



Tradition brings family together

Sometimes, I ask myself the question: If marooned on a desert island, is there some favorite treat I couldn't do without?

I prefer to think I'd survive in a primitive world, independent of usual habits, nothing I couldn't relinquish. With frequent headlines of famous entertainers addicted to substances, sometimes prescribed, sometimes not, I'm unwilling to indulge something I can't be free of.

But, I have to think twice. It would be difficult to give up my cup of hot tea.

After a lifetime association with my favorite beverage, there's little chance of my tapering off. I grew up in a family where happy occasions were celebrated by brewing a pot of tea. So it went when misfortune struck, and the same for a routine day.

Each morning, my mom awoke me, handing me a teacup (cream or milk, no sugar, no lemon). After school she would ask me to "put the kettle on." Evening studies were interrupted for a break with our special drink.

My mother and other British folk understood this routine. During World War II, German dictator Adolf Hitler dropped his bombs on London. The populace downed a few cups of tea and chirped "Cheers." Princes marry and kings die, as tables are set for tea, an afternoon ritual. So it is with individuals, so it is with a nation, in the blood, as wine is to the French national identity.

"It's a comfort thing there," says Bill McGinnis, who spent his first 16 years in the Suffolk area of England. Along with his wife, Rhonda, he is owner of Shamrock, Rose, and Thistle Tea Room, located at Holiday Place off Old Shell Road.

"Tea was about all we drank," he says. "In whatever situation, you would walk in the door and someone would say, 'Here's a cup of tea.'"

Shamrock, Rose, and Thistle opened in 2007 and attracts quite a few English visitors, says McGinnis. Similar to a British pub, it offers a varied cuisine that's British, European and Southern.

In English counties like Devon and Cornwall, you can order "Cream tea," and it's as standard as burger and fries. Waiters know to serve you tea, scones, jam and clotted cream. It's a great repast.

Black, yellow, white, green. Light, smoky, fragrant. Indian, Chinese, Japanese ... I've tried them all. I prefer black, English or Irish. Like my grandmother, I cover the teapot with a cosy, a beaded, quilted cover. By some law of physics I don't understand, it keeps the contents hot for some time. It works.

All in all, I guess it was something that connected us, a glue that held family together — my English grandmother, lavender scented, handing me a cup from her silver tea service in the drawing room — my sister and I, high school girls, sitting at the kitchen table, a porcelain teapot steaming nearby, as we waited for my mother's caraway seed buns to finish baking in the oven. The house smelled like a bakery with the aroma of her bread making. Then, visits with my aunt May who set the table for tea, as she shared her poetry with me, happy occasions because of her kind, gentle ways. Special times with special people, then and now, cups clinking on saucers, as dedicated tea drinkers find warmth and cheer in a tradition that comforts the soul.

Better still, recent medical research opines that the drink has health benefits.

If it comes to pass that I'm stranded on that remote island, I'd probably seek a method of brewing tea. You might try a cup.

If things get really bad, there's always chocolate.

(Hope Northington is a columnist for the Press-Register. Write to her at P.O. Box 2488, Mobile, AL 36652.)

LOVE the GLASS

Texas artist Carlyn Ray brings her creations to Orange Beach Festival of Art

By THOMAS B. HARRISON
tharrison@press-register.com

The Orange Beach Festival of Art will open next weekend with dozens of artists working in a dazzling variety of media from ceramics and fine art glass to metal sculpture, oils and watercolors.

Organizers anticipate 25,000 visitors for this year's edition of the festival, which gets started Friday with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band at 6 p.m. at Waterfront Park, 26389 Canal Road. The outdoor event on the banks of Wolf Bay will have a catered dinner featuring local cuisine. Dining tables will be set up around the stage. Preservation Hall Jazz Band will perform after dinner.

Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased at the Orange Beach Arts Center or by calling 251-981-2787 or 251-223-3970. (See information box for festival details.)

Festival-goers will have much to see, hear, touch and experience including the Tannehill Forge School of Blacksmithing, a teaching shop operated by forge master and resident blacksmith James Whatley and crew. The school is in Tannehill State Park, McCalla, Ala.

