‘The art of the soul’: Hilliard hosts ‘Yoga in the Galleries’

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Reporter

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s Hilliard Art Museum hosted “Yoga in the Galleries” on Saturday, June 8.

The event was free to the public, allowing students and non-students of all ages to enjoy a morning of peace, partnership, and self-reflection surrounded by the artwork on display in the museum.

Participants were arranged in a circle and instructed to abandon judgment of their fellow attendees as well as abandon judgment of themselves.

“Today was a partner class, so it was the true essence of ‘namaste,’ which is ‘I honor the divine light within you because I recognize the divine light is also within me,’” said Susan Buller, the class’ instructor, who has been studying yoga for ten years.

Buller called attention to the more spiritual, mental side of yoga, rather than the physical.

“There’s always that element of how to connect with yourself, which is really the root of yoga. We forget that it’s not just exercise,” Buller said.

The class seemed to be centered around these ideas, stressing both self-connection and connection with others in the room.

Many times throughout the class, attendees engaged with each other, both physically and verbally, in an effort to “break the ice with movement.” Buller asked the class to share their energies, give each other their support, and to remember that everyone has felt similar emotions in their lives.

She wanted to establish an emphasis on “connection, a sense of humanity, compassion for others, developing love and kindness, and the character of love and kindness,” she said.

There is also the other aspect of the class: the presence of the artwork. The class was stationed in the gallery housing “Gisela Colon: Pods.” Each wall presented its own unique plastic pod which reflected different colors depending on the angle of viewing and lighting.

“Yoga is like a really Zen, meditative sport. So it’s really fun and calming I think to do it in the museum. It’s a really cool experience with all those pods watching you with all the light plays through the plastic. It’s just a really fun space to kind of think about in there,” said Alex Pollard, Visitors’ Service Specialist at the Hilliard.

Buller talked about the class in a slightly different light, mentioning the artistic aspects of yoga and the prevalence of energies within it.

“I think that yoga is an expression of the art of the soul, and the Hilliard I think understands that, and so the energy of creativity from another person just kind of like permeates the space. It’s really lovely,” said Buller.

“We’re surrounded by art pieces. It’s a nice, open space. It’s peaceful,” said Laurie Guilbeau, a former UL student. “I do yoga once a month here. I have always enjoyed it.” One reason she particularly enjoys the class is “because it’s free,” she said while laughing. She also enjoys the variety the class presents: “I’ve seen lots of different instructors so far, and I liked all of them. They all have their own style.”

Events like these “bring awareness to what we have here at the museum ... A lot of it is local Louisiana artists or artists who have like taken some sort of Louisiana influence, and so we like to showcase that kind of locality in our museum. We like it to be different too,” said Pollard, in reference to the art involved and different events housed at the museum.

The Hilliard Art Museum hosts “Yoga in the Galleries” on the second Saturday of each month.

Buller said the class is primarily for yoga beginners and those who have fallen out of practice, noting the average difficulty level of the class.

“Someone who is new is going to kind of get a crash course in a way, but then someone who is seasoned would need to tap into that ‘back to the beginner mindset’ so everything is new,” she said.
The intention was to try and get some sort of feature that would get you into the lake and engaged more with the lake activity out there,” Hebert said. “Like I said, the alligators are a major attraction for our university. It puts us on the map. Nobody else has that, so it’s a neat little feature to get you right in the middle of it.”

The process has been relatively painless according to Hebert.

“It’s construction, so there’s always going to be something going on there that you’re not expecting, but overall it really has been a pretty smooth running project,” Hebert said. “There are just a couple of difficulties that we always have to maneuver around or get over, especially when you are working on a body of water. You can’t just walk up to it and start working like you could if it was on the side of the road.”

The pier was funded by the Master Plan student fee.

Michael Cortello, a fourth-year film major at UL Lafayette, said he was excited about the pier — so long as it’s safe from alligators.

“It would be cool to walk in the middle of that and get a better look at them, but I hope it’s safe more than anything. The last thing I want is an alligator coming up on the dock and … y’know,” Cortello said.

General studies senior Ravene Garrett also felt safety for both those using the pier and the wildlife in the lake should be a top priority for the university.

“I just want them to make sure both parties are safe,” Garrett said.

Hebert said the pier will have a “double-rail system” in place that will prevent alligators from getting onto the pier and harming visitors.

Hebert added he is happy with the project was proud to be a part of it.

“It’s really an honor to be a part of a project like this,” he said. “It’s really exciting to be a Ragin’ Cajun right now.”

“Louisiana is peculiar when compared to other states in the extent that state government is the driver of many things on the local level, so the state government funds local level services and pays the lion’s share or determines how economic development works in localities,” he said. “That has created this culture which people look to Baton Rouge to solve their problems and also to pay for things.”

Third, Louisiana has become too reliant on oil and gas for income.

“We’ve fallen into some of the traps that states that are ‘blessed,’ and I put that in quotations, with natural resources fall into in other areas, and that is that they depend too much for their economic, cultural and social health on the health of a particular industry.”

Lastly, Louisiana has a history of deliberately holding a significant portion of its population back for racial reasons.

“Louisiana has a large African-American population at 32% of the total population, and our long history of racial subjugation and discriminatory measures against African-Americans has been a damper on state economic, social and cultural health,” he said.

While Cross said Louisiana is improving in many areas, it will be challenging to earn a higher ranking in the future as other states are also making efforts to improve.

“You have to remember that this is a sliding scale. As we, for example, provide better healthcare or better outcomes for school children, other states are doing what they can to make things better in their state as well. We started out in last place, or nearly there, so for us to get up in the low 40s would be an enormous achievement,” he said.

Holly Mayeux, a junior in biology and chemistry at UL Lafayette, said Louisiana voters need to make more informed decisions about who they vote for.

“Honestly, I think we need to put people in office who genuinely care about Louisiana’s infrastructure and economy and not just filling their pockets,” Mayeux said. “I think people just need to get more educated about who they’re voting for, because if you’re voting for someone who says they are going to do one thing and end up wrecking the economy as soon as they get in office, then, really, did you do the right thing?”

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