Ephemera*, Tacoma, Washington, 2002-04); and *The Unifying Gift*, 2003-05; in the Republic of Macedonia, poorest of the war-torn former Yugoslavia) positioned these New Orleans artists for the unimaginable tasks they confronted after the 2005 catastrophic flooding of 80% of the city of New Orleans. Early in 2006, Gilbert initiated *VESTIGES: Think Tank*, and called upon former Orleanians from Geneva, New York, California, Austin, Boston and San Francisco, to re-connect as lifelines to post-Katrina NOLA. The charge was to aid rebuilding New Orleans, in its ruins, with experimental and interdisciplinary processes as tools.

Aside from garnering substantial resources and remote access to functioning infrastructures, one of *Think Tank's* many vital outgrowths was *HOME, New Orleans?*, a large-scale arts and community network bringing together

neighbors, artists, students, organizations, schools and universities, to produce five years of sustained rejuvenation efforts in four devastated New Orleans neighborhoods. In 2013, Gilbert and McCaffrey edited a collection of articles for TDR (The Drama Review), providing a collective, firsthand glimpse at how creative artists took responsibility for remembering the disaster and re-visioning the city. As collaboration begets collaborations, many outgrowths are going strong and serving as models in a world grappling with global warming and climate change.

The cultural activism of Gilbert extends to mentoring, teaching, and lecturing as well as serving on inaugural boards, for A Studio in the Woods (an artists' retreat with a focus on the environment), ArtSpot Productions and Goat in the Road (socially activist performance ensembles). Gilbert served as Vice President/Arts Policy Chair of the Executive Committee of the Board of the Contemporary Arts Center. Later, in two important transitions of leadership, she aided as executive staff, acting as Visual Arts Director (2012-13) and as part of a leadership triad (1995). Gilbert also sits on grant panels of the National Endowment for the Arts and state arts councils across the country.

Since the 1980s, Gilbert and her husband/documentary filmmaker Kevin McCaffrey have worked across disciplines with Dr. Jacques and Monica Arpin. The team delivered presentations at the World Association of Cultural Psychiatry Forum in Paris (2011) and in Mexico (2012), on the Cajuns of Louisiana as a model of resilience and collaboration. Gilbert and McCaffrey serve on Dr. Arpin's special interest group launching an exploration of the role of the arts globally in cultural psychiatry. Begun in 2013, Gilbert's current work includes an interactive archive/installation of tools and processes of resilience and regeneration. These will provide the basis for a planned 2015 Presentation at the WACP conference.