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# Mardi Gras 2016: Rex Proclamation artist has royal ties

Sue Strachan JAN 16, 2016 - 4:00 PM

The 2016 **Rex** parade theme, "**Royal Gardens \* Horti Regis**" no doubt conjures up visions of fantastical flora and fauna. This year's proclamation, in which Rex, King of Carnival invites all to Carnival revelry, is a romantic, Belle Epoque stylized image focusing on his majesty's favorite gardens, the Louisiana wetlands.

Visual and culinary artist Randolph Tucker Fitz-Hugh is well-known for his palette -- fine art paintings include horticultural subjects -- and palate via catering, is this year's proclamation artist. (His company, The Garnished Palette, suggests a play on food as art.)

Fitz-Hugh's family has longstanding ties to the organization: Fitz-Hugh's grandmother, **Delphine Clark**, was Queen of Carnival in 1941; her daughter, **Alma Atkinson**, was Queen in 1976; great uncle **Harry Bartlett Kelleher**, was

Rex, King of Carnival, in 1965, his son, **Harry Bartlett Kelleher Jr.** was Rex in 2000; and his wife, **Claudia Fitz-Hugh Kelleher** was Queen in 1964; their daughter, **Elizabeth Fitz-Hugh Kelleher**, was Queen in 1992; and two years ago his nephew, **Clifford Pipes Fitz-Hugh**, was a page in Rex.

The design process started in March 2015, when members of the Rex organization met with Fitz-Hugh about doing the proclamation.

Fitz-Hugh was thrilled, "This is the first time I had been asked to do the Rex Proclamation."

He then got to work with research. "I looked at many contemporary and old proclamations," says Fitz-Hugh. "I studied how the krewe's themes had influenced each artist's image choice, then jumped right in with the images that associated themselves with the royal gardens theme."

Even with that, Fitz-Hugh admits, "My mind was freaking [per] making a decision about what my image would be."

It came to him soon enough. "I tried to paint an image that exemplifies this year's theme by showing the Louisiana wetlands landscape," Fitz-

Hugh says. "The irises are the symbol of royalty, and Louisiana. The ribbon is the proverbial snake in the garden. All of the flowers, which include the asphodel, white empress camellia, vanda orchid, among others are specific symbols for people I love. I even sent a message to my nephew Pipes for the future as a flower."

During the process, the Rex committee came two more times to watch the painting's progress. Once completed, the original painting remains property of the Rex organization, but is held by The Historic New Orleans Collection for preservation.

The tradition of issuing a proclamation stopped after World War II, but was revived in 1980. Each year an artist is selected by the Rex Organization (also known as the School of Design), to create original art for the proclamation.

Other artists who have created proclamations include Layla Messkoub, Shelley Hesse, Tim Trapolin, Manuel Ponce, Patti Adams, Mignon Faget, Anne Scheurich, J. Casselle, Ed Dyer, and Auseklis Ozols, of whom Fitz-Hugh says, "It is truly an honor to be included with some of New Orleans' greatest artists."

The limited-edition proclamations are only offered to Rex members the year of the parade, but a limited amount from previous years (1992, 2007, 2008, 2012 - 2015) are available on its website (as of 1.14.2016).

## **Bulletins**

Revived in 2002, parade bulletins are published to give the public an idea of what the Rex parade themes and float designs are going to look like.

The 2016 bulletin reflects the parade theme "Royal Gardens \* Horti Regis" with original art and design. It is a collaboration between **Manuel Ponce** and **Matthew Hales**, in which Ponce's float sketches are incorporated into the bulletin by Hales, who also creates the bulletin's corner art and other embellishments. Corner art often draws on images from the Golden Age of Carnival (pre-World War I) and newly created graphics matching those unique style elements.

Other bulletins available online include: 2002, 2005, 2008-2015 (as of 1.14.2016).

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