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**ACADIAN CULTURE AND CONTEMPORARY COMMERCIALISM:
GEORGE RODRIGUE'S ARTISTIC AND MARKETING PRACTICES**

By

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ABSTRACT

In 1984 George Rodrigue, then known primarily as a naïve surrealist or Cajun primitive expressionist, was asked to paint illustrations for a collection of Louisiana ghost stories entitled *Bayou*. When the moment came to illustrate the French-Cajun tale of the werewolf, or *loup-garoup*, the artist used his previously deceased black and white spaniel-terrier mix, Tiffany, as a model. Bathed in the light of a Cajun moon, the creature took on a blue hue. Since then, Blue Dog, as the animal has become known, has generated wide recognition with original canvases and silk screens portraying this subject selling for as high as \$350,000.

George Rodrigue's artistic background is rooted in commercial design. From his earliest recollections he has maintained an interest in the ability of art images to impart specific feelings and emotions and exercise influential power over those who view them. In search of a niche market and subject matter with which to showcase his artistic talents, Rodrigue turned to painting images from his Acadian heritage. Efforts within this context earned Rodrigue domestic and international acclaim. His works sold relatively well within selected circles –offered initially at prices of \$50 and eventually, through enhanced product placement and networking efforts, reaching values of \$150,000. However, as Rodrigue's artistic focus shifted away from his Acadian past and began to focus intently upon Blue Dog, an icon more closely aligned with his immediate, commercially influenced present, what positive critical interest Rodrigue had been able to foster in his work began to subside. Conversely, putting to work theories concerning the power of public interest to diminish considerably the effectiveness of scant or negative critical commentary, Blue Dog's popularity grew exponentially. This icon ushered Rodrigue into a phase of his career that, with its ability to foster instant audience report and spur mass-market appeal, reflects a heretofore-unrealized synergy between his artistic and commercial sensibilities.

Today, George Rodrigue stands as an example of artistic success achieved outside the traditional artist/dealer/gallery establishment and propagated not through the centralized voices of select critics, but via the consensus opinions and economic power of a mainstream, art-purchasing audience. Using lessons learned through relationships with agents, dealers,

fellow artists, friends, and established marketing and promotional professionals, Rodrigue has generated for himself a version of the business model used historically by the art industry and infused it with his own approachable, genial persona. Without question, Blue Dog has provided Rodrigue a level of artistic freedom and financial success that was for him previously unattainable. Through the mass public appeal of the canine icon, Rodrigue's earning potential as an artist presently dwarfs that which he achieved with his early Acadian-influenced efforts. Averaging an annual income of \$10 million, it is clear that whether gleaned from the world of art or the world of business, the mantra of "success breeds success" remains true and verifiable.

INTRODUCTION

In 1984 George Rodrigue, then known primarily as a naïve surrealist or Cajun primitive expressionist, was asked to paint illustrations for a collection of Louisiana ghost stories entitled *Bayou*. When the moment came to illustrate the French-Cajun tale of the werewolf, or *loup-garoup*, the artist used his previously deceased black and white spaniel-terrier mix, Tiffany, as a model. Bathed in the light of a Cajun moon, the creature took on a blue hue. Since then, Blue Dog, as the animal has become known, has generated wide recognition with original canvases and silk screens portraying this subject selling for as high as \$350,000.

A native Cajun, George Rodrigue was born in 1944 in New Iberia, Louisiana. Ranging from bayou settings and peopled landscapes to images from a more recently popularized Cajun culture, Rodrigue's early paintings are organically tied to the Bayou setting in which they appear. In some of these works Rodrigue portrays figures as ghostly and opaque, pasted onto the painting's surface. Quite frequently, his early historical or allegorical figures, such as the famed Acadian drinking champion "Papa Jack," seem to be resting timelessly, while at other times they are involved in various vocational or recreational activities such as blacksmithing or fishing.¹ Paintings created after 1980 began to focus more on figures closer to our time, such as Huey Long, Hank Williams, Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev. In 1989 Rodrigue initiated experiments with his Blue Dog figure, using it as his primary subject. Since then, the theme and focus of his career have shifted dramatically. Whereas he was once known for creating works of art considered verifiable as high or fine art and widely acclaimed and appreciated by critics and international award committees, Rodrigue's work with Blue Dog takes on a commercialized flavor more closely aligned with his early training as an illustrator at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. Critics have argued that Rodrigue's Blue Dog paintings are a natural byproduct of his Cajun-influenced art. However, the development, marketing, and reception of this art in relation to Rodrigue's earlier work bears further investigation.

Existing published work on Rodrigue's Blue Dog paintings is limited to books and exhibition catalogues in which the artist has had direct input. Oriented largely toward a popular audience of collectors, dealers, and devotees of his art, titles including *Blue Dog* (1994), *George*

Rodrigue: A Cajun Artist (1997), *Blue Dog Man* (1999), *Blue Dog Christmas* (2000), and *Blue Dog Love* (2001) are by-and-large uncritical and informal presentations of the artist's work and career. As such, they lack historical perspective. These texts are packaged attractively to stimulate popular market interest but fail to address adequately the artistic and market-focused conventions at work in Rodrigue's paintings from either a systematic or developmental standpoint.

The Art of George Rodrigue: 30 Year Retrospective, a 2001 exhibit of George Rodrigue's paintings held at the Louisiana State Archives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana represents one of the artist's most recent exhibitions. The text provided in the catalog for this exhibit positioned Rodrigue's Blue Dog paintings at the end of a timeline, which began with his Cajun paintings. This issue of a unidirectional timeline will be addressed in Chapter 2. From an art historical perspective, there has been only one article, published in a 1974 volume of *Art in America* that may be considered a focused effort to present Rodrigue's artistic talents in a critical light. However, as the date of this article suggests, this article dealt only with the artist's Cajun-influenced paintings and provides no insight into Rodrigue's business or marketing practices.

The Origins of Blue Dog

Rodrigue's artistic creations are imbued with narratives that forge connections with his viewing public and, as a result, are attractive to a wide-ranging audience. The earlier Cajun works possess a nostalgic sensibility that draws viewers back into nineteenth-century Acadiana, when the purity of the Cajun people and their culture had yet to be tainted by oil industry developments brought on by the industrial revolution. As is evidenced by the extensive Cajun migration narrative retold within the pages of *The Cajuns of George Rodrigue* (1976), a book of ninety-eight color reproductions depicting the vanishing regional lifestyle and the folklore of Southwest Louisiana, these works rest solidly on the ethos and pathos of Cajun culture. Published along with commentary in both French and English, the paintings relay the Acadians' forced migration from Nova Scotia at the hands of the British and their subsequent journey south, where a collective culture and existence was hewn out of the forbidding Southwestern Louisiana bayou.

As with his Cajun paintings, Rodrigue's Blue Dog works have been carefully linked with a narrative to which viewers can relate. However, rather than focus entirely on the narrative elements found within the Cajun migration story, Rodrigue developed a storyline that takes the sentimental elements of the Cajun narrative and folds them into a tale that is perhaps more widely familiar to a mainstream audience – the story of a lost dog trying to find its master. In a Rodrigue Gallery press release of 1990, the artist states that Blue Dog is an amalgamation of the *loup-garoup*, a Cajun werewolf character, and the artist's own deceased dog, Tiffany.² Rodrigue maintains that Blue Dog is the spiritual representation of Tiffany journeying through time and space, trying to find her master. While the story behind Blue Dog is simple and lacks the historical reference of that behind Rodrigue's earlier Cajun paintings, the emotive impact is no less apparent. In both form and function, the central idea behind the Blue Dog narrative originates directly from that of its Acadian predecessor. As the market-centric books heretofore written about Blue Dog relay, the primary focal areas in Rodrigue's Blue Dog images are the elements of life to which he knows his audience can relate: transition, loss of loved ones or family members, a challenging journey through unfamiliar territory, and hope of finding a final destination. Once Rodrigue extracted these elements, which were so vital to the success of his Acadian-influenced work, and incorporated them into his Blue Dog myth, the entire package needed to be communicated to his audience in visual form. It was at this point that Rodrigue's understanding of and appreciation for proven art marketing practices came into play.

Rodrigue and Commercial Art

In her book entitled *Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market* (1992) Cristin J. Mamiya examines the financial and critical success achieved by American Pop art despite a serious initial lack of support or acclaim. Mamiya states that a key element to understanding the success of American Pop is an examination of the manner in which works of art in this vein were presented and received.³ Pop Art thrived by exploiting the elements of presentation and delivery. Even today, these elements supercede the need for critical acclaim. For good or for ill, the ability of critics to shape the manner in which art is accepted has diminished steadily over the last fifty years.⁴ Appearing as beacons of popular culture, blurbs and advertisements issued from the lips and pens of Hollywood, television, and magazine editors are rapidly drowning out the guiding voices of today's critics. Astute product placement can dramatically increase the public's familiarity with one's artwork. In Rodrigue's case,

several prominent placements of his Blue Dog work within the coffee shop of the hit television show *Friends* transmitted a widely dispersed marketing message for Rodrigue's Blue Dog in a way that a four-color advertisement in *ARTNews* never could. Soon after its inception, Blue Dog became a vehicle by which Rodrigue could connect with a market segment that, due to his previous work's general lack of marketable, mainstream impact, had previously been inaccessible. Although he did not completely discontinue production of Cajun primitive expressionist art, Blue Dog had, by 1989, become his primary focus. With this new focus clearly established, Rodrigue began to turn back to his commercial art beginnings in order to continue reaching out, in the adapted spirit of Pop Art, to a predominantly fun-loving, mainstream audience.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is comprised of the present introductory chapter, two chapters making up the main body, and a final conclusion. In chapter two, I will position Blue Dog as the product of a cyclical process that involves George Rodrigue's early involvement with commercial art, an extensive revisiting of his Acadian heritage, and finally a return to his early commercial sensibilities. I plan to accomplish this primarily through formal analysis of selected Cajun paintings and Blue Dog works and a discussion regarding Rodrigue's focus on subjects and themes that were increasingly more closely aligned with his own personal frame of reference. I then hope to provide additional insight into Rodrigue's market-conscious methodology by examining briefly the role storytelling has played within Cajun culture and how Rodrigue, as a member of this culture, has capitalized on this tradition by imbuing his art with specific emotive and sympathetic elements with which his audience can relate.

Without question, George Rodrigue's Cajun primitive expressionist paintings are regarded as fine art and as such, they have garnered considerable domestic and international acclaim, have been selected by government entities as official State and National gifts abroad, and set sales records in one of the most prestigious art galleries in the United States. Chapter three of this thesis centers on a question that seems ever present when addressing the success of George Rodrigue's Blue Dog works as compared to that of his earlier Acadian influenced paintings. This query, posed in various forms, asks the following: Did George Rodrigue forfeit his previous critical standing when Blue Dog, an image that sprang from his Acadian heritage but rapidly took root in mainstream culture, became the primary focus of his artistic endeavors?

Approached from a somewhat less academic angle, this question simply asks whether Rodrigue's wide artistic and commercial success with Blue Dog represents willful abandonment of his artistic ideals in an attempt to sell out to mainstream culture. In an effort to provide a context in which an answer to this question may be presented, I will at this point in my thesis enter into an analysis of Rodrigue's business practices as they relate to his experiences pre and post Blue Dog. The areas of focus for this analysis will include mediums used; sales achieved; level, type, and extent of recognition received; marketing or promotional sources brought to bear; characteristics/demographics of his buying audience; and critical recognition garnered including artwork residing in various collections and museums.

The conclusion of this thesis will offer a review and summary of the points contained within. By presenting Rodrigue's arrival at Blue Dog as a return to his early commercial influences and providing an assessment of the manner in which his modern business sense and promotional practices have radically shifted the manner in which he is regarded today as an artist, it is my hope that I will have produced an addition to the body of work on Rodrigue that is useful from an art historical standpoint.

CHAPTER 1

RODRIGUE'S ARTISTIC CYCLE: CAJUN HERITAGE AND COMMERCIAL SENSIBILITY

The supporting text for *The Art of George Rodrigue: 30 Year Retrospective*, a catalogue for a 2001 exhibit of George Rodrigue's paintings held at the Louisiana State Archives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, presents the artist's career as a one-way transition from his early Cajun style consisting of southwest Louisiana bayou scenes and nineteenth-century Cajuns to a steady stream of works featuring his more recent icon, Blue Dog.¹ This presentation sets Rodrigue's career within a developmental progression that is unidirectional, with each step in his stylistic and thematic evolution representing continued development toward an unknown end. While this reading provides a brief chronology of Rodrigue's artistic development, its characterization of his progression as linear misses the mark. In fact, Rodrigue's artistic development may best be viewed as cyclical. I wish to show that his initial involvement with market-driven commercial art while enrolled at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, came full circle with the development of Blue Dog, an icon that sprang out of old world Cajun tradition and Rodrigue's cultural heritage and then took root in the realm of popular culture.

