Jeffrey Marshall      Statement

When the levees around New Orleans began failing on August 29, 2006, I looked for a way to help beyond sending money. It was clear to me that my response would be through drawing, but the form was elusive, and I struggled with how to communicate so much from so far. For months after the storm, I used news reports to make drawings in my studio, trying to put into images what seemed to be so many layers of disaster. Missing from the studio drawings was imagery derived from genuine experience, a quality I value in my work, and the reason I draw and paint in the landscape. Eventually I decided to bring my studio to New Orleans, realizing that drawing the disaster meant being among the people and places that had drowned. I have made two drawing trips to New Orleans since Katrina (May 2006, March 2007), and will return in August 2007, before a solo show at The New England Institute of Art from August 29-September 30.

When I search for a place to paint or draw, I usually pick remote areas that make it difficult for someone to look over my shoulder, so that being alone is part of my process. Drawing the aftermath of Katrina has demanded that I act differently, that I make my drawings a public art project, not a personal one. In New Orleans I plant myself in the street, inviting people to stop and tell me their stories. I need to talk and listen to the people who share a similar experience, to bring their pain, frustration, and hope into my drawings.

My experiences drawing in post-Katrina New Orleans have changed me, turning my practice of drawing through observation from a personal activity to a political one. Representing a specific place, over time, reveals a breadth of reality that is hidden when an environment is only casually engaged. The question I find myself asking is who holds the information that allows true understanding of an environment, and can drawing give me access to that truth.

I have received sponsorship & grants from a variety of companies and foundations to continue with my New Orleans Drawing Project. The current work is funded by:

The New England Institute of Art
Daniel Smith Art Supplies
The Puffin Foundation
Jet Blue Airways
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Please see the full body of work at www.jeffreymarshall.net
Sale of prints to benefit Katrina relief will be available on the website soon.