a photography exhibit
Louisiane Bien-Aimée
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Lafayette, Louisiana
LOUISIANE BIEN-AIMÉE

For the US bicentennial celebration in 1976, Radio France requested that the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana assemble an exhibit to be shown in Paris. The state of Louisiana funded, and CODOFIL co-sponsored with Radio France, a panoramic exhibit of Louisiana life style that showed both the culture and the resources of the state. It consisted of paintings, photographs, maps and drawings covering the history, geography, and natural resources, as well as arts and crafts found in Louisiana.

When completed the display was flown to Paris and set up in the Radio France building. The French prime minister, Jacques Chirac, officiated at the opening ceremony which attracted ambassadors from fifteen nations and a crowd of about 2,000 people.

Entitled "Louisiane Bien-Aimée," the exhibit consisted of seventy-five 6' x 8' panels covered by plexiglass. The three hundred feet of window expanse along the exhibit space, overlooking a major Paris thoroughfare, were draped with huge replicas of the flags that have flown over Louisiana. They were designed, and their construction was coordinated, by Rae Bacque of New Iberia.

The exhibit was awarded a gold medal by the US Department of Commerce as the best bicentennial celebration and commemoration exhibit presented outside the continental United States. It was planned by Glenn Conrad, director of the Center for Louisiana Studies; Mathe Allain, who was then on leave from USL to work for CODOFIL; Jacqueline Voorhies, instructor of foreign languages at USL; and Beverly Latimer, director of the Lafayette Natural History Museum and Planetarium. It was designed and assembled by Herman Mhire, coordinator of exhibits for art and architecture at USL. Dr. Robert Bush, coordinator of the New Orleans Historic Collection, designed and executed the section on New Orleans. Some funding was obtained by Antony Perot, of the Evangeline Economic Development District.

This group of photographs was officially presented to Dr. Ray Authement, president of USL, by James Domengeaux, chairman of CODOFIL, on October 6, 1978. It contains many of the black-and-white photos from the Paris exhibit, primarily from the collection of the late Elemore Morgan, Sr. Essentially landscapes and portraits, the pictures were taken between the 1940s and mid-1960s when he was producing photographs for books and magazine articles on Louisiana subjects.

The original display also contained photographs from Clarence John Laughlin's book, Ghosts Along the Mississippi, and contained works by several USL faculty members, a few of which form a part of this permanent collection. Elemore Morgan, Jr., USL associate professor of fine arts, had two paintings and several enlarged black-and-white and color photographs of Louisiana scenes in the display; USL professor Fred Packard and associate professor Robert Wiggs, art, also contributed a number of photographs.

In the original show were pieces of latex art by Tom Ladousa, and paintings by William Moreland, both USL faculty members. John Geldersma, assistant professor of
fine arts at USL, had several totem sculptures in the show, and had loaned sculpture pieces by David Butler, the Louisiana primitive, from his personal collection. There were several paintings by USL alumni Robert Gordy, Wayne Amedee and Charles Richardson. Works by Edward Whitteman, Ida Kohlmeyer, Jim Richard, and Terry Weldon where loaned by the Simonne Stern Gallery of New Orleans. The Live Oak Gallery in Lafayette lent some Clementine Hunters; the Lafayette Planetarium and Natural History Museum provided various artefacts; the Art Center for Southwest Louisiana, Mardi-Gras costumes; George Rodrigue, a Lafayette artist, lent some of his works, as did Lester Duhon and Chestie Minvielle.

Elemore Morgan Sr.

Elemore Morgan, Sr., was born in 1903 in Baton Rouge. His father was a doctor who retired to the country where Elemore grew up. The rural environment was to influence his photography to such an extent that he seldom photographed New Orleans scenes but concentrated on people and sites in out-of-the-way spots across the state.