To explain Rodrigue's cyclical progression from commercial artist to naïve surrealist or Cajun primitive expressionist, and finally to an amalgamation of both, I will review the beginning of his artistic cycle centering on his educational background, commercial beginnings, and early market-focused influences. I will then show how Rodrigue's artistic focus moved, in counterclockwise fashion, away from commercial art back into his Cajun heritage and into a new and more immediate present. George Rodrigue's art has always been commercially focused. While his initial choice of subject matter may relate to his Acadian past, his artistic efforts have consistently moved closer and closer into the present. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of this forward progression as well as an expanded review of Rodrigue's initial focus on the bare Acadian landscape encountered by his eighteenth-century ancestors, his gradual portrayal of increasingly more recent stages of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cajun life, and finally his practice of painting Blue Dog. As this process unfolds, I will show how the narratives that provide his Acadian and Louisiana-focused paintings with their depth of meaning

were reshaped and reissued in order to provide similar structure and meaning for his Blue Dog works. Once this has been accomplished, it will be my contention that Blue Dog represents a point where Rodrigue's experience and success as a painter of his Acadian past provided him with the means by which to return to a creative focus more closely aligned with his immediate present. While Blue Dog does not represent a final stage in Rodrigue's artistic development, its appearance, development, and cultivation as a dominant icon within his oeuvre does represent the merger of Rodrigue's commercial and cultural sensibilities. As such, it presents itself as the culmination of a cyclical journey whereby Rodrigue's heritage and his love and affinity for commercially focused art could be expressed simultaneously.

Early Commercial Influences

When discussing George Rodrigue's commercial art inclinations, it is important to establish the context in which his interest in this area may have been established. Midway through the late 1950s and on through the mid 1960s, the United States was entrenched in a commercial marketing psyche firmly established by American business in order to widen and solidify its markets. During this time advertising became the overriding mechanism by which these organizations established their marketing practices and achieved commercial dominance. It was also during this time that Pop art began to emerge and thrive upon the very tenant of this new dominating commercial business movement by appropriating mass production efforts and marketing strategies that had helped establish corporate dominance. It has been argued that in the United States the dynamics of commercialism from 1958 to 1965 had become so ingrained into the American cultural community that this community's identity became more closely aligned with commercial business practices than ever before.² In effect, the nation's cultural population had so successfully appropriated these business practices that it became a corporate marketing entity unto itself. Fueled by the rampant success of blue chip marketing and advertisement campaigns, the cult of culture had become more enterprising than ever, and for those artists able to put their talent to use within this commercial environment, business was booming.

Rodrigue's first experience with commercial art came during his ninth-grade year, when he began taking correspondence courses with the Minneapolis Art Instruction School. During this phase in his artistic development, Rodrigue learned the value of matching artistic renderings with specific marketing efforts. He also began to focus on the role played by an Art Director in

the field of commercial art. After three years of correspondence classes, he entered into Western Louisiana State University's (WLSU) art program. His time at WLSU was largely spent enhancing his drawing technique and creating a design book, which served as his portfolio. In 1963, at the age of 19, he enrolled at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. Instructed by accomplished commercial illustrators and artists such as Bob Peak and Bernie Fuchs, Rodrigue experienced an education focused on commercial art and was directed along a mechanically oriented curriculum consisting of graphic design, illustration, and painting. Although examples of Rodrigue's commercial illustrations are not available for study, it is possible to gain an understanding of the type of work that he would have created by briefly examining illustrations created by Bob Peak, one of his Art Center instructors.

Bob Peak was one of the most widely known commercial illustrators of his time. Rodrigue has made special mention of Peak's tutelage, and it is plausible that Peak's grasp of illustration's power to capture the viewer's attention and successfully promote various marketing efforts played a large role in Rodrigue's understanding of artistic marketing.³ Peak, himself educated at the Art Center in Pasadena, began working in New York around 1953. Early on he established a strong reputation for his fashion illustrations through the work he did for Dobbs Hats (1955, watercolor, private collection; [Fig. 1](#)). By 1956 Peak was creating illustrations for nearly all the major advertisers and periodicals. According to Kent Steine, Peak was known for establishing trends in the field of art and design. Upon his release of a new style of illustration, competing art directors would demand that their illustrators match Peak's style.⁴ Working into the 1990s, Peak established a wide and varied career. By the 1980s he had produced over forty-five magazine covers for *Time*, three of which are on permanent display at the Smithsonian: those representing Marlon Brando (22 January 1970), Anwar Sadat (9 June 1975; [Fig. 2](#)), and Mother Theresa (29 December 1975). He also created advertisements for products such as Coca Cola and 7-UP and was the creator of the archetypal cigarette figure, the Marlboro Man (*Marlboro Man*, 1975, watercolor, private collection; [Fig. 3](#)). Again, Rodrigue made special mention of Bob Peak's instruction while at the Art Center. Given that Peak's artistic endeavors were so intensely centered on marketing, media, and the current events of his day, it is logical to assume that, under such instruction, Rodrigue's own artistic production would have been similarly focused.

By 1966 photography had begun to diminish radically the need for commercial illustrators. While established figures such as Bob Peak were still in high demand, the market for budding illustrators such as Rodrigue had begun to dwindle. Searching for a way to utilize his commercial talents and driven by both love for the power of commercial media and respect for the art of such Pop figures as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, Rodrigue painted *Pop Go the Ads*, a painted collage of figures including Batman, Alfred E. Neuman, and the Campbell's Soup Girl (1966, Mixed Media, [Fig. 4](#)). However, once completed, this work reflected what was already being done and lacked the originality that Rodrigue knew he must develop.⁵

In 1967, tired of the rigors brought on by his intense course load at the Art Center and anxious to return to New Iberia, Louisiana, upon the death of his father, Rodrigue boarded a train for home. That same year, he joined the National Guard and was sent to Fort Dix in New Jersey for basic training. While at Fort Dix, Rodrigue spent his leave with friends living in New York City who were employed as commercial artists with various advertising agencies. This sojourn in New York provided for Rodrigue the chance to investigate further the world's center of mass media and advertising, as well as take in the works of Warhol and Lichtenstein that had sparked his interest in Pop art.⁶ He returned in 1968 to Louisiana and accepted the position of Art Director with the N. Jay Primueux advertising agency, a job he maintained until 1969. Although the market for painted illustration had become limited to some extent, Rodrigue's position as Art Director may have offered him the opportunity for financial success. He could still utilize his painterly vision as he met with clients and worked to bring the spirit of their advertising campaigns to life via whatever mediums they desired.⁷ For Rodrigue the opportunity to earn a good living as commercial artist in the 1960s must have presented an attractive financial, if not wholly artistic opportunity. Though jobs for commercial illustrators were gradually being phased out with the increased use of photography, those commercial artists who were able to find employment stood to earn considerable amounts of money. This fact is supported by the figures in advertising dollars spent by major corporations during the early to late 1960s. In 1960 General Motors, the country's leading national advertiser at the time, spent over \$66.3 million on advertising. By 1968 Proctor and Gamble Company was spending \$196.3 million, marking a 200 percent increase in highest dollars spent on advertising.⁸

The notion of artists working in the commercial art field is quite common. Such has been the case for artists dating as far back as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec with his many poster advertisements and book illustrations, as well as Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol. Warhol was a successful freelance illustrator and designer before crossing over to the area of fine art.⁹ By Warhol's own account, he entered into the realm of fine art via a friendship developed with Emile de Antonio, known for his cinematographic work on McCarthy and Nixon. During the 1950s de Antonio was an art agent who connected artists with a wide range of opportunities from art houses to department stores and large corporations. In fact, according to Warhol, it was de Antonio who found work for John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg as window display designers for Gene Moore at Tiffany's.¹⁰ Warhol himself designed an April 1961 installation for Gene Moore in the Bonwit Teller storefront with fashionably dressed mannequins strolling through a mock up of a gallery with Pop art paintings ([Fig. 5](#)). Warhol's exhibit allowed window shoppers to project themselves into the scene at hand, imagining themselves as well dressed women viewing paintings in an upscale gallery.¹¹ In the true spirit of commercial advertising, Warhol's design drew consumers in and allowed them to cross into the scene at hand.

It is important to note here that while artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg took on work as window display designers, both used the pseudonym Matson Jones to hide their identities. Warhol reveled in his status as a commercial artist, and according to de Antonio, Johns and Rauschenberg were put off by this fact. They were accepting jobs as commercial artists to survive, using false names to minimize their exposure in a commercial light. According to Johns and Rauschenberg, if one wanted to be considered a serious artist, one was not supposed to have anything to do with commercial art. Warhol, however, along with de Antonio, saw past such distinctions and worked actively to establish himself as a commercial artist.¹² Rodrigue's views on the balance between commercial and fine art are best understood as paralleling Warhol's. True, Rodrigue's formal career as a commercial artist was much shorter than Warhol's and garnered little critical acclaim in light of Warhol's achievements. Additionally, his early painterly focus was more in creating art as a fine artist in the traditional sense than was Warhol's. However, Rodrigue's appreciation for commercial art's place within the cultural realm aligns exactly with that of Warhol's and remains strong.¹³ However, although working with N. Jay Primeaux provided Rodrigue the opportunity to work within his

chosen field of commercial art, he soon grew tired of the drudgery and limits imposed upon him by clients. Additionally, it became clear to him that the promise of high financial gain and artistic freedom was not to be realized in his current position.

In 1969, filled with a desire to create works of art borne of his own imagination and perhaps desirous of a chance to increase his financial position, Rodrigue left his agency post and began painting full time.¹⁴ As Rodrigue saw it, the commercial art world, and the Pop art that grew from it, had lost their promise for new or original artistic expression. Rodrigue decided to create something different and it was his Louisiana heritage that would provide the perfect backdrop. The task at hand was to find his niche, to create a style and theme for his artwork that flowed from his life experiences. He wanted to paint from a local perspective: “I had an idea that set my work apart from that of any other artist. The only reason artists sell paintings for \$250,000 to \$300,000 is because those paintings are different.”¹⁵ According to Rodrigue, no one at that time had approached the theme of Acadiana from a local or regional perspective. It was his contention that, if he could create paintings full of nostalgic and narrative pertinence to his life, then he knew he could connect with and develop an audience.

Creating a Marketable Product: Using Nostalgia to Connect with Viewers

To gain full insight into Rodrigue’s artistic development and ability to connect with his audience, it is important to understand the narrative and visual vehicles he has used to navigate the course that has resulted in the Blue Dog’s phenomenal material success. True to his commercial art training, Rodrigue knew that the best way to sell his art was to meet personally with his buyers, befriend them, and sell himself. He contends to this day that the best successes of his artistic career have come by way of getting in front of potential buyers and letting them get to know the man behind the artwork – his life, his passions, and his personality. How does Rodrigue relate to his viewers? In true Acadian fashion, he tells them a story.

According to Barry Jean Ancelet, noted scholar of Louisiana French oral tradition and collector of Cajun and Creole folktales, there exists, in the southwest area of Louisiana in which Rodrigue grew up, a strong tradition of storytelling and relaying orally the folk tales of Acadiana.¹⁶ Many of these stories emanate from individuals with rural backgrounds, including those living in more urban areas such as Lafayette, Louisiana. Told in French, Creole, English or a mixture of each, such stories take the form of jokes, tall tales, and historical accounts, which feature the idiosyncrasies and behaviors of fishermen, ranchers, farmers, and hunters.

Often relayed in a fashion similar to the stories of Joel Chandler Harris, the bulk of Acadian and Creole narratives focus mainly on the antics of animals, magic, jokes, lies and tall tales, legendary renditions, and historical accounts. Due to their length, and the artistry with which they must be told, animal tales extending from a blend of African and French tradition, along with magical tales, are less frequently told today that they once were. However, such stories, along with their more popular tall tale and historical counterparts, may still be heard from local raconteurs.¹⁷ One may argue that George Rodrigue's early life experiences with regionally based storytelling, his narrative painting style, and his penchant for including in his works elements of humor, history, and magic, position him as a type of folklorist or native Acadian conversationalist in his own right.

When one views the progression of Rodrigue's artistic career, the scenes portrayed range from primordial bayou landscape and faded post card images of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Acadiana, to portraits of famous figures from Louisiana's past and near-present and serialized depictions of Blue Dog within various contemporary settings. If there is a linear progression within Rodrigue's work, as the general introduction to *The Art of George Rodrigue: 30 Year Retrospective* suggests, it is in the presentation methodology the artist has used throughout his career. Relying heavily upon the narrative and stylistic elements that situate his paintings in their proper context, this presentation methodology has been carefully designed to establish and maintain a connection between Rodrigue's art and his viewers.

