



Needle Point Mardi Gras Mask Maker

Suson Launey's distinctive yarn masks have become a common sight in both the men's and women's Mardi Gras runs in Tee Mamou, located on Mamou Prairie near Iota, Louisiana. Iota is home of the most conservative Country Mardi Gras Run in all of Louisiana. Runners are required to attend meetings during the year, and outsiders are not allowed to run in the official Mardi Gras run on Fat Tuesday.

Launey grew up with the rural Mardi Gras traditions of Iota. The participants of the run mask themselves and go from house to house in the rural countryside to beg for ingredients for the communal gumbo that is cooked, eaten, and celebrated at the dance on Mardi Gras night. The gumbo dinner and dance signal the beginning of forty days of Lent.

Part of the running of the Mardi Gras includes the wearing of screen masks which Suson found uncomfortable and left scratches. She decided to experiment with plastic to make a plastic screen for the base. She used needlepoint to make the design onto the plastic screen base. This type of mask was comfortable to wear and left no scratches at the end of the day.

Using designs and colors found on traditional screen masks, Launey's needlepoint masks became popular and in demand with other participants of the Tee Mamou Mardi Gras Run. Launey has years of experience making regular size masks as well as miniature masks used as jewelry pins. While visiting with Launey as she works on a mask, a mischievous smile sometimes appears as she pulls the needle through the small holes of the screen. Buyers purchasing one of Launey's creations, receive more than just a Mardi Gras Mask. They receive a part of her love of the craft and the Mardi Gras run itself.

Suson Launey has made and exhibited her masks at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, the Festival International, the Natchitoches/NSU Folk Festival, the Native Crafts Festival in Lafayette, and the official Louisiana Folklife Festival held the last three years in Monroe, Louisiana.

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