



REYNOLDS RECORDS 300 YEAR HISTORY OF NEW ORLEANS – 'BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL'

London, Monday, January 29. A new history-based work by UK artist Robin Reynolds is to be exhibited in New Orleans as part of the city's 2018 tricentennial events.

A collaborative project with The Historic New Orleans Collection (THNOC), the piece is accompanied by an interactive tool developed by the artist's brother Simon Reynolds. Both will be shown as part of THNOC's exhibition "Art of The City: Postmodern to Post-Katrina", presented by The Helis Foundation.

New Orleans: Between Heaven and Hell is the second in a series of heavily-researched historical works linked to prominent events and anniversaries. It has taken more than two years to complete, and it follows Robin's 2016 panorama of London in the style of the 1616 engraving of that city by Claes Jansz Visscher. *Visscher Redrawn* was hung in London's Guildhall Art Gallery as part of the City of London's Shakespeare 400 celebrations.

The colored pen-and-ink work is a view of a fragile American city, held aloft by parading figures through whom its 300-year history unfolds.

In character with the artist's other works, *Between Heaven and Hell* is sprinkled with humour. It celebrates the joyful cultures, eccentricities and music that have made New Orleans one of the great tourist destinations of the world. But central to the story is the city's painful past – from the slave economy on which it was built to the fires, plagues, wars and weather events through which it has survived.

The project was initiated by Robin Reynolds early in 2016. Research has been led by Dr. Sarah Borealis, a New Orleans-based visual historian, in collaboration with THNOC.

A vital feature is the accompanying interactive tool, which expands on scores of historical themes and events depicted in the work. Visitors can pick their way through the work with the help of microhistories prepared by British writer Cathy Loughran. These will, in turn, lead visitors to further reading and to the documents and treasures of The Historic New Orleans Collection.

Robin Reynolds says he was drawn to the city by its uniqueness.

“As a subject it was irresistible, but also overwhelming. You hear people say, in conversation, ‘only in New Orleans’, and you don’t have to be there long to see why. The history is almost impossibly rich in variety, and the characters, past and present, are endlessly entertaining.

“But I was also curious about the recent past. People would say to me I wish I had gone to New Orleans before it was destroyed by the hurricane. I’m pleased to say it’s far from having been destroyed. Katrina is certainly a vivid and tragic chapter, but looking back, you see that resilience is part of the New Orleans story.’

Daniel Hammer, Deputy Director of THNOC, said he was thrilled when a print of the drawing of London was sent to THNOC.

“The level of detail that Robin was able to execute in that drawing is remarkable. It just took one look to say the public is going to be enthralled by this piece. I have to say that the idea behind the New Orleans piece is really what captured our interest, because it’s based in large part in the holdings of our museum. So you have this embodiment of the idea that history informs art.”

He also sees it as an educational tool. “I think the interactive component will enable Robin’s artwork to live on.”

Jan Gilbert, artist and curator of “Art of the City,” said: “Robin’s work is going to serve wonderfully in an educational mode... just the fact that so much of his information was drawn from the archives from The Historic New Orleans Collection is a great showcase of the richness we have here.”

She describes the work as “chock-full” of stories spanning the life of the city and its cultures. They encompass the French and Spanish eras, slavery and its legacies, the Battle of New Orleans, the ravages of yellow fever, and the Civil War. The work celebrates the Mardi Gras tradition, and the city’s achievements in art, literature and music. It also recognizes its vulnerability to flooding.

And she applauds the fact that the work is by an outsider, quoting the words of long Louisiana-based poet and commentator Andrei Codrescu: “Few people have a

sense of where they live anymore... To hold onto the specifics of place you need to look deliberately, to look with a stranger's eye."

She sees the work, with its interactive element, as a public art piece.

"I am a public artist, so I like the idea that this can be accessed from anywhere. You don't have to be standing in the gallery to reap the richness of this. I'd like to think it's going to bring people to New Orleans."

Sarah Borealis, who has researched the project in New Orleans for more than 18 months, and visited England in late 2016 to work with Robin and Simon, hopes the artwork will connect with a different audience.

"Maybe, because it is based so specifically on research conducted within The Historic New Orleans Collection, the work can bring in people who would not otherwise engage with the institution or see the exhibits.

"I hope this will be like a treasure map. When it's on display to the public they might be inspired to play with it, not just visually, but interactively. People will be able to understand, okay, this interesting story isn't just something that came from a textbook. There's a letter, there's a series of correspondence, there are ephemera, a person's physical objects – all are saved in this institution in the French Quarter, often right where these things happened."

Kristian Sonnier VP Communications and PR, New Orleans Convention and Visitor Centre, said: "I've never seen a work of art that encapsulates so much history. It seems as though it was produced by someone who lives in New Orleans and has a deep knowledge of our history. He's covered some obscure parts of our history that even I didn't know about. I think locals have things that they can learn from looking at this beautiful work of art... he's done his homework."

"Art of the City: Postmodern to Post Katrina," presented by The Helis Foundation is scheduled to open in 2018 as the opening exhibition in the new, purpose-built exhibition center at 520 Royal St. Robin's pen and ink with watercolor, 36 x 72 inches, work will feature in a preview exhibition at 533 Royal Street from May 9, 2018 – June 3, 2018.

Notes to Editors:

The Tricentennial: The 300th anniversary of New Orleans will be celebrated from late February 2018. Mayor Mitch Landrieu plans a celebration of the city's resilience. "We have faced and overcome the challenges of rebuilding a great city after fire, war, and disasters—both natural and manmade. With the tricentennial, we now have the opportunity to celebrate the hard work of generations of New

Orleanians who have made us one of the world's most authentic and beloved cities and to remember the fullness, richness, and diversity of our history as it should have always been remembered... Our work toward 2018 has been 300 years in the making.”

About The Historic New Orleans Collection: Founded in 1966, The Historic New Orleans Collection is a museum, research center and publisher dedicated to the study and preservation of the history and culture of New Orleans and the Gulf South. For more information, visit www.hnoc.org or call (504) 523-4662.

Visscher Redrawn: Visscher Redrawn is a pen-and-ink revision of Dutch engraver Claes Jansz Visscher's London panorama, published in 1616. It was exhibited at London's Guildhall Art Gallery from February-November 2016 as part of the City of London's celebrations of two significant anniversaries – the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare, and the 350th anniversary of the Great Fire. A feature of the work was the Shakespeare puzzle. Visitors to the gallery were asked to find, hidden in the panorama, visual references to all of Shakespeare's major plays and poems.

Robin Reynolds: Born in Zimbabwe in 1952, Robin Reynolds lives and works in England. His professional background is journalism and business communication. He worked at the BBC for 23 years and was latterly head of the BBC's art, history and collections unit (BBC Heritage). As a semi-professional draughtsman he produced pocket illustrations, including a series of Dickens characters, for newspapers and magazines. For a time he was a regular contributor to Popular Gardening magazine. He had an exhibition of larger pieces in Luton in 1981, but for many years the demands of family life and work limited his activities as an artist to fantasy pieces for the amusement of friends. Now retired, he works full-time on images that have historic resonance. He says of his work: 'My pictures are about having fun with what I think of as the human beehive.'

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