

EUGENESIS

THE GUARDIAN OF THE FUTURE.

BY ARIA SELIGMANN

Those who show up for Saturday morning's parade, beginning at 9 am at 11th and Oak, will get a rare and beautiful treat: the second coming out of mask-maker Maureen Culligan's Eugenesis, the giant female guardian of the future who was created for First Night '00.

During the parade, Eugenesis will be airborne, floating behind the 2002 Eugene Celebration Parade Grand Prize-winning entry, Samba Ja.

Culligan's Eugenesis seemed to Samba Ja member Steve Holtzmann the perfect symbol for now to lighten people's hearts and show the way to a hopeful future. Holtzmann, Culligan and Downtown Events Management, Inc. (DEMI), which had been storing the giant Eugenesis for Culligan for three years, pooled financial resources and gathered a team together to refurbish the plaster-covered-with-paper fortuitous female.

Culligan conceived of Eugenesis during a trip to Scotland in 1995. She was there studying permaculture, and visited a site in the Borders region where a millenium forest was being planted. "Just the magnitude of that focuses so far into the future, hundreds of years, for the well-being of people and land, that it inspired me to create something, building toward something for the turn of the millenium. Something of significance," says Culligan.

Since 1978, Culligan had been concentrating on celebratory art, making masks to be worn by people who gather at events, as opposed to making masks for theater. "I call it streetwear," she says.

In 1995, Culligan also began moving into the realm of parade arts, mask-making for community art projects, and away from

mask-making as a cottage industry. She attended the first First Night celebration in '95 and became involved with the event thereafter, creating masks for processions — "different from parades in that spectators are invited to join in as participants," she says — and forming the Eugene Maskmakers Guild in 1998. By 1999, the concept of Eugenesis began to jell.

The idea was born out of the "hysteria of Y2K and all this fear of the turning of the millenium," says Culligan. "The concept of Eugenesis is to have a presence — I don't want to say a goddess, maybe that's more what she's becoming — but just to have some sort of benevolent female that's the guardian of the future."

DEMI hired Culligan's son, Arthur Smid, to do some concept sketches of Eugenesis and her attendants. The idea was for her to be carried as a floating entity, to have her garments carried and the 24 attendants holding her overhead, says Culligan.

For the attendants, Culligan incorporated "sort of a classic European style, with white face masks. They had sort of opulescent aspects with white costumes. They were all sort of luminescent." She spent most of the spring, summer and fall working on her creations, with the help of a community arts grant.

But as many mothers and all creative people know, the labor of birthing her creation became nearly unbearable. "In the 11th hour, in actually bringing her to

fruition, I almost gave up the project," says Culligan. She had used plaster over a clay form, which worked for the smaller attendants' masks, but not for giant 'Gen. The plaster didn't hold the shape.

"It was a horrible thing for me. I had already made 24 costumes and masks." Plus, Eugenesis had taken over her life, invading her small two-bedroom apartment at the top of Emerald Street. But the plaster lady was, after all, a community art project, and sure enough, friends came forward to help. Culligan says she was "literally rescued by these brilliant men," affectionately termed "The Friends of Maureen," who included Don Kahle, Steve Holtzmann and others.

Putting their minds together, Culligan and company figured out how to fill Eugenesis with styrofoam and build a PCV pipe framework for her. With the help of another friend who stepped in at the last minute with a flatbed trailer, Culligan got her baby downtown on a cold, rainy New Year's Eve, in time for the First Night procession.

That night, Eugenesis was rolled out,

attended by members of Hannah Fox's Young Women's Theatre Collective, who danced along with her, and many who spontaneously joined the procession with drums and revelry.

But Eugenesis's reign was short-lived. "After that she was too big for me to deal with," says Culligan, who even had fantasies of pitching her over the ledge of the Glenwood dump because "she wasn't perfect."

Fortunately, DEMI stepped in and stored her for three years. Then last February, Holtzmann asked DEMI if Samba Ja could use her for Mardi Gras, and the answer was yes. After that, the decision was made to refurbish Eugenesis and let her float in this year's celebration parade.

"She really has a presence," says Culligan. "I hope she can become a new symbol for the city. I feel like we're entering a new point in time where we need to counter fear with a new mythology, to create a new collective awareness and so her role is — instead of combating evil, she is the guardian, she is holding the goodness and the light for the future." ★



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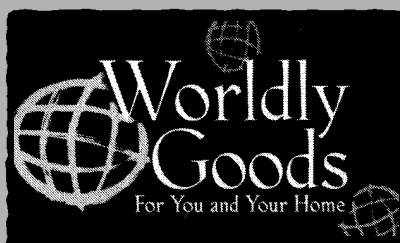
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