Shane Manthei
shanemanthei@gmail.com

At the Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum, exhibits have been updated for the fall season. A tour of the five most recent exhibits is hosted by Laura Blereau, the new curator for "the Hilliard." Museum guests are presented with the perspective of both portraiture and portraitist, and how the curator arranges them against white walled rooms.

The statement of independent curator, Jane Hart, collaborator for three of the five new exhibits, are seen first. Titled "A Season of Portraiture," Jane Hart's curatorial statement on these three collections, claims portraiture is "a way to more fully comprehend not only the universality of the human condition, but also the uniqueness inherent to all of us."

Blereau offered her knowledge and thoughts of the artists and works, including her own art selections found in the exhibit, "Spotlight on the Collection: Portraiture."

"Each show really is its own animal," Blereau explained. "Sometimes the artwork is local and finds us quick. Sometimes the work circulates internationally and I wait many years before it can be available for exhibition in Lafayette."

Blereau then continued to discuss her work with Hart, stating how collaborations are a common occurrence for curators. Hart communicated from Florida and traveled to Lafayette in February to select the pieces on display in the exhibit.

"After that point," Blereau continued, "it was up to our staff at the museum to implement the ideas (Hart) generated. It is my role at the Hilliard Museum to steer projects like this, and to keep all the exhibition details straight."

From adding small touches, such as an artist's quotes next to their work, to spatial planning with scaled models and proposals, there are many tasks Blereau must accomplish.

Blereau was born in Baton Rouge and received her bachelor's degree in fine arts from Louisiana State University. She subsequently attended Pratt Institute in New York City and earned her master's degree in fine art and new forms. Blereau organized art shows early in her career at institutes such as The Kitchen Center for Video and the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York City. She also worked at the Bitforms Gallery as gallery director and curator.

Working at the Bitforms Gallery was "the first time I had serious deadlines to create new exhibitions quickly," she said. "I learned to manage visual information efficiently, and I also began to take my own writing seriously."

Blereau has also published commentaries and critiques on exhibitions, and her writing was used to guide guests through exhibits such as the Bitforms Gallery.

"I have seen many sides of the art puzzle, so to speak," Blereau said, "and in that process I've discovered how flexible the role of a curator can be."

"I am a patient viewer who searches for beauty and social relevance," she responded when asked why she enjoys what she does. "The best projects create an experience that transforms the way we see the world. This is the essence of true cultural exchange. Meaning can be produced in unexpected ways. Little details or surprises can command our attention when we witness a great artwork or exhibition."

After joining the Hilliard in January, Blereau said she is eager to work on future projects. She has already helped develop multiple exhibits, yet, she states that she has been inspired by the Hilliard's in-house collection along with its modern architecture juxtaposed with that of the A Hays Town building. She said she plans for the collection to grow while she is a curator and to loan art to other museums to spread interest for it.

"My primary goal, for the coming years," Blereau stated, "is to present exhibitions that function as cross-disciplinary intellectual catalysts. The best museums are places of discovery and lifelong learning. Campus environments are a great place for contemporary artists to share their ideas, collaborate and inspire others."