Rodrigue's efforts to connect with his audience are represented both temporally and figuratively. His Acadian influenced paintings achieved their initial connective force with viewers through nostalgic references to a time when rural Cajun life had yet to be negatively impacted by the many changes brought on by the industrial revolution and ensuing oil industry development. The historically reflective quality of these distant yet approachable works, populated with figures from Rodrigue's childhood memories as well as figures from Louisiana's more popularized history, helps to establish an artist/viewer connection within very specific historic and cultural contexts. The key element found in Rodrigue's paintings from 1970 to the present is a forward progression of both time and figurative placement in relation to the viewer. By selecting works from each of Rodrigue's Cajun phases as well as from his Blue Dog phase, I will illustrate this progression. In order to address properly Rodrigue's progression from past to present, it will be necessary to align Rodrigue's shift in subject matter as it relates to each phase

discussed. The objective of this examination is to illustrate the cyclical, as opposed to linear, nature of Rodrigue's artistic development. In doing so, I argue that Blue Dog represents Rodrigue's return to his earlier commercial artistic training and influences.

Depictions of Acadiana – Past and Present

Rodrigue's main Cajun painting period lasted from 1969 through 1984, and his works from this period present a historical overview of Cajun life. It is interesting to note that Rodrigue's work during this sixteen-year period relays directly the remoteness of the Cajun culture and the varied traditions contained therein. Even more interesting is the fact that as the years during this period progressed, Rodrigue's focus shifted away from his Cajun past and began moving toward his immediate present. The works to be discussed in the following paragraphs of this chapter provide pictorial examples of this progression.

Rodrigue's painting entitled *Maurice's Gully in Abbeville* serves as an example of his early Cajun style (1970; oil on canvas, collection of Dr. and Mrs. Keller Griffith, Jr.; [Fig. 6](#)). In the storyline of Rodrigue's Cajun painting career, *Maurice's Gully* may best be viewed as the prologue. It is in such a darkened and desolate bayou enclosure that Rodrigue's Cajun ancestors first found themselves. Forced from their Nova Scotia homes by the British, they traveled southward in search of land remote and unwanted enough to ensure that never again would they be required to uproot. Rodrigue uses several visual elements to lull viewers deeply into the painting. The dark, murky bayou floor fills the foreground of the painting and extends back to or just past the base of the massive oak trees. As is characteristic of Rodrigue's bayou and Cajun paintings, oak trees dominate the composition and are cut off at the tops in order to relay a feeling of being closed in, removed, and protected from the outside world. It is important to note that the murky foreground and massive trunks are merged by Rodrigue's brush and palette in a manner that reflects nature's organically integrated design. The oaks' expansive presence extends this sense of organic integration upward as thick limbs support dark foliage draped with weighty, vertically aligned moss. Rodrigue's use of chiaroscuro here creates a multi-layered effect that remains a theme on through his more contemporary Blue Dog paintings. Collectively, the foreground, oak trees, and imposing canopy form a frame that is laid over the otherwise bright Louisiana skyline.

In this painting, viewers are presented with the southwest Louisiana landscape as it might have appeared when the first Cajuns arrived from Nova Scotia in the nineteenth century. Here we encounter Rodrigue's narrative sensibilities. The connective force encountered here is one of sympathy, and it begs viewers to imagine what the early Cajuns must have felt when faced with such a primitive and forbidding landscape. The actual narrative surrounding Rodrigue's work was widely disseminated only a few years after *Maurice's Gully* was painted. In 1977 *The Cajuns of George Rodrigue*, published by Oxmoor House, was selected by First Lady Rosalyn Carter as the official United States State Department gift for visiting foreign heads of state.¹⁸ In this book, Rodrigue takes great care to outline the full story of how eighteenth-century Cajuns, forced from their Nova Scotia homes by the British, slowly made their way to southwest Louisiana in search of a place to call home. Accompanying this tale are ninety-eight color reproductions of Rodrigue paintings depicting the regional lifestyle and folklore of southwest Louisiana. *Maurice's Gully* stands as a prime example of Rodrigue's attempts to communicate the remote yet protective spirit of the southwest Louisiana landscape.

It is important to convey some of Rodrigue's reasons for developing such a highly contrasting and at times abrupt means of artistic expression. In *The Cajuns of George Rodrigue*, Rodrigue explains that, compared to neighboring west Texas, and much of the country for that matter, southwestern Louisiana is "very closed, very dark, very black, and has a very small sky." Rodrigue's paintings relay the separation created by these characteristics both thematically and technically. Thematically, the ground, trees, moss, and sky introduced in his early Cajun works, and subsequently seen throughout his entire oeuvre, play together visually as if part of an organic, musical composition. Consequently, rhythm and tempo are extremely important aspects of Rodrigue's works. The trunks of the deeply rooted oak trees provide the basso continuo, the foundation of the musical piece, while branches and limbs expand to establish a melodic theme. Lightly playing over this theme is the moss, which provides various tempo fluctuations, ornamentations, modulations, and counter-melodic themes that lead patiently observant viewers ever so slowly forward toward a distant hope represented by limited patches of sky.¹⁹

It is Rodrigue's technical approach that allowed his artistic vision to unfold. Contrast, whether it is between light and dark, smooth and rough, or edge and main portion, plays the most essential role in these early works. The central figures in Rodrigue's early paintings are the oaks. As he progressed, ghostly figures from Acadia's past were introduced. Throughout this progression, the paintings begin with a loose, impressionistic rendering of foreground and skyline. The large oaks were painted in heavy oils applied by brush in thick strokes, and their trunks and limbs contrast sharply against a bright Cajun sky. Later, as people were introduced, they were painted white with sharp edges that contrast roughly against the dark oaks. It can be argued that the hard edges of each pictorial element represent the sudden and frequent transitions one finds within the Louisiana landscape. As these alternating elements work together, they provide visual references to sentiments that are true to the Cajun migration narrative – a sense of motion that leads forward from a difficult and painful past to the hope of a brighter future.

The next phase in Rodrigue's career is best illustrated by two paintings. The first is *Aioli Dinner* (1971, oil on canvas, private collection; [Fig. 7](#)), and the second is his award-winning work entitled *The Class of Marie Courregé* (1972, oil on canvas, collection of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Trahan; [Fig. 8](#)). *Aioli Dinner* represents one of Rodrigue's first peopled landscapes and stands as a reference to his cultural heritage. The figures contained within this painting include the artist's grandfather, Jean Courregé, as well as his uncle, Emile Courregé. These individuals sit with their friends outside of the Darby house in New Iberia enjoying the traditional aioli (garlic butter) dinner held each month from the turn of the century to about 1920. The main reason for these dinners was to provide time for the men of the area to sit and enjoy good food and drink. Traditionally, only the men would sit while the women, positioned at the rear of painting, cooked and young boys, flanking the table, served. Rodrigue succeeds with *Aioli Dinner* in his ability to relay the familial nature of the scene at hand. The artist continues his use of heavy oils and placement of the large oak as the central image. Using as models a combination of memory and early twentieth-century photographs of the Ancient Order of Creole Gourmets, Rodrigue sets the scene as if it were a faded postcard, causing the individuals pictured to appear as faded remembrances of a dying culture. Although thirty-four individual portraits are included in this work, these Gourmet Society members never actually sat together in their entirety, as depicted by Rodrigue.

Aioli Dinner represents a narrative continuation of the Cajun migration story. These people came to southwest Louisiana and were originally faced with the landscape seen in *Maurice's Gully*. After tireless effort, they forged a life for themselves out of the forbidding bayou territory. Not only did they forge a life for themselves, complete with the comforts of such a culinary gathering as is depicted here, but it is clear that they did so in a protective manner. Specifically, as a culture once driven out of their home in Nova Scotia and forced to seek refuge in a foreign and inhospitable land, it can be argued that what is seen here in *Aioli Dinner* represents the elder members of a culture working to ensure the preservation of Creole cooking. The very idea that these individuals felt that their traditions required maintenance suggests that even at the turn of the last century they were well aware of the changes to come vis-à-vis the encroachment of modernization.²⁰ Just like the oaks in *Maurice's Gully*, these people and their traditions are linked organically with the thickly rendered, moss-laden Acadian landscape in which they appear. Their skin tone, clothing, and even the table at which they sit all take on the same loose, heavy brushstrokes as their surroundings, creating a feeling of total, organic cohesion. The figures seated at the *Aioli Dinner* rest timelessly within a distant past invoking memories of Cajun cultural experiences that have dissipated. The aspect of Rodrigue's composition to be most appreciated here is the manner in which these gatherers appear in a single moment in time separated from our own. This idea of a captured moment in time is reiterated in Rodrigue's award winning work entitled *The Class of Marie Courregé*.

The Class of Marie Courregé deserves special mention because it helps to illustrate the international acclaim Rodrigue received for his Cajun paintings. In 1974 Rodrigue was the first American to be honored by the Société des Artistes Français. During this exhibition, *The Class of Marie Courregé* was selected as honorable mention among a field of 4,000 entries in Le Salon des Artistes held at the Grand Palais in Paris.²¹ Rodrigue painted *The Class* after a photograph of his Mother Marie's Our Lady of Mount Carmel class of 1920 in New Iberia, Louisiana, and each person's face is a unique representation. Sitting for their school photograph, the class embodies the elements of family, determination, and pride. These elements are symbolized in the geometric shape and formal appearance of the group – the isosceles trapezoidal configuration, the appearance as a photographically individualized yet cohesive group, and the American flag hanging proudly behind the young women. Rodrigue has again used his trademark oak as the predominant background image, creating a stark play of

light against dark with the class of women sitting directly in front the tree's trunk. The figures, seated naturally, appear as if posed for a class picture. It is clear that Rodrigue's goal in this work was to depict the group as they would have appeared in their class photograph – each figure possessing individual qualities and characteristics of their own. Rodrigue's choice of coloration for the young women seated in *The Class* represents a bit of a break from what was typical of Rodrigue during this time. According to Camilla Hunt Cole, Rodrigue's figures typically appear as “phantasms, perhaps mirages from the past making a visitation into the present.”²² Nevertheless, the still stoppage of time so evident in Rodrigue's work continues to play an essential role in *The Class* as we see the young women, filled with youthful promise, positioned collectively at the base of the firmly rooted bayou oak. Closed off from the outside world, time seems to move in slow motion until, as Cole explains, it finally stops and the past mingles with the present.²³

Edging closer to a more contemporary time frame in Rodrigue's career, we come to his portrait phase, where he presents a narrative based less in familial referent and more on prominent figures from Louisiana history. It is at this stage that we begin to see Rodrigue's masterful manipulation of public sentiment as well as his ability to capitalize on the success of famous Louisianans. During this phase Rodrigue memorialized such popular characters from Louisiana history as author Robert Penn Warren (*All the King's Men*, 1982, oil on canvas, private collection; [Fig. 9](#)), zydeco musician Clifton Chenier (*King of Zydeco*, 1985, oil on canvas, private collection; [Fig. 10](#)), and chef Paul Prudhomme (*Paul Prudhomme*, 1986, oil on canvas, private collection; [Fig. 11](#)). Present in each of these works are the same heavily laid brush strokes, bayou floors, and imposing oaks. However, whereas the “future hope” of Louisiana was previously represented by small patches of sky stealing glimpses from behind massive expanses of moss-laden foliage, one might argue, albeit a bit fantastically, that this hope is now represented in the personalities depicted. Each figure is positioned with characteristic elements that were key to their gaining popularity and acclaim during their lifetimes--Robert Penn Warren poised with his famed novel *All the King's Men*, Clifton Chenier with his monogrammed accordion, and Paul Prudhomme dressed in his trademark chef's uniform. By positioning his subjects in this manner, Rodrigue highlights their achievements and gives his viewers visual symbols by which to recognize their specific connection to Louisiana's culture. By actively moving closer to the current time and away from a distant and

allegorical past, Rodrigue creates a focal shift that presents viewers with a new temporal frame of reference. It is this temporal shift that lies at the heart of Rodrigue's artistic progression. No longer are we presented with Rodrigue's distant cultural and historical recollections where we as viewers processed the scenes set before us with often times vaguely focused filters of reference. Rather, what we experience through these portraits is a temporal shift bringing us closer to our own time.