Other participating artists include: Ian Williams, Bill Palmer and Joe Wujcik, wood; Konstantyn Sylin, Domi Williams and Chris Hartsfield, watercolor; Donna Weiss, Larry Allen, Steve Dark and Charles Smith, clay; Gila Rayberg, mosaics; M. Hakima, oils; David and Ann Reif, jewelry; Frank Ledbetter, metal; Theresa Mirabile, mixed media; Tony Krynsky, folk art; Jill Elkins, glass; Patrick Reynolds, graphite and ink.

Eloise Thomley, chair of the festival steering committee, says 90 exhibitors will be on hand for the event, which will include an Authors Aisle with more than a dozen writers including Pulitzer Prize winner Rick Bragg as guest author. A performing arts tent will feature a children's theater performance of "The Aristocats." Plenty of live music available as well.

Guest glass artist Carlyn Ray will demonstrate on-site glassblowing at The Hot Shop; the Tannehill Forge School will



Guest glass artist Carlyn Ray will demonstrate on-site glassblowing at The Hot Shop.

show adults and children how to create their own metal art; and a Kids' Art Alley will allow youngsters to create their own artwork.

"We are very unique," Thomley says. "Our focus is quality, not quantity. We have turned away as many artists as we have accepted. We have built a huge show with different art venues (with) a broad-based appeal."

Carlyn Ray undoubtedly will draw a crowd, as much for her exquisite art glass as for her glassblowing skill. Both will be on display next Saturday and Sunday.

"I am currently making all the artwork for the festival the weeks leading up to the show," she says. "All of the pieces which I will be bringing, I will have made for the festival."

Ray's primary media are

glass and metal, and in creating the artwork for this festival she bears in mind that "since it is in the South and by the water, a lot of people will like bright colors. I think about the atmosphere and environment when I am making pieces for certain people or places."

For this show, Ray will bring a variety of work.

"In choosing which pieces to bring, I like to have examples of (work) I will be demonstrating as well as a variety of different shapes and colors," she says. "For certain galleries, I usually cater to their clientele based on price points and specific colors."

Based in Austin, Texas, Ray has been training as a professional artist for about 10 years. She has worked for several "Italian maestros," Seattle artist Dale Chihuly and the Corning

The grand old masters

I saw on the news that a famous man had bought a Norman Rockwell painting that turned out to have been stolen from a museum.

The painting is quite valuable and reminds me of one of the saddest things about great art: namely, that if an artist hopes to be famous, he has to wait until he's dead. No matter how good his work, no one will take any interest in him as long as he is alive. Art museums won't consider him, art collectors won't buy his paintings and Sotheby's of London won't let him in the door.

I could cite many examples of this puzzling fact. Vincent van Gogh, for instance, tried to sell his paintings at Goodwill stores, flea markets and garage sales — but nobody would look at them. Why? Because people knew van Gogh was still alive.

People would pass a display of his work and say things like, "Well, that's a pretty good painting of a sunflower — if it is a sunflower. But I wouldn't buy it. The man who painted it is sitting right over there on that bench, drinking absinthe and looking alive and healthy. True enough, one of his ears is missing, but that's not terminal. I would guess that the man has 15 good years left. If I were to buy one of his paintings, I'd have a mighty long wait before it became valuable."

Let us turn to a related subject: non-representational art. This includes cubism, post-impressionism and abstract painting. Under this heading I would place the work of Picasso, Bra-

que, Jackson Pollock and others whose names escape me at the moment. In this kind of art, the painter paints an idea rather than an object.

Picasso, for instance, liked to paint two-dimensional figures

rather than three-dimensional. The figures in his paintings often have two eyes on the same side of their head, a thing you rarely see in real life. In fact the only such items I can think of are flounders — which, so far as I know, Picasso never turned his hand to.

One of his most famous paintings is called "Guernica." If you study it closely, you can make out something that looks like a horse — a rather square-jointed horse, to be sure, but unquestionably a horse. That's what is meant by painting an idea.

Non-representational art used to be controversial, but no more. The matter has been settled once and for all. You either enjoy non-representational art or you don't. And if you don't, you keep quiet about it.

Of course, I personally prefer representational art. The more representational, the better. If you are going to paint a real object, say a hippopotamus or a hyena, then why not make it look like a hippopotamus or a hyena? Otherwise, choose

something else to paint — a giraffe, a kangaroo or even an aardvark.

