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Courir de Mardi Gras Masks – Significance

Georgie Manuel, a native of Eunice, Louisiana, and her husband Allen make and sell traditional Mardi Gras masks, brightly colored suits de Mardi Gras, and capuchons, the pointed, dunce-like hats worn by many Courir de Mardi Gras riders. She has family ties to the Eunice Mardi Gras tradition. Georgie's grandmother, Alma McGee, was a seamstress who ran Mardi Gras herself and made Mardi Gras suits and capuchons. Georgie learned the art of Cajun costume making from her grandmother.

Wire screen masks seem to have been widely used in Cajun Mardi Gras runs by the early twentieth century. Georgie, an avid historical researcher and collector of old Mardi Gras masks, discovered a catalogue, once used in an area store, that included wire screen masks imported from Germany. A presenter for the Louisiana Crafts program, Louisiana Division for the Arts – 1988 and an annual participant at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, Georgie's masks are featured in "Louisiana Folklore Miscellany" published by the Louisiana Folklore Society. They also appear in the award-winning video "Dance for a Chicken".

The masks themselves are made from window screen and are painted and trimmed to match whatever design they choose. To complete the Courir rider's look, a "*capuchon*", a tall conical hat decorated much like the rider's costume, is sat atop their head.

Masking offers revealers a chance to throw caution out the wind, along with inhibitions, if only for one day. It allows for everyone to hide their true identity and for everyone to act the same no matter the social class.