



1 - REX, KING OF CARNIVAL, MONARCH OF MERRIMENT

Rex's float carries Rex and his pages through the streets of New Orleans on Mardi Gras day.



2 - HIS MAJESTY'S BANDWAGON

A band rides on this permanent float to provide music for Rex and for those who greet him on the parade route.



3 - THE KING'S JESTERS

Even the Monarch of Merriment needs jesters in his court. Rex's jesters dress in Mardi Gras colors—purple, green, and gold.



4 - THE BOEUF GRAS

This is one of the oldest symbols of Mardi Gras, symbolizing the great feast on the day before Lent begins.



5 - TITLE FLOAT: "VISIONS OF AGE-OLD CATHAY"

The Rex Procession of 2005 takes us on a journey to one of the world's oldest and richest cultures to explore the history, mythology, and fantastic images of ancient China. Recorded Chinese history extends back more than five thousand years, a rich weave of dynasties, warring states, contesting religions, and slow engagement with other cultures. "Cathay," in fact, was the name by which the western world first knew the land now known as China. Medieval explorers encountered the Khitan, Manchurians who had conquered Northern China, and called this mysterious kingdom "the land of the Khitay," which became "Cathay." Marco Polo first used the word "China," probably derived from the Sanskrit "Cin," from the Qin Empire of the 2nd Century B.C.

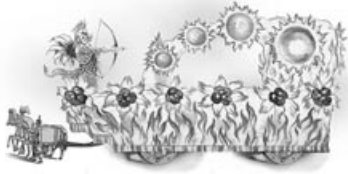


6 - THAO-THIEH, SHANG DYNASTY BRONZE

This float is inspired by a beautiful ancient bronze artifact, which originally served as the ornament on a ceremonial staff. The Shang dynasty (1700-1200 BC) was China's first verifiable dynasty. The Thao-Thieh were ravenous mythical monsters with vicious claws and teeth which were known to devour humans. The gods punished the gluttonous Thao-Thieh by taking their bodies away, leaving only the fearsome head—any person unlucky enough to be swallowed simply passed through unharmed. A symbol of gluttony, the Thao-Thieh is sometimes painted on Chinese plates to discourage over-eating.



7 - HOU-YI SHOOTS THE TEN SUNS



In ancient times the world was threatened when ten suns shone from the sky, burning up crops and drying up rivers. Hou-Yi was a wonderful archer who climbed Mount K'un Lun and, one by one, shot down the suns. A wise old man counted ten arrows in Hou-Yi's quiver, and realizing that the world needed one sun, hid the last arrow. The Queen Mother of the West, the wife of the great Jade Emperor, made Hou-Yi Emperor of China, and gave him a magical elixir that would make him live forever. Hou-Yi's wife was Chang'er, who became the Moon Fairy.

8 - FU-HSI, FIRST OF THREE SOVEREIGNS



Fu-Hsi is the first of three mythical noble emperors, known collectively as the San-huang, or the three sovereigns. Legend says he was carried in his mother's womb for twelve years. Fu-Hsi is sometimes called "The Oxtamer" because he taught men to tame wild animals, as well as to use fishing nets and breed silk worms. He also invented music and the "pa kua," the eight trigrams which form the basis of Chinese writing. These figures are seen on the sides of the float.

9 - PALACE OF THE LORD OF THE SKY



In various Chinese legends the Lord of the Sky is identified as the North Star, as K'un Lun, the highest mountain in the Celestial Mountain range, and frequently as a dragon, the most well-known symbol in Chinese mythology. Surely the mighty Chinese Dragon, the Lord of the Sky, symbol of celestial sovereignty, wealth, and power will find his home in an exotic palace, guarded by a great beast such as this, with monster head, elephant ears, dragon wings, and cloven hoofs.

10 - CHANG' ER, THE MOON FAIRY



Chang'er was the wife of Hou-Yi, the archer who saved the world by shooting nine suns from the sky. Hou-Yi was given a magic elixir of immortality by the gods. When he was away from home Chang'er took the magic elixir herself, felt her body become light, and began to fly away to heaven. She missed Hou-Yi, however, and decided to stop on the nearest heavenly body, the moon, so that she could be closer to him. Chang'er lives there still, accompanied by a jade rabbit who listens to her stories. Hou-Yi thought he could see her on the moon, and made an altar with offerings of food of the harvest. This was the beginning of the Mid-August Festival, a major Chinese celebration.