Morgan's artistic and graphic talents surfaced early in his teen years, but it was not until his son was born that he began taking photographs. In the mid-30s he went to work as supervisor of construction for A. Hays Town, a Lafayette architect. Among the projects he worked on were the New Iberia courthouse and the Heymann house at the corner of Girard Park Drive and East St. Mary Boulevard in Lafayette. He photographed the construction jobs to record the buildings' progress, and his love of architecture shows through these early pictures. Eventually he called himself an architectural photographer and specialized in architectural and industrial shots.

When World War II broke out he returned to Baton Rouge to farming and free-lance photography. Many of his photographs from the 1930s and early 1940s were destroyed because of Louisiana's natural conditions. His shop had no air conditioning, and fungus attacked and ruin the negatives.

After the war, Morgan's earlier work with industrial concerns, as well as his natural sales ability, enabled him to make arrangements for the publication of a book entitled John Law Wasn't So Wrong, written by Hodding Carter, photographed by Morgan, illustrated by Jay Broussard, the former director of the Louisiana Art Commission, and sponsored by Esso Standard Oil Company. The book describes Louisiana as a horn of plenty, despite its first couple hundred years plagued by public and private opportunists, first under the administration of France and Spain, and later under Reconstructionists and the Louisiana Lottery Company. It describes the agricultural, mining and forestry and industrial strengths of the state, and characterizes the Louisiana life style as filled with buoyancy of spirit, acceptance of the dissimilar, casual sophistication and a spirit for holiday making. The book, which was distributed as a public-relations piece, was used in schools and went through several printings. The pictures in this collection express an attitude in keeping with the point of view of that book.

Morgan also worked with Mrs. Frances Parkinson Keyes when she was researching
I en her book, River Road, and he collaborated with her on the book All This Is Louisiana. He worked with Anna Hong Rutt to produce Art of Flower and Foliage Arrangement, and developed The Sixties Ended It, a photographic study of Louisiana architecture.

Early in the '50s he began working for the Louisiana Forestry Commission and The Louisiana Forestry Association, and for the next thirteen years crisscrossed the state to gather pictures for the commission's quarterly news magazine, Forest and People. He and writer Ed Kerr were given broad latitude to dream up feature stories, with the result that they produced unusual articles, such as those on boat making, hog dog hunting, the orphan train, moss picking, and several on the Atchafalaya Basin. They frequently featured people who used wood or worked in forests for their livelihood or pastime. Most of the negatives in his permanent collection come from this period.

In the early '60s when movie makers began using Louisiana settings, he worked with producers to help locate sites and did local liaison. Among the movies he worked on where: "Long Hot Summer," "Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte," "Desire in the Dust," and "Hurry Sundown." He also covered the opening of "Louisiana Story" in Abbeville, and one of the pictures in this collection shows the gathering of buggies which were used in a parade through town to celebrate the movie which had been made nearby, using local people.

In 1962 many of Morgan's pictures were published in The Lower Mississippi Valley, with text by Ed. Kerr. Morgan also did photo murals for the Red River Room in the LSU Student Union, and exhibits for the LSU art department; he assembled a traveling exhibit for the Louisiana Art Commission; and sold pictures for national use through Black Star, a photo agency in New York City. He sold pictures to Holiday magazine, and had his pictures used in the tourist development display by the Department of Commerce and Industry at the 1964 New York World's Fair.

Morgan died April 10, 1966. All his negatives and proof prints were put in a bank vault in Baton Rouge, but his darkroom was kept intact by his son, Elemore Morgan Jr., who has made his father's pictures available for both public and private use. Since his death LSU has published Louisiana, Its Land and People, a geography text written by Fred B. Kniffen, using Morgan's photographs; and Face of Louisiana, a volume of pictures with captions which is representative of the work done during Morgan's career. Its text is by Charles East.

Morgan's last photographic, long-range project was to study an ancient oak tree at Clio, south of Baton Rouge. He visited the tree during all seasons and weather conditions, and accumulated several hundred frames. Photographs of the tree in this display and on the exhibit's poster are from that project.

For further information about the exhibit contact the Center for Louisiana Studies, USL Box 40831, University of Southwestern Louisiana Lafayette, La., 70504