I mentioned Vincent van Gogh earlier. He was one of a group of early 20th century painters known as the impressionists: Monet, Degas, Renoir, Gauguin and others. Some of them aren't so bad. Their work forms a sort of transition between representational art and non-representational art. They painted *impressions* rather than objects.

For example, if they are painting a wheat field with a river running through, they may paint the wheat field blue with pink dots and the river yellow with red stripes. If they put a cow in the picture, the front of the cow may be purple and the back green. In other words, it is their *impression* that the river is yellow, the field blue and the cow half purple, half green. Very often the whole thing looks okay. Especially if you are color-blind.

Which brings me to the question of nudity in art. For some reason, painters love to depict nude women. If you visit the Louvre, for instance, you will see hundreds of pictures of nude women. They are all over the place: lying on the grass, sitting in chairs, riding horses, peeking out of bushes, climbing trees, etc. Nobody ever suggested that there is anything pornographic about them, although some of them strike me as *verging* on pornography. I don't want to be accused of Puritanism, but if some of those pictures appeared in Playboy magazine people would be shocked.

Finally, there is the question of who is the world's greatest

ART FESTIVAL IN ORANGE BEACH

WHAT: Orange Beach Festival of Art

WHEN: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. March 10-11

WHERE: Orange Beach Arts Center, 26389 Canal Road, and the adjoining Waterfront Park in Orange Beach

ADMISSION: \$1

INFO: www.obfoa.com

SPECIAL EVENT: Festival gets under way Thursday evening with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band "Dinner & Jazz by the Bay." Tickets are \$50. Call 251-981-2787 or 251-223-3970.

Museum of Glass during her training.

"I have been fortunate to have worked with the best during my career," she says. "It is only in the past year that I have completely focused all of my energy on my own designs and pieces."

"Most recently I have been focusing on creating custom work and also sculptural pieces. I am always pushing new designs, techniques, and thus my work is in a constant flux of change and development. I have made some newer, sculptural wall pieces. I enjoyed making these (and) I have new ideas in mind."

Ray was published recently in "Best of World: Glass" and "Best of America: Glass," which will go to print the next few months with her sculptural wall "Weavings."

Any glass artist will tell you that the medium is labor-intensive and can break your heart in a thousand ways.

The same artists will tell you that glass also can inspire an artist to achieve the unimaginable.

"I am in love with glass," Ray says, "from the enlightening material in its molten state through the creative and colorful dance, all embodied in each creation. I hope others can feel the love I give the piece and also develop a personal relationship with the colors, shape and vibrancy."

"It is my feeling that a glass piece can change the energy of a room with the reflections of light and colors. I aspire to share the light and love from this material with others. To me, a glass piece can hold the colors of the rainbow, have the magic of a drop of dew, and radiate the energy from the sun."

artist: Michelangelo or Leonardo da Vinci? Michelangelo, for example, painted his pictures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, which you must admit was quite a feat. He would climb up on a scaffold, apply some wet plaster to the ceiling and paint like crazy before the plaster dried. This was a pretty difficult way to operate. I can't get over the sneaking suspicion that he would have done better to have painted the pictures on sheets of canvas and used Super Glue to stick them to the ceiling. Of course, this would also have had drawbacks. Did you ever try to get Super Glue off your fingers?

Then there's Da Vinci's Mona Lisa. Here I part company with the people who consider this the world's greatest painting. I've never really liked it. In the first place, the girl in the picture isn't very pretty. Her features are nice enough, but she can't compare with Marilyn Monroe, Doris Day or Betty Grable. And secondly there's the question of her smile. It has been called "enigmatic" or "mysterious" but to me it's just plain annoying. If you're going to smile, then let's see a real smile. Something with teeth and dimples.

But of course, I'm not one to put my opinions against art critics. I wouldn't argue with people who have devoted their lives to the study of art. But as the old saying has it: "I don't know much about art — I just know what I don't like."

(S.L. Varnado is a columnist for the Press-Register. Write to him at P.O. Box 2488, Mobile, AL 36652. He can be e-mailed at svarnado251@aol.com.)