

## Tours

From the French Quarter to the Garden District to the riverfront plantations, the New Orleans area offers a number of tours.



CREOLE QUEEN

### Cypress Swamp Tours, Inc. Bayou Segnette/581-4501

Guided boat rides through the swamps and marshes of the bayou country are offered, along with narrated plantation tours.

### Dr. Wagner's Honey Island Swamp Tours, Inc./242-5877

Two-hour narrated trips into the bayous and sloughs of a 70,000-acre swamp; hotel pick-up.

### Gray Line Tours

#### Toulouse St. at the Mississippi River/587-0861

Attractions include antebellum plantations, city tours, riverboat cruise/city tour combinations and swamp tours.

### New Orleans Paddlewheels, Inc. Poydras Street Wharf/ 524-0814

The paddlewheeler *Creole Queen* and the riverboat *Cajun Queen* offer daily cruises and a nightly dinner jazz cruise.

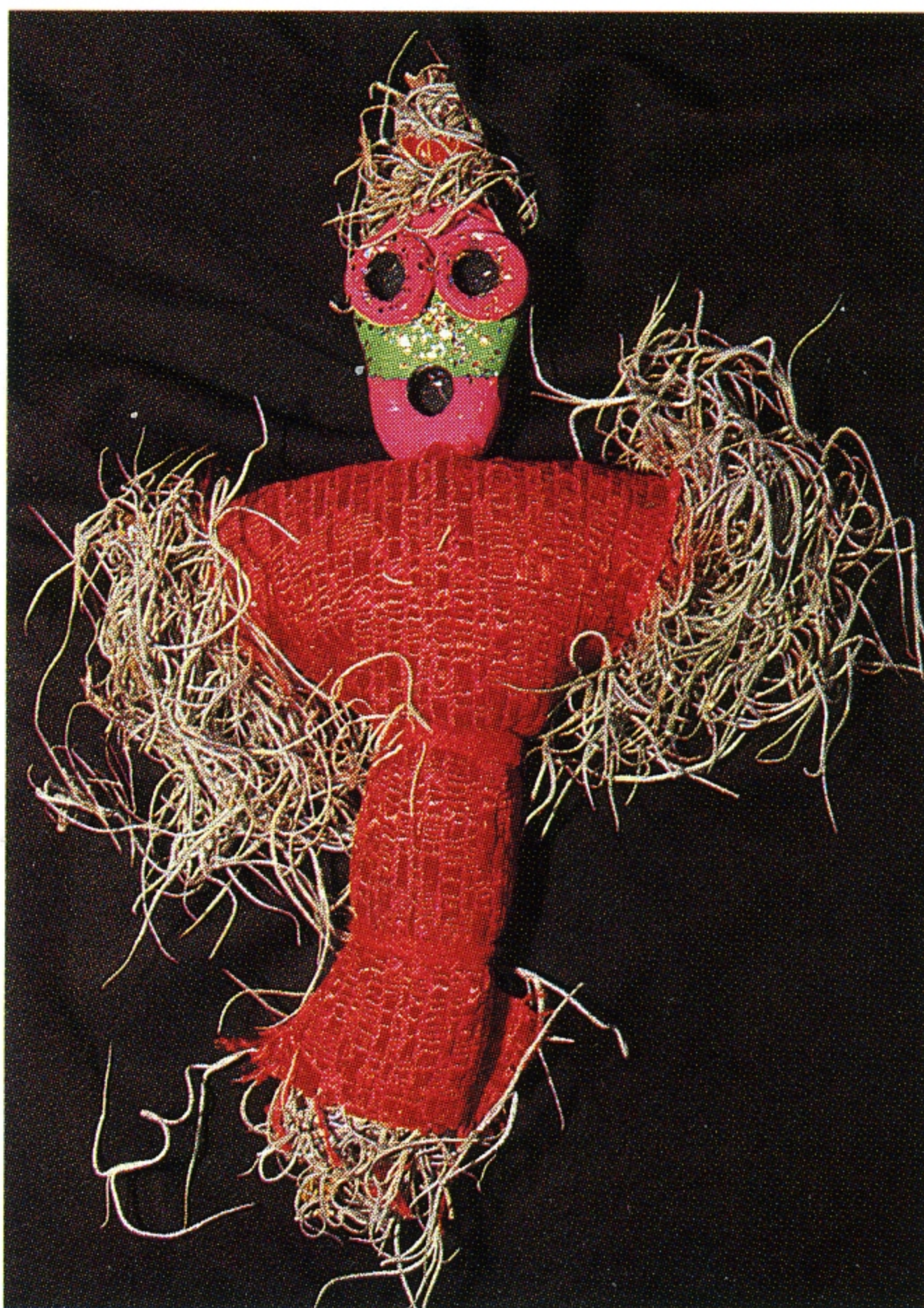
### New Orleans Steamboat Co./ 586-8777

The steamboat *Natchez* departs from the Toulouse Street Wharf twice daily for a two-hour river cruise and once nightly for a dinner jazz cruise.

### New Orleans Tours, Inc./ 592-0560

Offers daily city tours, Mississippi River excursions, river/city combinations, the Crown Point Swamp Tour and nightlife tours.

# Voodoo



The word *voodoo*, courtesy of films and television, conjures up an image of dolls with black pins stuck in them capable of causing death. Contrary to this too-common portrayal, voodoo is more of a bonafide religion than a mechanism for revenge, and voodoo has always involved a lot more white magic than black. Voodoo's main business over the years has been to tip the scales in the battlefield of love in favor of the highest bidder. The most common voodoo artifact is the red flannel "gris-gris" bag, filled with items of both black and white magic (gris means gray, the product of this union), including such items as herbs, High John the Conqueror root, alligator teeth and "goofer dust" (dirt from a graveyard). The bag is then anointed with the appropriate oil and incantations to give the client the desired goal, whether that be love, luck or victory in court.

Voodoo is practiced today all over the world, from Africa and Brazil to the Caribbean Islands. It first came to New Orleans via slaves brought over from the country of Dahomey (on Africa's Slave Coast) and from the Caribbean, particularly Haiti and Santo Do-

mingo. These slaves brought with them a pantheon of powerful gods, but no idols to use in their religious ceremonies; however, statues of Catholic saints were plentiful, and the slaves soon attached the names of their own gods to these Catholic saints. The slaves thus appeared to be good Catholics instead of evil pagans, so their religion wasn't driven entirely underground. Slaves in New Orleans were given Sundays off, and they gathered as a group to stage voodoo ceremonies right out in the open, in a place called "Congo Square," which is still a prominent feature of Louis Armstrong Park on Rampart Street.

In the 1850s, voodoo in New Orleans enjoyed its golden age, and under a group of powerful leaders the religion enjoyed its height of popularity. The exploits of Marie Laveau, Doctor John and Sanite Dede became the stuff of legend, and sensationalized newspaper accounts of their Lake Pontchartrain ceremonies made for hot copy; lurid, firsthand accounts were sure to mention frenzied dancing with snakes, chanting to the gods, drinking and sexual excesses. The voodoo queens were early masters of marketing. They created demand by leaving tiny black coffins or other charms on doorsteps; the next day, the person who had been "fixed" would visit the queen to have the curse lifted.

It is said that tens of thousands of New Orleanians believe in or practice voodoo today. To understand why voodoo has remained so compelling for so many people here and around the world, visit the **New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum** (724 Dumaine St.; 523-7685) to see their exhibits or sign up for one of their fascinating tours.

— Clay Lord