Commercial Style Revisited: Cajun Tradition and Contemporary Celebration

The final phase of Rodrigue's artistic career to be discussed is that which is dominated by a single iconic image – Blue Dog. As referred to previously, the story of Blue Dog is encased in a myth Rodrigue developed surrounding its initial appearance. Like most myths, it is founded both in fact and creative fiction. The story begins with Tiffany, a spaniel-terrier mix who was the Rodrigue family pet for a period of twelve years (photograph with Rodrigue's son André, 1980, Lafayette, private collection; [Fig. 12](#)). In 1985 Rodrigue agreed to paint the illustrations for a book of Cajun ghost stories written by Chris Segura entitled *Bayou*. In one of the tales, Rodrigue used a photograph of Tiffany as the model for the *loup-garoup*, a Cajun werewolf or ghost dog believed to devour children who did not mind their parents.²⁴ Rodrigue positioned Tiffany within a darkened bayou setting underneath a pale Louisiana moon. Bathed in moonlight, Tiffany's white hair took on a blue hue and it was at that moment that Blue Dog first appeared (*This is Tiffany*, 1985, oil on canvas, private collection; [Fig. 13](#)).²⁵ By the time this work was painted, Rodrigue had been painting scenes from his Acadian past for nearly sixteen years. With each shift in his Cajun painting phase, Rodrigue moved further from his ancestral past and closer to his immediate present. Evolving over time as an iconic figure unto itself, Blue Dog allowed Rodrigue to take the next step in this direction and move toward a more contemporary style. Forged in Cajun mythology, but modeled after his own spaniel-terrier pet, this new image possessed enough figurative independence to allow Rodrigue's paintings to reflect his own personal present and future. Blue Dog and its story of separation, loss, and catharsis provided Rodrigue a narrative capable of carrying his newly revisited commercial inclinations forward in much the same way the Cajun narrative had done for his previous work. The creature's appearance in his paintings allowed Rodrigue to focus less on the personal characteristics and historical remembrances of his Cajun ancestors and fellow Louisianans and concentrate more on his own playful, jovial personality.

Initially presented as a feral creature from Cajun mythology, Blue Dog was inserted into settings that would otherwise be considered part of Rodrigue's traditional Cajun painting phase. The figure portrayed in *This is Tiffany* is nothing more than an introductory presentation of Blue Dog in its roughest form. Positioned squarely in front of the viewer, the animal's facial markings are minimal, save for the trademark white stripe and yellow eyes. Falling in line with the ghostly manner in which the people in Rodrigue's Cajun paintings are treated, the dog's body is painted with loose, visible brushstrokes using a palette of pale blue and white. Looming in the right, back portion of the painting is a variation of Rodrigue's signature oak with its massive limbs spreading across the corners and out of the frame on each side of the painting. Resting in the back left portion of the work is a large, two story antebellum mansion rendered in deep red. Interestingly, the steps in front of the house, and the tombstones lined diagonally in front of them are the brightest components of the painting. As focal elements, the increasing tonal intensity of the house, the steps, and the tombstones serve a purpose. By lining up these elements directly behind the blue animal resting in the center of the picture, the creature is forced into the viewer's gaze. This effect is important as it is with this first iteration of Blue Dog that we are presented with two departures Rodrigue makes from his traditional artistic methodology. First, rather than presenting Blue Dog as a mere static apparition or remembrance from his Acadian past, Rodrigue has given the animal a stare that actively seeks to be returned. Though not fully realized, we see at least the beginnings of a central figure that intentionally means to be seen. The second element that differs from Rodrigue's earlier artistic practices is the manner in which the Blue dog depicted in this painting is not organically connected to the bayou scene in which it appears. The dog's blue limbs and haunches contrast with the gleaming white tombstone and appear to have an option for movement that Rodrigue's previous bayou inhabitants did not possess. Together, these two deviations from previous practice signal Rodrigue's next steps toward uniting his past and present. As time progressed, these aspects became more pronounced. Rodrigue's depiction of Blue Dog became more frequent, increasingly more refined, and altogether detached from its bayou setting.

By 2000 Blue Dog and the settings in which it appeared had undergone dramatic figurative and spatial augmentations. These changes are evident when viewing *This is Tiffany* next to a work entitled *A Smarter Breed* (2000, acrylic on canvas, Xerox collection, [Fig. 14](#)). Smooth lines and a much more polished presentation replaced the loose, heavy brushstrokes, found in Rodrigue's earlier Blue Dog images.²⁶ As in his earlier works, Rodrigue continued his use of stark color contrast and figurative placement to project Blue Dog outward toward the viewer. In *A Smarter Breed*, the dog's position in front of the large blackboard forces the viewer to focus on the dog's electric blue fur, illuminated center white facial stripe, and brightly lit yellow eyes. Additionally, there exists in this work a geometric balance similar to that found in *This is Tiffany*, as we see the dog resting on a stool in the center of the picture flanked by a piece of chalk on its left and an eraser on its right. The geometric shape resulting from drawing connecting lines from the center point above Blue Dog's head down on either side towards these two flanking objects is an equilateral triangle. However, the most noticeable difference between the Blue Dog depicted in this work and the one shown in *This is Tiffany* is Rodrigue's treatment of the eyes and facial markings. Unlike the 1985 version of Blue Dog, where the eyes appear as vivid, yet small yellow orbs with tiny red pupils, this 2000 version, with its raised blue eyebrows and black markings surrounding its face, peers out with larger, more stylized orbs with black pupils. The eyes are again yellow in color, but increase in size, and the black outlines used to increase their prominence greatly enhances the effect and power of the animal's stare. Clearly, in this later version, we as viewers are confronted with a much more intense sense of curiosity and inquisitiveness than had previously been offered. This inquisitive quality bears further mention as it relates to a shift in the visual experience of Rodrigue's works.

Up until the advent of Blue Dog, the vast majority of Rodrigue's bayou landscapes, Cajun paintings, and commissioned portraits contained scenes and figures requiring viewers to turn their gaze inward and back to a time that existed before their own. Many of these works are reflective in composition and evoke remembrances of culturally specific moments or events that have specific meaning to the artist. For viewers, unless specifically involved or connected with Cajun culture, these works serve as signs or symbols of a life or culture outside of their own. In this continued historical or culturally reflective dialogue, the direction of interaction travels largely from the viewer into the picture with perhaps only ambient or incidental reflexive meaning reaching back out from the works themselves. The emergence and eventual

dominance of Blue Dog as Rodrigue's chosen subject transformed radically this pattern of viewer interaction. What were once passive images to be gazed upon have become active images gazing directly upon viewers, each demanding a measure of silent and at times even vocal response.

The Blue Dog image seen in *A Smarter Breed* represents one in a long line of increasingly more caricatured and independently depicted versions of its bayou predecessor. The figure shown in this painting is still connected with the Cajun mythology from which it was originally derived. But by unfettering the animal from its mythological origins, allowing it to appear in a non-bayou setting, and representing it in brighter hues and sharper color contrasts than had previously been used, Rodrigue instilled within his creation the very thematic mobility that he himself desired. As a result, Blue Dog allowed Rodrigue to move his commentary fully out of his near distant past and into his immediate present, which, according to the artist, was a freeing experience.²⁷ By creating an icon more closely related to present-day culture in both appearance and interactive presence than were his Cajun figures, Rodrigue opened up thematic avenues of contemporary reflection not available to him since his early commercial art experiences after graduating from the Art Center College of Design. It is here that we begin to see a merging of Rodrigue's love and appreciation for his Cajun heritage and his desire to excel within a commercially influenced artistic framework. However, it must be stated that although Rodrigue's Blue Dog paintings represent a return to his commercial sensibilities, they have not done so at the expense of the narrative elements found in his previous Cajun works. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Rodrigue's love for Pop art and his initial desire to work within this genre failed to manifest in any sort of solid artistic production, due to his late arrival to this style. In effect, Rodrigue's early efforts in the Pop art style may be characterized more as mimicry than innovation, simply because the influence he received from Warhol, Rauschenberg, and Lichtenstein outweighed his own original production or creativity. Rodrigue's creation of an original Acadian-influenced artistic style represented a desire to move into his own space and produce a niche where he could be both artistically and fiscally successful. The historical narrative Rodrigue wove into these early works set him apart from the likes of Warhol and Lichtenstein, whose works most frequently referenced events related directly to their immediate present. Additionally, this new Cajun painting style alluded to traditional influences such as Rousseau more than it did Rodrigue's earlier Pop-oriented heroes.

However, with Blue Dog, one sees a merging of Rodrigue's earlier Pop sensibilities with the narrative style he later developed. The dog itself represents an homage of sorts to both Warhol and Lichtenstein in that it may be viewed as a blend of iconic image similar to Warhol's soup can or Brillo box as well as an illustrative figure possessing emotive and more story-like sensibilities similar to Lichtenstein's Ben Day dot rendered John and Martha images.

It is clear that the story behind Blue Dog represents a continuation of Rodrigue's use of narrative to imbue his artwork with sentimental or emotional elements that mean something to his audience. The story Rodrigue used to add depth to his Acadian influenced paintings has been refitted and reissued to support his Blue Dog works. For his Cajun paintings Rodrigue used the tale of the Acadian migration and subsequent triumph over a harsh and forbidding southwest Louisiana landscape to generate a connection between his art and his viewers. In similar fashion, he has constructed a storyline surrounding his deceased dog Tiffany's journey in spirit form to find her way back to him. Spirituality is a key component of Rodrigue's Cajun heritage, as Acadian folktales like the one of *loup-garoup* abound. However, the narrative associated with Blue Dog diverges from the real world sentimentality fostered by the Cajun migration story. Rather than being based on historical fact and past occurrences, the narrative behind Blue Dog deals with a purely sentimental and cathartic story of love, loss, and a search to find one's place in the world. This narrative is a convention that works in almost formulaic fashion. By incorporating the same emotional triggers into his Blue Dog paintings that were so important in instilling the Cajun paintings with meaning, Rodrigue has created an emotional framework by which to market his canine creation. It is this fact that allows us to see the artist's commercial sensibilities meshing closely with his artistic capability.

In the next chapter, Rodrigue's commercial and market savvy approach to artistic creation will become more evident as I provide insight into his ability to navigate both traditional and non-traditional art marketing channels. Specifically, I will show how Rodrigue built upon his art practice using lessons he learned from early artistic influences like famed Louisiana architect A. Hays Town, observations gleaned from prominent New York art dealers and corporate marketing professionals like former U.S.-based Absolut Vodka distributor Michael Roux.

CHAPTER 2

PATRON DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING PRACTICES

In the previous chapter, I positioned Blue Dog as a product resulting from the synthesis of George Rodrigue's cultural and commercial sensibilities. I also addressed the manner by which Rodrigue, in an effort to instill within these new works a sense of resonance with his audience, reformatted the narratives behind his Acadian-influenced paintings and reissued them as the story of Blue Dog. Interestingly, for all the formulaic similarity and apparent thematic connection that exists between Rodrigue's early work featuring the Cajuns of his cultural past and the Blue Dog paintings that moved him into the present, the reception of each style of work has been quite different. Rodrigue's early expressionist paintings garnered considerable domestic and international acclaim, were selected by government entities as official State and National gifts abroad, and set sales records in one of the most well known art galleries in the United States.¹

This said, where Blue Dog is concerned, there appears in critical circles to be an overriding sense that these works and the media-savvy manner in which they are presented represent a forfeiture of any serious critical standing Rodrigue may have earned from his Acadian-influenced art. The idea of Rodrigue's status as a fine artist being jeopardized by his introduction and use of Blue Dog as a means to market his talents provides an interesting point for discussion. However, I argue that, as *Times-Picayune* art critic Douglas MacCash has stated, careful study of Rodrigue's Blue Dog creation as an art marketplace phenomenon is perhaps the best way by which to come to an understanding of the merit or effectiveness of his artistic efforts. In truth, it is the business side of Rodrigue's career that presents "as large a part of the contemporary aesthetic as oil, paint, [and] canvas."² Therefore, for the sake of argument, I will not in this chapter champion George Rodrigue's Blue Dog artwork as being exceptionally powerful, pertinent to the state of the world today, or emblematic of any sort of deeply rooted, severe, or ardent socio-economical agenda. Rather, I accept the position that Rodrigue's shift to using Blue Dog as his primary artistic subject marked a purposeful, market-influenced divergence from a style that caused writers for *Le Figaro* to call Rodrigue "a Louisiana Rousseau."³ In fact, it is my belief that for Rodrigue, the decision to focus on Blue Dog as a

central motif, one linked to, yet wholly separate in appearance and effect from, his early Cajun works, was deliberate. What is more, the emergence and eventual dominance of Blue Dog within the artist's oeuvre may in fact indicate a relative feeling of dissatisfaction within Rodrigue regarding the level of financial success and mass public acclaim received by his Acadian works. Rodrigue's own words seem to support this: "The reaction of people [to the Blue Dog works shown in his New Orleans gallery] was just so great that it got me all excited. ... I thought, I'm going to come back and I'm going to show them."⁴