11 - THE FLAMING PEARL



Chinese dragons are often depicted pursuing a flaming pearl. One legend describes the story of Xiao Sheng, a village boy who discovered a pearl with magical powers. One night he hid it in an empty rice jar, and in the morning found the rice jar full. He and his family shared their good fortune with their neighbors, but some became greedy and attempted to steal the pearl. To foil them Xiao Sheng swallowed the pearl, felt his body grow hot, and was transformed into a flying dragon. To quench the fire inside he drank up the river, and then brought much-needed rain to the village. As he flew away from the village he turned his head from side to side, carving the bends of the river.

12 - PROTECTORS OF THE HEARTH



Figures intended to protect the home from evil spirits and other threats are found at the entrance to many Chinese buildings, from palaces to modest homes and businesses. Lions, symbols of power and protection, are the most common guardians. Imperial Guardian Lions are placed in pairs at the entrance to important buildings, the male lion on the intruder's right, and the female on the left. Lions are not found in China, so these lion figures have been somewhat mythologized, incorporating features of other protective beasts.

13 - KUBLAI KHAN



The grandson of Ghengis Khan, Kublai Khan (1215-94) ruled over the largest empire of the medieval world. He is remembered as a wise and tolerant administrator and emperor. He founded the Yuan dynasty in China and established his magnificent capital at Cambuluc, now Beijing, where many, including Marco Polo, came to visit his court. This magical kingdom was the inspiration for Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, "Xanadu."



14 - THE STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE

This permanent float honors the most famous of all of New Orleans' streetcar lines.

15 - YU PO, GOD OF FISHES



The religious and mythologic traditions of ancient China, heavily influenced by Taoism, teach great reverence for all of nature, with gods and spirits associated with mountains, rivers, trees, birds, animals, and fishes. With so many gods and spirits they sometimes overlap: Ho Po, the god of the Yellow River, seems interchangeable with Shui-Shen, the god of the waters, and Yu Po, the god of fishes. These aquatic gods were described in the "Nine Songs," an ancient collection of Chinese poetry.

16 - THE MONKEY KING



"The Monkey King" (known in China as "Journey to the West") is an allegorical novel written more than four hundred years ago by Wu-Ch'eng-en. It is based on the legendary exploits of the Chinese monk, Xuan Zang, who in the early seventh century traveled on foot to India to seek the Sutra, the Buddhist holy book. The Monkey King's story is one of trials, tribulations, struggles with the gods, supernatural powers, and ultimate triumph. When the gods finally captured and tried to execute him for his rebelliousness, they found that none of their means of execution succeeded, but only made the Monkey King more powerful. The book mingles history, fairy tales, myths, monsters, and religious themes, and is one of China's literary treasures.

17 - NIAN, THE SPRING FESTIVAL



The greatest of the Chinese festivals, the Spring Festival, has its origins in the legend of Nian. Nian was a terrible beast that lived in the mountains, preying on other animals. During the winter, however, he came into the villages and devoured humans. A wise man suggested to the villagers that they try to drive the monster away by using the things Nian feared: noise, fire, and the color red. When Nian returned the villagers were ready: they lit fires, waved red lanterns, and pounded on drums and gongs.—and Nian fled. The Spring Festival has been celebrated ever since with fireworks, lanterns, and red banners.

18 - THE PEKING OPERA



The Peking Opera is a Chinese national musical tradition and treasure, dating to its formation from several traditional regional opera troupes in 1790. Chinese opera is a rich mixture of singing, dancing, music, acrobatics, and mime. Elaborate costumes and the troupe's traditional dramatic and mask-like makeup, which is featured on this float, are enduring symbols of this Chinese art form.

19 - AUSPICIOUS SYMBOLS OF LONGEVITY



In Chinese mythology there are auspicious symbols for wealth, happiness, good health, and, especially for living a long life. The Chinese Red-crowned Crane is the principal symbol of longevity. The crane is considered a divine bird in Taoism because of its very long life—fifty to sixty years. The crane flies very high, and chirps constantly, communicating with the gods. Other auspicious symbols of longevity include the turtle and the pine tree, both known for having very long lives.

