

Alan Plattmann's  
French Quarter Impressions





*Rainy Day Carriage Tour*, pastel, 24" x 32", 2001

# Alan Flattmann's French Quarter Impressions

TEXT BY JOHN R. KEMP

PAINTINGS BY ALAN FLATTMANN

FOREWORD BY E. JOHN BULLARD



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## FOREWORD

New Orleans is a city that is possessed by its past. While most other American cities—particularly those in the new South, like Atlanta and Charlotte—focus on future growth and expansion, New Orleans is caught between its past and present, between reality and fantasy. Its unique architectural inventory of several square miles of nineteenth-century housing and public buildings creates a historical environment, where today live several hundreds of thousands of people.

This nearly overwhelming sense of place has been chronicled for over two hundred years by writers, painters, photographers, and filmmakers, both residential and transient. The aura of history in New Orleans is very much like that found in even older European cities—particularly ones that once were centers of empires, like Venice and Vienna—living on remembrances of past glories. Alan Flattmann's lush, colorful, and atmospheric pastels of the French Quarter—the Vieux Carré—beautifully capture the Proustian feeling of lost time. With its unique architecture, music, and food, New Orleans is a national treasure, appreciated by the millions of visitors who flock to the city annually.

Alan Flattmann has studied, taught in, and painted the French Quarter for nearly forty years. Today no other artist has such an intimate and personal knowledge of this special place. Flattmann is the latest, possibly the finest, artist to seriously depict this subject. Many artists have painted scenes of the French Quarter, but three stand out as Flattmann's artistic predecessors. William Woodward—professor at Tulane University School of Architecture, painter in a modified Impressionist style, and pioneer preservationist—is the most important. Beginning in 1895, in response to the threatened demolition of the Cabildo on Jackson Square, Woodward began to document the buildings in the Quarter, then a long-neglected neighborhood favored by Italian immigrants and bohemian artists and writers. His paintings and etchings

helped inspire the creation of the Vieux Carré Commission in 1936. This interest in preserving the Quarter and restoring its glory was accelerated by a Depression-era WPA project, the Historic American Buildings Survey, which hired watercolorist Boyd Cruise to record important historic buildings in Louisiana. These documentary works lead Cruise to later paint meticulously detailed watercolors of lost structures and portraits of Quarter homes beginning to be restored by new owners. A more romantic, even surreal, approach to the architectural treasures of the Quarter is found in the extensive work of Clarence John Laughlin, who made thousands of photographs celebrating the melancholic decay of old buildings.

The great challenge for Alan Flattmann is to find new ways to depict a subject that is so familiar, that if left in the hands of a lesser artist, can easily become a hackneyed cliché. Fortunately, he is fully up to this creative challenge, as can be seen in this remarkable book. In his pastels, we are able to experience afresh the Vieux Carré, seeing it for the first time through his eyes. Flattmann's extraordinary skill in handling the pastel medium allows him to achieve wonderful atmospheric effects. I especially admire his ability to depict the gray and rainy days and nights of wet streets and empty shops, with shimmering reflections of buildings and lights. The sadness and melancholiness of these scenes contrasts the animated interiors of the restaurants and bars, where tourists and residents enjoy the sybaritic delights for which New Orleans is famous. Future generations will look back at Alan Flattmann's French Quarter pastels with nostalgic reverence and admiration for his ability to capture the character of this glorious place.

—E. JOHN BULLARD

The Montine McDaniel Freeman Director  
New Orleans Museum of Art



Henry Sciambra Produce Company, pastel, 24" x 36", 2001

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