Rodrigue continued with his Blue Dog efforts with conflicting regard to criticism that they were merely commercial illustrations on a grander scale.⁵ In answer to such remarks, he has offered the following response: "When I first began to paint Blue Dog this way, I simply didn't care whether my work was 'high' or 'low' art; my main concern was simply to keep Blue Dog vital and expressive and necessary to me."⁶ Alternatively, he has on more than one occasion released comments relaying displeasure with critical remarks pertaining to his Blue Dog works, stating in one instance that "to criticize [these images] you would have to sit down in the gallery and see how people react to it. They [his critics] haven't taken time to study it to find out what this is really about."⁷ At times, Rodrigue has been publicly sensitive to the idea that he keeps painting Blue Dog because of the money and freedom it gives him, stating: "I painted Cajuns for 20 years when nobody wanted them, so they can't accuse me of painting Blue Dog for the money."⁸ However, such comments are frequently overshadowed by his own acknowledgement that with Blue Dog he has in fact traded in the reserved environment of international salon exhibitions for a more openly commercial atmosphere and sense of accomplishment. Rodrigue understands fully that Blue Dog speaks to a much wider demographic than did his earlier Cajun works, and he openly appreciates the financial success he has subsequently achieved as a result. The following statements reflect such an understanding:

You know how Paul Prudhomme invented a whole lot of recipes and nobody cared. Until he invented blackened redfish and then everyone went wild. Well, the Blue Dog was my blackened redfish.⁹

I fed Tiffany for 12 years, and now she is feeding me. And feeding me very well, too.¹⁰

When dealing with the media, Rodrigue often speaks with an easy-going, lighthearted narrative contradiction and inconsistency that rivals that of Andy Warhol.¹¹ Inasmuch, he seems to struggle with a multiplicity that he himself has created. As is evidenced by his aforementioned comments, there are moments when he appears indifferent to criticisms labeling him as nothing more than a commercial artist bordering on something of a blend between savvy art dealer and mass merchandiser. In fact, he seems to be lending credence to such commentary with a condoning wink and nod. Conflictingly, his comments to the contrary, the maintenance of proper gallery spaces in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Carmel, California, and his strong desire for a major museum exhibition focusing on his career as a whole indicates that he does, to some degree, harbor a desire to regain some semblance of the high-art status he enjoyed during the years his work centered primarily on his Acadian heritage.¹²

George Rodrigue and the “Art Biz”

I believe that George Rodrigue, while operating legitimately as an artist currently working in such traditional mediums as oil or acrylic on linen and canvas, as well as in prints and silkscreens, and issuing the former as originals and the latter as part of limited editions of twenty-five to one hundred and twenty five, is, at the very least part businessman as well. While he genuinely enjoys the process of artistic creation, it would appear that to some extent he derives a great deal of pleasure from what Andy Warhol referred to as “business art,” which Warhol defined as “the step that comes after art.”¹³ It would be a mistake to say that Rodrigue’s only goal is to become wealthy through the production of his art, with little regard for how he is viewed by critics. If this were the case, he would have readily accepted the countless offers from companies wishing to use Blue Dog for ventures as varied as animated cartoons to sneaker campaigns.¹⁴ However, in contrast to the typical vision of a starving artist relying on the good graces or influence brought to bear by a known operator within the fine art world – say, a Leo Castelli – Rodrigue has throughout his career exercised a considerable degree of business and marketing energy in order to generate public interest in his art. In order to keep his Blue Dog artwork from being unceremoniously heaped onto the ever-increasing pile of artistic production known affectionately as “low kitsch,” Rodrigue takes measures that he feels will prevent his Blue Dog creations from being considered merely products of a commercial artist. The logic for such measures might be twofold. One, he values the reputation as a fine artist he developed

for himself with his previous Acadian-influenced work, and he strives to maintain as much of this status as he can in the face of criticism that he has moved away from fine art creation in favor of mass commercialization. Two, he realizes that if he were to let such criticisms go unchallenged and allow his Blue Dog works to settle within the category of illustration or lowly kitsch, the ability for these works to rise in value as legitimate art objects may be seriously limited.

Rodrigue's early experiences with the covert and often times contemptible art world, defined by Alice Goldfarb Marquis as the "art biz" in her book entitled *The Art Biz: The Covert World of Collectors, Dealers, Auction Houses, Museums, and Critics* (1991), kept him operating on the fringes of this establishment.¹⁵ At first unwilling and later unable to pay the exorbitant advertising costs typically associated with having one's artwork prominently featured in major art magazines, Rodrigue found his Acadian-influenced work largely excluded from such publications. However, due to the marketing and business development principles he learned early in his career, Rodrigue has been able to generate local, national, and international publicity for his work.¹⁶ I argue that during his early career Rodrigue seized upon an artistic style and subject matter – focusing on his Acadian heritage from a local or regional viewpoint – that required a strong dose of his personality, presence, and storytelling ability in order for it to sell. The eventual critical acclaim received by his Acadian paintings opened up avenues by which Rodrigue was initially able to sell greater numbers of his paintings, but they failed to afford him the ability to reach the heights of public recognition and financial success he managed with Blue Dog. The reason for this may have been that, despite being the focus of an article published by Camilla Hunt Cole published in *Art in America* in 1974, Rodrigue never truly made a splash in the critical magazines, journals, and show spaces comprising the "art biz." Even with his record setting-gallery sales in California and the recognition he received both nationally and abroad, Rodrigue's position as a painter of Cajun genre scenes remained relatively subdued. It is my contention that with Blue Dog, Rodrigue saw a chance to break into public consciousness in a way he had once hoped for during his days as a student at the Art Center in Pasadena. Rodrigue, having realized from his previous experiences with the art industry that he was simply not going to be given the publicity and notoriety necessary to achieve this goal, seized upon Blue Dog's media-friendly design and color scheme and generated a publicity machine of his own. Embarking upon a media campaign with a

groundswell that ranged from grass roots to a whole new level of commercially-focused international notoriety, Rodrigue combined his artistic talents with business savvy to generate the financial success he desired.

George Rodrigue's path to financial success with Blue Dog is one built upon the lessons he learned from his early commercial art education, the experience he gained promoting his early Cajun-focused primitive expressionist paintings, and his ability to seize and capitalize upon authentic and popularized elements of his own Cajun culture. I hope to provide in this chapter what Douglas MacCash has called for: a careful study of Rodrigue's Blue Dog creation as an art-marketplace phenomenon. I will highlight the development of Rodrigue's marketing practices to include his early experiences with business development and the increasing adeptness with which he marketed himself and his artwork. What I hope to show is that, though they have become more sophisticated, the practices Rodrigue used to promote and sell Blue Dog works are very similar to those used at the beginning of his artistic career. As previously mentioned, most of the publicity Rodrigue has received, both positive and negative, has come via self-generated means. To support my analysis I will include, where applicable, signs that the marketing and publicity efforts Rodrigue used to achieve incredible financial success with Blue Dog have in many ways mirrored those used by an art industry that has to date offered him little quarter. It is not my purpose to determine definitively whether Rodrigue should be regarded today in the same critical light in which he was held prior to embarking upon his Blue Dog period. In fact, the introduction to this chapter has attempted to show that the artist himself, despite a desire to retain as much of his fine art status as is possible, realizes that Blue Dog will most likely not be marveled at for its status as "high art." What will indeed be regarded as impressive for many years to come is the general impact Blue Dog has had in the art marketplace and the savvy with which it has been promoted.

Early Lessons in Business Development

It has been said that successful art dealers must possess charm, execute proper placement, and understand the finer points of pricing.¹⁷ Imagine these qualities wrapped collectively within a blanket of southern Acadian personality and it is at this point that one begins to understand George Rodrigue's patron development methodology. Rodrigue has always been very hands on when it comes to developing the market for his artwork. Although today his efforts are conspicuously veiled in the trappings of mass media and market culture, his

patron development and marketing practices continue to maintain a very personalized feel. Early in his career Rodrigue traveled around to various southwestern Louisiana shops and restaurants to talk with prospective buyers to see whether the establishments themselves would provide him with a place to hang his art. Along the way, he received advice from individuals well versed in presenting themselves to the public and adept at receiving compensation for their work that was on par with their respective expectations. One of the first and, according to Rodrigue, most influential pieces of advice he received was from the famed Louisiana architect A. Hays Town. According to Town, the best thing Rodrigue could do for himself as fledgling artist was to treat each of his paintings as if it were a valuable jewel.¹⁸ This counsel remains for Rodrigue one of the strongest lessons he has learned. In his practice as an artist, Rodrigue creates with a specific sense of value in mind and assigns to his finished products prices that correspond with his level of effort.

A second and perhaps equally beneficial lesson Rodrigue learned came via an art agent from Vienna, then operating in New Orleans, by the name of Kurt Schon. Rodrigue had, per Town's advice, raised the prices for his artwork from \$50 to approximately \$800. However, upon seeing Rodrigue's paintings, Schon exclaimed: "This is good. You should charge \$5,000 to \$10,000."¹⁹ Rodrigue eventually achieved these prices, but only after he learned the value of product placement, a subject broached by Sophy Burnham in her book entitled *The Art Crowd* (1973). Burnham explains that on a particular day, a New York dealer came to a dealer in a nearby town and explained that if a particular artist came to New York, "he would be the vogue next year."²⁰ From 1971 until 1975 a relationship existed between Rodrigue and Schon. The nature of this relationship is somewhat in question. Today, Rodrigue characterizes his relationship with Schon as a partnership rather than an artist/agent relationship. Specifically, rather than creating artwork for Schon to sell, Rodrigue states that he actually functioned as an associate of sorts, finding purchasers of art created by artists Schon represented. However, an article printed in *Discover* (1985) states that during the five years in which this relationship endured, Rodrigue painted eight to ten paintings per year. The article continues by stating that Schon had an active hand in securing his suggested \$5,000 to \$10,000 prices for Rodrigue's paintings in New York and abroad, and that in order to publicize properly Rodrigue's artwork, Schon ran full-color advertisements of Rodrigue's work in *Art in America* as well as *ArtNews*. Noting the cost for this sort of paid advertising to be exorbitant, Rodrigue remarked in the

Discover article that “he [Schon] could afford to,” indicating that at this stage in Rodrigue’s career, he was dependent upon the traditional artist/dealer relationship as well as all the contacts and publicity that result from such an arrangement.²¹

In any case, it was through Schon’s connections, most notably the French artist Jean-Pierre Surrier, that Rodrigue was provided the opportunity in the early 1970s to join a twenty-artist show that traveled throughout Europe and was intended to portray various facets of America. Additionally, Surrier provided Rodrigue the opportunity to enter his painting *The Class of Marie Courregé* (1972) in the Le Salon des Artistes held in 1974 at the Grand Palais in Paris, where it received honorable mention among a field of 4,000 entries. These exhibitions, along with awards such a 1974 gold medal from the International Academy of Literature, Arts, and Science in Rome, provided Rodrigue with the credibility he needed to stand on his own as an artist and get out from underneath the auspices of an agent representative. In 1975 Rodrigue’s relationship with Kurt Schon came to an end and the artist has been in the business of self-representation ever since. It goes without saying that the advice Rodrigue received from A. Hays Town, along with the experiential knowledge he gleaned from Schon and his contacts, taught Rodrigue a very important truth: price your works according to what you feel they are worth and support your prices with the credibility you have earned. Above all else, sell yourself.

According to Ed Cullen, by the 1980s Rodrigue had indeed begun to put these lessons into effect. Rather than taking his work to dealers and agents, he sold his paintings via direct artist-to-patron relationships. Targeting a buyer segment comprised largely of established business individuals with discriminating tastes and excess disposable income, Rodrigue became a polished marketing professional adept at brokering deals for his art over lunch with oil executives in New Orleans and over dinner with lawyers in Houston. In each case, he was always sure to deliver his artwork personally.²² Issues of artistic merit, intent, or philosophy aside, Rodrigue’s continuance of this type of artist/patron interaction – approachable and altogether unpretentious – stands today as the single most important reason behind his continued success with Blue Dog.

Marketing and Distribution Practices

According to Michael Carter, author of *Framing Art: Introducing Theory and the Visual Image* (1990), the key objective of any art distribution system is to ensure that objects of artistic production reach prospective buyers. The most common way in which this occurs is for art objects to enter into what Carter refers to as a “traffic system” comprised of intermediary institutions, typically art dealers, who provide access to structures like private art galleries that function as “traffic lanes” by which art objects reach the art marketplace.²³ Previous mention of George Rodrigue’s dealings with the art agent Kurt Schon has provided a basis for understanding how Rodrigue, now guiding himself through this “traffic system,” came to learn the highways and “buy-ways” inherent within the art marketplace. It is now important to delve more deeply into the ways Rodrigue has used this navigational knowledge. The origins of George Rodrigue’s current marketing and distribution expertise may be found in the promotional practices used for his Acadian paintings. In fact, for every marketing effort put into place for his Blue Dog works, there exists a precedent set by what was done during this early period. Spanning his entire career, Rodrigue has made use of multi-level market stratification, involvement in local, national and international events, book publication, and collaborative publicity to generate the interest in his artistic efforts required for financial success.