20 - THE RIVER OF STARS



Every culture has a myth or story to explain the Milky Way. Chinese legend tells of the peasant boy Niu Lang, a cowherd, who fell in love with Zhi Nu, the daughter of the Heavenly Emperor and the Queen Mother. Zhi Nu was known as "the Weaver Girl," who wove the clouds across the skies. When Zhi Nu chose to remain on earth with her true love, the Heavenly Emperor sent Celestial Guards to bring her back. Niu Lang followed her into the heavens until the Queen Mother threw her hairpin across the sky, creating a milky River of Stars, the Milky Way, forever separating the lovers. Still they try to cross the River of Stars, and every year on the seventh day of the seventh month they are reunited.

21 - PAVILION OF HEAVENLY FRAGRANCE



Pavilions are a ubiquitous feature of Chinese architecture, going back through many centuries and dynasties. Some have specific and clear purposes, such as pavilions dedicated to ancestors or gods. Others are given names as lovely as their design and setting: Wonderful View Pavilion, Everlasting Spring Pavilion, Clear-Skies Viewing Pavilion. Near the Forbidden City in Beijing is a lovely ancient pavilion which might have inspired this float—Jifangting: The Pavilion of Harmonious Fragrance.

22 - FU-HSING, GOD OF HAPPINESS



Fu-Hsing, Lu-Hsing, and Shou-Hsing are the three stellar deities of Chinese mythology. Fu-Hsing, the first, is the star god of happiness. His legend tells the story of Yang Ch'en, a judge from Hunan province who bravely appealed to the Emperor Wu-ti to cease enslaving the citizens of Hunan province simply because they were short. The emperor was touched by his pleas (and his determination and courage in making them) and returned the slaves to their homes. This made the people so happy that they made monuments and shrines to their hero, who became the human counterpart of Fu-Hsing, the God of Happiness. He is depicted as a smiling presence, often in a judge's blue robes.

23 - ANCESTRAL HALL



Ancestor worship has always been an important element of Chinese religion and culture. From a small altar in a simple home to an elaborate separate hall dedicated to the immortal spirits of ancestors, a place is set apart for these spirits to linger, and to be consulted. Ancestors' spirits are honored on tablets placed next to representations of gods, and prayers and sacrifices are offered in these sacred places. The Hall for Ancestral Worship, located in the Forbidden City, is one of the grandest examples of Ancestral Halls.

24 - K'UN LUN, ABODE OF THE IMMORTALS



The K'un Lun mountain range is one of the longest in Asia, and forms the Western border of China. In Chinese mythology the K'un Lun are believed to be Taoist paradise, as well as the home of the August Personage of Jade, or the Jade Emperor. The first mortal to visit there was King Mu of the Zhou dynasty. On his visit he discovered the Jade Palace of Huang-Di, the mythical Yellow emperor. He also met Hsi Wang Mu, the Royal Mother of the West, who made her home in these mountains, where she kept the Sacred Peach Tree, which blossoms once every three thousand years. Her symbol is the feng, or phoenix.

25 - SACRIFICE OF THE DRAGON KINGS



The great emperors of China have long adopted the Imperial Dragon as their symbol. Many, in fact, claimed to be descended from dragons, especially from the Great Dragon Kings presiding over the four universal seas, with earth at the center. To call the Emperor "dragon face" was not an insult, but rather a great compliment. One of the most important duties of the Emperor, or Dragon King, was to offer sacrifices at propitious times each year to assure that the people would be blessed with all they needed and protected from calamities and evil spirits.

26 - GATE OF HELL



The ancient Chinese believed that the spirits of the dead were presented at the City of Ghosts, and then conducted across Naihe Bridge before entering the Gate of Hell. The various levels and chambers of hell, each presided over by its own deity, were located within the Fengdu Mountains and ruled over by Yen Lo Wang, the King of Hell. Following questioning by his officials, evildoers were consigned to one of the chambers, to be punished there in many creative ways. At the end of their punishment souls were given the Drink of Forgetfulness and sent back into the world to be reborn.

27 - THE ROYAL BARGE



The Royal Barge is a permanent float, complete with Royal Gryphon, and brings the Rex Procession of 2005 to a close.