As early as 1969 Rodrigue realized the value of catering to all levels of his buying public. One way to do this was to issue prints, serigraphs, and posters of his original works priced at levels the casual admirer of his paintings could afford. Such alternative releases of his original work allowed Rodrigue’s art to be disseminated at rates much faster than what might have been achievable had he limited his production to oil paintings alone. This was the case whether prints were issued and sold in his gallery or whether posters were issued as part of regional benefits, with the proceeds stemming from their sale designated to benefit a specific group or charity. The support and publicity of local and national festivals or events represents a specific area of direct correlation between Rodrigue’s issuances of commissioned posters in his early career and instances where this has taken place with his Blue Dog works. In 1984 Rodrigue was commissioned to paint an image of Old St. Peter’s College to benefit a Cajun Fun Fest held by the Christian Brothers of Catholic High School in New Iberia, Louisiana. In 1985, Edging closer into the commercial realm, Rodrigue completed a promotional poster in his Cajun

style for Miller Light's Crawfish Festival in San Francisco, California. With Blue Dog, Rodrigue's promotional poster efforts are best and most readily exemplified by the series of New Orleans Jazz Festival posters he was invited to complete – with posters featuring Louis Armstrong (1995), Pete Fountain (1996), and Al Hirt (2000).

Rodrigue's approach towards a stratified market is by no means innovative. Throughout history, artists have always faced a challenge where the creation and distribution of their work is concerned. Either they remain content to produce a limited number of works each year and rely on them to sell at high enough prices to support their efforts, or they produce limited editions of their work in order to make it available to greater numbers of individuals. Typically, artists who rely too heavily upon this latter practice are disparaged by the art world at large because when works of art are released to the public in quantity, they are viewed as products of mass production rather than rare, and thus valuable, works of art. In looking at Rodrigue's use of limited-edition prints as a means of making his Blue Dog works available to more buyers without reducing their worth as individualized works of art, one might look to the methodology used by Old Masters such as Bruegel or Hogarth – for it has been commonplace since at least the sixteenth century to paint original works on commission for wealthy patrons and make available engravings based on such works so that they might be purchased and enjoyed by individuals of lesser means. In fact, one might argue that the very presence of a limited number of reproductions makes the originals after which they are modeled more valuable. It should be noted that less expensive items with Rodrigue's Blue Dog image have been released in the form of note cards. However, even this practice falls in line with typical gallery sales methodologies of the highest order. Ivan Karp, at his O.K. Harris Gallery on West Broadway in New York's SoHo, saw the value in offering something for sale to every strata of gallery visitor. According to Alice Marquis, casual admirers of Karp's artists' work could pick up something as wallet-friendly as a twenty-five cent postcard reproduction or invest a moderate sum by purchasing a \$500 lithograph.²⁴ However, Rodrigue has brought this notion of making his works both visible and affordable to a wide variety of art enthusiasts and collectors to a level that I call hyper-presentation. Whereas it is fashionable in many private galleries to hold specific works back for the purview of favored art collectors, Rodrigue has designed the layout of his commercial galleries, one in New Orleans and one in Carmel, so that they present a full stock of original Blue Dog paintings, silkscreens, prints, and ancillary products and are open and welcoming to

all who pass by.²⁵ Supporting a very approachable means of art presentation, the staff in each gallery is as eager to address questions from the browsing public as those with clear intent to purchase one of the painted originals valued up to and over \$150,000.

An especially conspicuous aspect of Rodrigue's method of image dissemination is his long-standing practice of showcasing his artistic talents via collaborative means. Early in his career, these collaborations took the form of books on Cajun folklore, cuisine, and Rodrigue's Acadian paintings. One of the first and most significant of these initial efforts is *The Cajuns of George Rodrigue* (1976), published by Oxmoor House and priced at \$24.95. Consisting of ninety-eight of Rodrigue's Acadian paintings with narrative text in both English and French, this text was selected to be an official State Department gift for visiting heads of state during the Carter administration. Following this effort, Rodrigue collaborated with Gus Weil, noted writer and native of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to write *A Couple of Local Boys* (1981), a selection of Rodrigue's Acadian paintings with corresponding poems by Weil. First released during a reception and autograph session at Rodrigue's Lafayette, Louisiana home, Weil and Rodrigue sat for approximately three and one-half hours signing roughly four hundred books – each selling for \$14.95.

In 1984, Rodrigue embarked upon a literary collaboration that had perhaps the biggest impact on his professional career. The book, titled *Bayou*, sold for \$24.95 and featured forty paintings by the artist, each one illustrating a ghost story written by author Chris Segura. All in all, thirty paintings were completed to match Segura's ghost stories and ten stories were written to match existing Rodrigue paintings. In order to publish and distribute the books, Ron Sanders, a Baton Rouge financial consultant and collector of Rodrigue prints, teamed with local business associates Duane Morgan and Sheila Jacobs to form Inkwell Publications. According to Sanders, Rodrigue expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that so many of his paintings were seen by a limited number of people once they were sold. *The Cajuns* was released primarily as a monograph of Rodrigue's Acadian-focused art – the audience for which was comprised primarily of those already familiar with or interested in the artist's work. However, *Bayou* represents Rodrigue's first book collaboration geared towards a mass audience. Presented as a companion to his artwork, the ghost stories in *Bayou* infused Rodrigue's art with narrative meaning intended to prompt further interest in his images. According to the artist, he “wanted people to ask questions about the paintings ... each one tells a story. You have to have both the

painting and the story to get the full meaning.”²⁶ Rodrigue’s mass-market sensibilities may have come to light initially with the issue of *Bayou*, but it is with the application of these early collaborative efforts to Blue Dog, with its wide mass media appeal, that we can see these sensibilities fully realized.

The idea that the international and domestic acclaim Rodrigue received as an Acadian folk painter served as a springboard by which he was able to operate at financially successful artistic levels has been discussed throughout this thesis. Blue Dog’s rise to international popularity occurred in much the same way. However, rather than being ushered in on the wings of awards and recognition received from established French and Italian cultural institutions, Rodrigue’s canine icon was led into global view via a characteristically media-centric advertising campaign developed by Michael Roux, then owner of the United States distribution rights to Absolut Vodka. In 1985 Roux collaborated with Andy Warhol to create a work centered on the Absolut Vodka brand. Warhol’s response was typically clever: he suggested making one of his trademark screen print-based paintings of the bottle, which the company could use in their advertisements. The painting eventually became an advertisement titled *Absolut Warhol*, launching the company’s art-themed advertising program and leading the way for future artists to create Absolut art. So successful was this project that Warhol suggested Absolut also commission his protégé, graffiti artist Keith Haring - and suddenly the Absolut Art campaign was born. In 1992, after watching Rodrigue paint a large Blue Dog painting at the St. Landry Heritage Festival in Opelousas, Louisiana, Roux asked his friend Chef Paul Prudhomme, also in attendance, if he would provide an introduction to the artist. Then working on the Absolut Statehood campaign, Roux decided that Rodrigue’s Blue Dog, coupled with his trademark bayou landscape and oak tree, would provide excellent representation for the *Absolut Louisiana* entry.²⁷ Subsequently, the sale of *Absolut Louisiana* prints to benefit AIDS research was advertised in *USA Today* and ultimately raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the cause. Due to the popularity of *Absolut Louisiana*, Roux commissioned Rodrigue to paint *Absolut Rodrigue* (1993), which ran as a three-year advertisement in magazines such as *ArtNews*, *Life*, and *Mirabella*. Rodrigue’s inclusion in the Absolut Artist campaign entered his Blue Dog art, even if only by association, into a virtual *Who’s Who* of contemporary art. Totalling over 500, the list of individuals who have created images interpreting the Absolut bottle includes such artists as Kenny Scharf, Edward Ruscha, Stephen Sprouse, Armand Arman,

and Romero Britto. Moreover, Rodrigue's inclusion in this campaign issued his Blue Dog works into public consciousness with a level of frequency and exposure that would have otherwise cost him thousands of dollars.

Rodrigue's involvement with Absolut Vodka marked the first of three significant media-related partnerships. The second is represented by a three-part release, one each in years 1996, 1998, and 1999 by Rodrigue of his Blue Dog image for use on the cover of Neiman Marcus' catalogue titled *The Book*. The third and most involved collaborative marketing effort in terms of artistic output was a \$200 million Xerox home use color ink jet campaign for which he was contractually obligated in 2000 to provide a total of 100 Blue Dog paintings over five years with painting rights reverting to him when the campaign is over. For paid sum of \$7.5 million, Rodrigue's painting entitled *A Breed Apart* (2000; acrylic on canvas, private collection) and other such works were scheduled to appear in twenty top U.S. newspapers and magazines, including *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Fortune*, *Forbes* and *Business Week*. Additionally, a Xerox television advertisement featuring Blue Dog paintings was aired on multiple occasions during the 2000 Olympics. Due to the struggling economy, the campaign never actually ran its full length; however, Rodrigue was paid in full. At first reluctant to work with the copier company for fear of over commercializing himself, Rodrigue acquiesced stating, "I'm an image maker, Xerox is an image maker ... Andy Warhol would have done it. I'm a pop artist, and this is the next logical step in my career."²⁸ Maintaining veto power over storyboards and realizing fully the value such an advertising campaign would provide in terms of overall publicity, Rodrigue's motive for working with Xerox was clear: "It's going to be a huge boost to the Blue Dog image."

The final element of Rodrigue's collaborative approach to marketing Blue Dog was his return to using books as a means of maximizing the breadth and frequency with which his artwork could be viewed. In 1994 he entered into a cooperative effort with author Lawrence Freundlich and Penguin USA, parent of Viking Studio Books, to issue a book titled *Blue Dog* designed to showcase the artist's Blue Dog works and relay the story behind the creature's creation. In her 1995 *New York Times* article entitled "Book Prices as Marketing Tool: High Cost Signals Upscale Product," Mary B.W. Tabor relays that when Viking Studio executives initially received the book proposal, their plan was to give the book a large initial printing, modest packaging, and a price of between \$17.95 and \$19.95.²⁹ However, upon giving the

proposal further consideration, Penguin USA Chief Executive Peter Mayer insisted that the book, if properly packaged, be released as an upscale “coffee table” book priced at \$45. Configured with high quality paper, attractive graphic design, full color reproductions, and a supporting text written by Freundlich relaying the cathartic tale of Blue Dog’s origin and subsequent journey to find its master, *Blue Dog* sold more than 2,000 copies as a special \$250 edition and more than 60,000 copies as a non-special edition \$45 hardcover book. After several reprints, more than 200,000 copies of *Blue Dog* have been sold – shattering sales records for art book publications of its type.

In 1996, following on the heels of this marketing success, Rodrigue used the same collaborative team of author Lawrence Freundlich and Penguin USA to issue *George Rodrigue: A Cajun Artist*, issued for \$75.00 as a 223-page full-color text comprised of 210 color plates of Rodrigue’s Cajun and Blue Dog works. The interesting thing about this text is that it represents both a reinvented issue of Rodrigue’s 1976 release *The Cajuns of George Rodrigue* and for the first time an in-depth retrospective of the artist’s work. The narrative that accompanies the text of *George Rodrigue: A Cajun Artist* is a blend of feel-good patter by John Bradshaw (he compares the blue dog to Faust, the Flying Dutchman, and the Wandering Jew), the artist’s first-person account concerning his artistic origins and influences, and a cursory review of the artist’s Cajun and Blue Dog works written by Freundlich. It is important to stress here that within the publishing industry, it is common to release art books in series of 5,000, and as I have stated, this was the original intent of the marketers at Penguin USA. It should be noted that Peter Mayer’s vision for Rodrigue’s Blue Dog book and its subsequent sales success were not matched by *George Rodrigue: A Cajun Artist*, primarily because Mayer had, by the time of this book’s publication, moved on to form Overlook Press. Despite *Blue Dog*’s establishment of a sales record, the remaining executives at Penguin USA released *George Rodrigue: A Cajun Artist* in an issue of again, only 5,000. With such a limited release, the book’s \$75 price tag, and a somewhat lackluster Penguin USA public relations campaign, Rodrigue decided to leave Penguin USA. After meeting with several eager publishing houses, Rodrigue decided to sign with Stewart, Tabori, and Chang.³⁰

In a simulated and somewhat reprised collaborative effort between Rodrigue, writer David McAninch, and newly signed publisher, Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, Rodrigue issued *Blue Dog Man* (1999) for the price of \$50.00, *Blue Dog Christmas* (2000) issued for \$14.95,

and *Blue Dog Love* (2001) released for \$35.00. As he did with previous Blue Dog books, Rodrigue ushered these texts into public awareness via a series of book tours and signing events. A central theme delivered by the artist during such events is that his Blue Dog books, as a collective, represent an accidental outgrowth of his original paintings, silk screens, and prints, and were originally intended for collectors of his artwork. This explanation, while plausible, does little to explain why the initial publication figures for *Blue Dog Christmas* were so astonishing. Released in October 2000 in an issue of 50,000 copies, this book sold out three weeks prior to Christmas. By the time the last of these initial copies had sold, *Blue Dog Christmas* had reached number seventeen on the New York Times bestseller list. Furthermore, this text represented the first time a book published by Stewart, Tabori, and Chang had ever achieved a position on this list. In similar fashion, *Blue Dog Love* dwarfed those for similar efforts. According to an article published in the December 4, 2001 issue of *The Los Angeles Times*, *Blue Dog Love* was initially issued in a run of 100,000 copies, whereas the usual first printing for such art books is about 5,000 copies.³¹

Decreased Dependence on Traditional Marketing Channels

Throughout the history of art, a lack of institutional and critical support has often signified failure. However, with the advent of Pop art, and more specifically, the legacy it has left behind, artists today have become decreasingly dependent on traditional art-marketing channels. At the very least, they have become increasingly more adept at the entrepreneurial art of self-promotion. Take for example, the comments artist Robert Longo offered when asked to describe his business acumen: “I’m a good salesman, and I transfer my enthusiasm about my work to other people. I convince them that I’m going to be an artist forever and an important one.”³² Artists are not the only individuals who recognize the importance of managing the business aspects of their craft. According to Christin J. Mamiya, many successful dealers today are fully aware that their artists expect near immediate results. In fact, Meg Cox, in her article entitled “Feeling Victimized? Then Strike Back: Become an Artist,” relays that famed “business artist” Jeff Koons ended his professional relationship with dealer Mary Boone after only eight months because, to his estimation, she had failed within that time to make him famous.³³ Given George Rodrigue’s need for total control over how his art is created, presented, and sold, it is not surprising that, after learning to navigate the sometimes troubled waters of the “art biz” from individuals such as A. Hays Town, art agent Kurt Schon, and fellow

artists such as Jean Paul Surrier, his chosen path was to use this knowledge within a true entrepreneurial context.

Today, it is estimated that Rodrigue earns approximately \$10 million per year from his collective Blue Dog efforts. Driven primarily by his own open, approachable marketing practices, his galleries in New Orleans and Carmel continue to thrive. With this success, Rodrigue has achieved a level of financial freedom enjoyed by very few artists operating outside of the traditional dealer/gallery system. Conscious of how closely his Blue Dog image aligns itself with mass media and commercial design, Rodrigue takes great pains to limit the commercial use of this image. However, the fact remains that even if the impending release in Fall 2003 of a Harry N. Abrams, Inc. book providing a somewhat sentimental yet factual overview of Rodrigue's body of work to date sparks increased interest among major museums who may want to exhibit his art, Rodrigue's Blue Dog paintings will forever be seen as riding a thin line between fine art and commercial production. The challenge faced by artists such as Rodrigue, who become known for creating widely popular and high-priced art based as much on the elements of commercial design as on general concepts of artistic creation, will forever be to retain their status as fine artists despite a general lack of positive authored criticism.

CONCLUSION

In the opening paragraphs of *The Crisis of Criticism*, Maurice Berger relays the notion that criticism, like the arts, is becoming increasingly more decentralized. In effect, the increasing significance of community-based cultures, dissolution of the separation between high and low culture, concentration on specific markets, and a progressively more diverse cultural audience have significantly lessened the need for what Berger calls “dominant, centralized critical voices.”¹ This idea of the decreased role of art critics, coupled with the fact that the legacy of Pop, as it is reflected by the art boom of the 80s and 90s on through the present, has led to the development of a cultural establishment that is driven by mass publicity and evaluated not by a chosen few but by the opinions and purchases of many. It is within such a cultural environment that an artist like George Rodrigue continues to thrive.

What I have attempted to show in the preceding chapters is the manner by which Rodrigue has combined cyclical artistic and stylistic development with a continuing understanding and mastery of business development and marketing practices. It is interesting that in 1969, as he sought to find a niche market in which to grow and develop as an artist, Rodrigue, who had studied so hard to master the art of commercial illustration and design, turned instead to a primitive surrealist style of artistic creation – one characterized by heavy oils, broad brushstrokes, adept use of chiaroscuro, and a regionalized and almost folkloric painterly perspective – rather than continue in a more mainstream, commercial, or at the very least, contemporary mode. It is also interesting that after success with this traditional style brought him praise and garnered him recognition as Louisiana’s Rousseau, he sought to move progressively back towards a style more indicative of his commercial training. However, what I have tried to show is that this “retreat” to what may be perceived as a more traditional style of artistic creation was in fact all part of a continuous experiment in both design and marketing in which Blue Dog represents a climactic result.

Regarding the design aspect of this endeavor, in each of Rodrigue’s Cajun paintings the bayou oak represents a single, repetitive, iconic motif. This image changes little, while its surroundings change with great frequency. Rodrigue clearly continued this practice with Blue Dog. Though this image is today rendered with much more refinement and individual

characterization than was its mythical bayou predecessor, each iteration of the icon is, like Rodrigue's bayou oaks, similar in appearance while its surroundings change with great variance. What one must realize when looking at Rodrigue's early Cajun paintings is that, as a native of Acadiana, he was as much an innovator with these paintings as he later became with his Blue Dog works. By choosing to render visually a historical account of how the Cajuns developed for themselves a collective existence in Louisiana after being forced by the British from Nova Scotia, Rodrigue made what was effectively his very first marketing decision. Up until 1969 the visual history and culture of Cajun Louisiana had been represented primarily by artists who were, for lack of a better term, cultural outsiders. Realizing this, Rodrigue depicted his homeland from a regional perspective, using his native status as marketplace differentiator. The domestic and international accolades and sales records garnered from his Cajun painting efforts helped establish Rodrigue as a legitimate American artist, and it is my contention that his release of Blue Dog has done nothing to diminish this status. What it has done is to shift the light in which Rodrigue's artistic efforts are currently held from primitive surrealist or even "folk artist" to neo-Pop artist with a clear affinity for marketing and commercial design – aspects of Rodrigue's skill that have in truth been artfully executed throughout his entire career. It is my hope that this thesis has shown that the business and artistic development practices Rodrigue uses today have changed very little from those that he employed during his early artistic practice. While critical acclaim for Blue Dog has been slow to come, it is my contention that Rodrigue, through expert execution of marketing and promotional principles used by the art industry, continues to grow, create, and thrive as an artist. Moreover, to his credit, he has distilled these promotional elements down to their essence and has infused them into his own persona – one that is centered upon a sense of openness and approachability that will continue to serve him well into the future.

APPENDIX A

FIGURES



Fig. 1. Bob Peak, Dobbs Hats illustration, 1955. Watercolor, Private Collection.

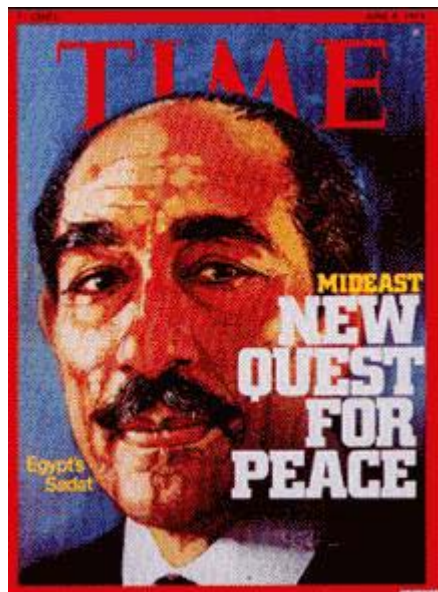


Fig. 2. Bob Peak, Cover of *Time* Magazine featuring Anwar Sadat, June 9, 1975. Smithsonian Collection.



Fig. 3. Bob Peak, *Marlboro Man*, Ca. 1975. Watercolor, Private Collection.



Fig. 4. George Rodrigue, *Pop Go the Ads*, 1966. Mixed mediums, 36 x 48 inches, Private Collection.



Fig. 5. Andy Warhol, Installation of Pop art canvases in the storefront window of Bonwit Teller. New York, April 1961.



Fig. 6 George Rodrigue, Maurice's Gully in Abbeville, 1970. Oil on Canvas, 30 x 36 inches, Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Keller Griffith, Jr.



Fig. 7. George Rodrigue, *Aioli Dinner*, 1971. Oil on Canvas, 32 x 48 inches, Private collection.



Fig. 8. George Rodrigue, *The Class of Marie Courregé*, 1972. Oil on Canvas, 36 x 24 inches, Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Trahan.



Fig. 9. George Rodrigue, *All the King's Men* (Robert Penn Warren), 1982. Oil on Canvas, 40 x 30 inches, Private Collection.



Fig. 10. George Rodrigue, *King of Zydeco*, 1985. Oil on Canvas, 24 x 18 inches, Private Collection.



Fig. 11. George Rodrigue, *Paul Prudhomme*, 1986. Oil on Canvas, 40 x 30 inches, Private Collection.



Fig. 12. Rodrigue's Son André and Tiffany in Rodrigue's Lafayette, Louisiana Home, 1980. Photograph. Private Collection.



Fig. 13. George Rodrigue, *This is Tiffany*, 1984. Oil on Canvas, 40 x 30 inches, Private Collection.



Fig. 14. George Rodrigue, *A Smarter Breed*, 2000. Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 36, Xerox Collection.

APPENDIX B

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FORM

Dear George:

As you know, I am completing a thesis at Florida State University concerning your work, and I would like your permission to reprint images of your paintings.

Thesis images include:

1. *Pop Go the Ads* (1966)
2. *Maurice's Gully in Abbeville* (1970)
3. *Aioli Dinner* (1971)
4. *The Class of Marie Courregé* (1972)
5. *All the King's Men* (1982)
6. *King of Zydeco* (1985)
7. *Paul Prudhomme* (1986)
8. *Photograph of André Rodrigue and Tiffany* (1980)
9. *This is Tiffany* (1985)
10. *A Smarter Breed* (2000)

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my thesis, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you.

Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-listed images. If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



Kevin M. Sandridge

**PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE
USE REQUESTED ABOVE:**


George Rodrigue

Date: Nov 3, 2003

END NOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ The story of Papa Jack tells of the fall of an Acadian drinking champion. In a contest with a Texas opponent, Papa Jack successfully defended his title but lost his life.

² George Rodrigue, press release, “The Blue Dog Series – Paintings by George Rodrigue,” 1990. This press release, issued by Rodrigue from his gallery on 721 Royal Street gallery in New Orleans, provides an account of how Blue Dog came into existence.

³ Christin J. Mamiya, *Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 5.

⁴ Judith H. Dobrzynski, “The Arts Rise, but Critics' Status Wanes,” *Houston Chronicle* 23 June 1998: A1.

CHAPTER 1: RODRIGUE’S ARTISTIC CYCLE: CAJUN HERITAGE AND COMMERCIAL SENSIBILITY

¹ Division of Archives, Records Management, and History, *The Art of George Rodrigue: 30 Year Retrospective* (Louisiana: Department of State, 2001) 10-21.

² Christin J. Mamiya, *Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992) 14.

³ Lawrence S. Freundlich and John Bradshaw, *George Rodrigue: A Cajun Artist* (New York: Penguin Studio, 1997) 30-31.

⁴ Kent Steine, “Infinite Horizons,” *Step-by-Step Graphics*. July-August 2001: 101.

⁵ George Rodrigue, interview with the author, 6 June 2002.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Mamiya, 18.

⁹ John A. Walker, *Art in the Age of Mass Media* (London: Pluto, 1994) 61.

¹⁰ Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s*. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990) 3-4.

¹¹ Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 9-10. According to Whiting, Gene Moore was the display director for Bonwit Teller from 1942 through 1962 and had been designing windows for Tiffany's (using Robert Rauschenberg among others as collaborators) since 1955. As early as 1930, Bonwit Teller's storefront windows had gained a reputation for their theatrical displays. It was Moore's burgeoning and competitive reputation as a "purveyor of principles of modern art" in window design that earned his windows status as modern art.

¹² Warhol and Hackett, 11-12. During a dinner meeting between Warhol and de Antonio, Warhol asked why Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg always gave him the cold shoulder. De Antonio's answer involved two key points. First, Johns and Rauschenberg believed Warhol's habit of collecting artists' work to be uncharacteristic of an artist. It was their feeling that "artists don't collect other artists' work." Second, whereas Warhol enjoyed his status as a commercial artist, Johns and Rauschenberg sought work as commercial artists only to survive and used a pseudonym to limit recognition as anything other than fine artists.

¹³ Rodrigue, George, interview with the author, 6 June 2002.

¹⁴ During a 6 June 2002 interview with Rodrigue, he explained that he worked as an Art Director at the Lafayette, Louisiana-based N. Jay Primeaux advertising agency for one year. It should be noted that in her *Daily Reveille* article of 3 May 1991, Karen Freyou reports that Rodrigue worked at the agency as an artist for only two months. Rodrigue stated in his interview with Karen Freyou that he left the N. Jay Primeaux primarily because drawing cars for newspapers was not what he wanted to do, and he did not want to be caught earning a living doing something he did not enjoy.

¹⁵ "George Rodrigue: An Idea and an Agent" *Discover the Arts and Humanities of Greater Baton Rouge*, February-March (1985): 15. Additionally, in *The Cajuns of George Rodrigue*, by George Rodrigue (Birmingham: Oxmoor House, 1976) ix, the artist explains that while he was in New York around 1967-68, he realized that European painters had tried to paint Louisiana, but their works failed to capture the basic traits of South Louisiana: witchcraft, darkness, bayous, and haunting feelings.

¹⁶ Freundlich and Bradshaw, 26-27. Rodrigue explains that as a child growing up in New Iberia, he would go with his family to his grandmother's house each night. A key remembrance from these visits were the stories told of life in and around that part of Louisiana as his older relatives and their predecessors experienced it more than fifty to one hundred years prior.

¹⁷ Barry Jean Ancelet, *Cajun and Creole Folktales: The French Oral Tradition of South Louisiana* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), xxix – 1.

¹⁸ June Smith, “Rosalynn Picks Artist Book on Cajun Culture.” *Beaumont Sunday Enterprise Journal* 31 July 1977: 5-C.

¹⁹ George Rodrigue, x.

²⁰ Mathé Allain, “Twentieth-Century Acadians,” in *The Cajuns: Essays on Their History and Culture*, ed. Glenn R. Conrad. (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1983), 129-41. In this essay, Mathé Allain describes the manner in which pre-1950s rural Acadian life began a series of rapid social and economic transformations brought on by industrialization. Named in this essay as a major force for change is the oil boom of the 1950s. With the oil boom, Acadians began to earn cash money, which had previously been scarce in their society, with which they proceeded to take advantage of industrial age conveniences such as electricity, clothes washers/dryers, travel, and increased access to non-regional food products.

²¹ In 1974 Rodrigue was also awarded the Tommaso Campanella Gold Medal from the *board of directors* of the Accademia Internazionale di Lettere – Arti – Scienze in Rome, Italy in recognition of merits achieved in the field of art. This Italian organization selected Rodrigue after examining his artistic and cultural activities both in the United States and abroad. Upon being accepted into the Tommaso Campanella as a *Membro Honoris Causa*, Rodrigue was registered in the golden album of the Accademia Internazionale di Lettere – Arti – Scienze.

²² Camilla Hunt Cole, “George Rodrigue and Time in Slow Motion,” *Art in America* (March – April 1974): 28.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Patricia K. Rickels, “The Folklore of the Acadians,” in *The Cajuns: Essays on Their History and Culture*, ed. Glenn R. Conrad. (Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, 1983), 249. This essay provides a developmental overview of the study of Acadian folklore from the first studies performed by Alcée Fortier in the 1880s to Richard M. Dorson’s mention in 1971 of the merits of studying Louisiana Cajun folklore. See Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore and the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 28.

In reference to the Cajun myth of the Cajun werewolf creature *loup-garoup* (pronounced Roo-Garou), Rickels explains that mostly children believe tales involving this creature. Rickels explains that adults find such stories useful when attempting to frighten children into obedience by threats of this creature.

²⁵ Clancy DuBos, “Dog Days,” *Gambit* 1991: 24.

²⁶ In her 3 May 1991 *Daily Reveille* article entitled “Rodrigue: The Past is his present,” Karen Freyou reports that in 1984, Rodrigue began having problems breathing caused by prolonged exposure to oil and varnish fumes. He was diagnosed with clinical hepatitis and nearly died. The hepatitis nearly took two years from Rodrigue’s career, but once recovered, the artist ceased using oil and varnish opting instead for acrylics.

²⁷ In an 18 February 1993 article in *Coast Weekly*,²⁸ written by Chuck Thurman, Rodrigue explains while talking of the freedom gained when he began painting Blue Dog, “I had painted Cajuns for years and they were stiff. I’m free in time and space. I do the dog first and then whatever happens. I don’t know until it happens. I can use any design or color. Before, I was stuck in a landscape with a tree and whatever.”

CHAPTER 2: PATRON DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING PRACTICES

¹ “Rodrigue Sales Set L.A. Record,” *Advertiser* 4 December 1988. At the printing of this article, Lee Sonnier, director of the Upstairs Gallery location in Beverly Hills, said that the organization’s nine galleries sold roughly forty George Rodrigue oil paintings and drawings for a collective amount totaling over \$300,000 during two shows in April and October. Said Sonnier: “It was the largest turnout for an artist in the twenty-three year history of our company.” Sonnier continued by saying that Rodrigue’s showing in all nine of the gallery’s locations broke the record for the number of locations shown in by a single artist, noting that Leroy Neiman came in at second with five. “Our sales of Rodrigue paintings in 1988 set a record for annual sales by one artist ... that’s more than Picasso, Chagall, or Neiman have done here in one year.”

² Douglas MacCash, “Blue Dog, Blue Dog, and More Blue Dog,” *The Times-Picayune* 10 September 1999: L17.

³ Clancy DuBos, “A Louisiana Rousseau,” *The Times-Picayune* 23 November 1980: A6. Here, George Rodrigue states that decision to focus on Blue Dog as a central motif, one linked, yet wholly separate in appearance and effect from his early Cajun works, was deliberate.

⁴ Karen Freyou, “Rodrigue: The Past is His Present,” *The Daily Reveille* 3 May 1991.

⁵ Betti Jane Levine, “A Blue Dog Is This Man’s Best Friend,” *The Los Angeles Times* 4 December, 2001: E1. Levine addresses Rodrigue’s sentiments toward critics that have either ignored or belittled his Blue Dog works despite their enormous popularity and earnings of over \$150,000 a piece. In answer to those who have accused him of stenciling the same dog over and over again or copying it and simply changing the backgrounds, Rodrigue replied, “Who cares ... when so many people accept and like something, you just have to wait for the critics to catch up.”

⁶ MacCash, L17.

⁷ Chuck Thurman, “George Rodrigue,” *Coast Weekly* 18 February 1993.

⁸ Beverly Beyette, “Blue Dog Sniffs Out a Golden Goose,” *The Los Angeles Times* 7 October 1994: 1.

⁹ Dalt Wonk, “A Howling Success,” *Louisiana Life* February/March 1992: 50-53.

¹⁰ Wes Smith, “Bloomington Collars a Coveted Art Show,” *The Chicago Tribune* 16 April 1993, Beyond the Burbs Section: 1.

¹¹ Mamiya, 138-139. Warhol’s countless unreliable statements fill the pages of many interviews attempting to achieve heightened understanding about the meaning behind his art. Mamiya suggests that Warhol’s intention was to disseminate information about his art but, first and foremost, deliver stories designed to increase overall interest in it.

¹² Wendy Rodrigue, “Re: Thanks and Questions Re: Abrams Book and Major Museums,” E-mail to Kevin Sandridge. 21 March 2003. In this email, Wendy Rodrigue, wife of George Rodrigue, relays that it is her and George’s hope that a current book on George’s career as an artist being written by author Ginger Danto to be published by Abrams will provide an impetus for major museums to request Blue Dog works as part of focused exhibitions.

¹³ Andy Warhol, *From A to B and Back Again: The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (London: Pan Books, 1976) 88. Warhol followed this statement by relaying that he began his career as a commercial artist and planned to finish as a business artist. According to Warhol, “Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. . . . Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.”

¹⁴ Beyette, 1. Additionally, in “Rodrigue: The Past Is His Present,” Karen Freyou explains that Rodrigue was once offered \$25 million for the rights to use Blue Dog for a children’s cartoon. He reportedly declined stating that he did not want to risk overexposure of the icon causing it to phase out too soon, as is sometimes the case with cartoons.

¹⁵ Alice Goldfarb Marquis, “Dealers: Selling the Sublime,” *The Art Biz: The Covert World of Collectors, Dealers, Auction Houses, Museums, and Critics* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1991) 222. Marquis relays an account of the art historian Leo Steinberg wanting the publisher of the Italian art magazine *Metro* to pay him \$1,000 to write an article on Jasper Johns. When the publisher offered Steinberg only \$200 of his requested fee, Johns’ dealer Leo Castelli offered Steinberg the remaining balance of \$800, p. 222. Likewise, Sophy Burnham, in her book entitled *The Art Crowd* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1973.) 41, explains the practice of dealers buying advertisements in art magazines in an attempt to keep their artists in the public eye.

¹⁶ George Rodrigue, personal interview, 6 June 2002. During this conversation, Rodrigue referenced meetings he had with art magazines showing interest in advertising or writing articles on his Acadian painting. When it became apparent that the key way for such publications to focus on key works was for Rodrigue to purchase advertising space, he opted to move ahead with his own marketing and publicity practices.

¹⁷ Burnham, 39.

¹⁸ Wendy Rodrigue, interview with the author, 5 April 2003.

¹⁹ Ed Cullen, "Rodrigue's Success Slowly Making its Way Home," *Sunday Advocate* 22 November 1981: I-3.

²⁰ Burnham, 41.

²¹ Wendy Rodrigue, "Re: A Few Questions for You and George," E-mail to the author. 31 October 2002. In this e-mail, Wendy explains that Kurt Schon did not sell paintings for George. Rather, George sold works delivered to him on behalf of Schon. The article "George Rodrigue: An Idea and Agent," *Discover: The Arts and Humanities of Greater Baton Rouge* 7:1. (February – March 1985) indicates that the relationship between Schon and Rodrigue was established in the traditional artist/dealer manner.

²² Cullen, I-3.

²³ Michael Carter, *Framing Art: Introducing Theory and the Visual Image* (Sydney: Hales and Iremonger, 1990) 101-102.

²⁴ Marquis, 215.

²⁵ Up until the mid to late 1990s, Rodrigue operated two non-U.S. Blue Dog galleries: The Blue Dog Gallery in Yokomaha, Japan and Galerie Blue Dog GmbH in Munich, Germany. It is suspected that these galleries were closed primarily to lessen Rodrigue's administrative and overhead outlay.

²⁶ Smiley Anders, "Brooding Black Oaks and Ghostly Legends," *Baton Rouge Advocate*, 1984.

²⁷ Christian Wagnborg, *Absolut Story*. PDF document. 7 April 1999. <http://www.vinsprit.se/v_varumarken/the_story.pdf>, 21. The Absolut Vodka Statehood campaign represents one of the most innovative and popular mass-market events in the history of U.S. corporate underwriting of the arts. As part of this \$3.5 million effort to encourage a revival of plurality and variety in American regional painting, selected artists' works ran every two weeks in USA Today during 1992 and 1993. The campaign presented one work from each of the 50 American states and the District of Columbia, each done by a local artist from that state. As was done for each of the works included in this campaign, a limited edition of 300 lithographs of Rodrigue's painting, signed and numbered by the artist, were sold to the public for \$300 each. All revenues from these sales went to the national Design Industries Foundation for AIDS (DIFFA).

²⁸ "Blue Dog Picture of Pickiness about Being a Pitchman," *Associated Press* 14 July 2001.

²⁹ Mary B.W. Tabor, "Book Prices as Marketing Tool: High Cost Signals Upscale Product," *San Francisco Chronicle* 5 September 1995: E4.

³⁰ During an 11 April 2003 conversation with Wendy Rodrigue, she relayed to me that she and George selected Steward, Tabori, and Chang (STC) because of their willingness to promote his next book *Blue Dog Man* (1999) as their major publication effort. It is important to note that Rodrigue's relationship with STC has provided him with the opportunity to connect with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., noted publisher of artist books. The connection between STC and Abrams exists in that they are both owned by La Martinière Groupe, one of France's leading publishers of art and illustrated books, headed and owned by the experienced French publisher Hervé de La Martinière.

³¹ Betti Jane Levine, "A Blue Dog Is This Man's Best Friend," *The Los Angeles Times* 4 December, 2001: E1.

³² Kim Foltz and Magie Malone, "Golden Paintbrushes: Artists Are Developing a Fine Eye for the Bottom Line," *Newsweek* 15 October 1984, 82.

³³ Meg Cox, "Feeling Victimized? Then Fight Back: Become an Artist," *Wall Street Journal* 13 February 1989: A-1.

CONCLUSION

¹ Maurice Berger, *The Crisis of Criticism* (New York: New Press, 1998), 6.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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