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NEW CURATOR AT PAUL AND LULU HILLIARD UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM

Dr. Lee Gray served as curator at Auburn University

LAFAYETTE - University art museums should offer something for everyone.

That's one of Dr. Lee Gray's guiding principles. She's the newly hired curator of exhibitions and collections for the Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum. She will oversee the acquisition, display and continued development of the museum's art collections and organize exhibitions.

The museum's permanent collection consists of more than 2,000 works of art, including paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture and photographs. It represents 18th, 19th and 20th century Louisiana, as well as the United States, Europe and Japan.

"Everybody has a different interest and everybody wants to see their interest hanging on the museum walls. The complexity, specifically for a university museum, is that there are many different audiences," Gray said in a recent interview. "You have faculty, students, the community at large. And then you have a national community, which might be the museum industry or tourists who travel to various places to see art museums and galleries. . . It's a challenging balancing act."

Gray has lots of experience keeping her balance. For the past three years, she served as curator of collections and exhibitions at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University. During her career, she has worked at a variety of museums, mostly in the midwest. They include the Kennedy Museum of Art at Ohio University and The Dairy Barn Arts Center. Both are in Athens, Ohio.

She also gained valuable experience at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.; Gallaudet University, also in the nation's capital; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; and the Women's Art Registry of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

"I've actually done everything in a museum. I was a coat check. I was a security guard. I've hung installations and I've done conservation work, mostly in textiles. I've conducted inventories and handled duties related to shipping and receiving art work. I've judged shows and I've swept the floor," she said. "I've pretty much done the whole gamut."

Gray has also taught college and university courses in art history, two and three-dimensional design, and drawing. At Gallaudet University, she taught deaf and hard of hearing students using American Sign Language to communicate.

Gray will teach a course at UL Lafayette. "The fact that I also have teaching responsibilities means that there will be a great connection between the museum and UL Lafayette's College of the Arts. I think that's a key role, in part, because we can cultivate our future audience through the university by attracting young students and getting them interested and involved in museum work."

Mark Tullos, director of University Art Museum, said Gray "will work in tandem with a new Collections Committee to discern the path of where the collection is headed. She will help us strategize ways to build this collection."

Gray received a doctorate in American Cultural Studies at Ohio University. She holds a bachelor's degree in studio art from St. Cloud State University and a master's degree in applied design from the University of Minnesota. She has owned her own business and has traveled extensively throughout eastern and western Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, Northern Africa and the United States.

The breadth of Gray's experience, combined with her academic background, made her the top choice for University Art Museum's first curator position, said Dr. Steve Landry, vice president of Academic Affairs at UL Lafayette. "She's a gifted curator who brings great enthusiasm and knowledge to the museum."

Landry was chairman of a search committee composed of representatives of UL Lafayette's faculty, the local art community and the UL Lafayette Foundation.

Gray said she is impressed with University Art Museum's opportunities for growth and with its staff. "I think they have tremendous skills and I see myself fitting in and being inspired by that," she said.

She also noted that the Cajun and Creole cultures of Acadiana captured her attention, especially since regionalism in art is one of her interests.

Gray is most proud of a successful show she developed at the Kennedy Museum of Art at Ohio University entitled “Appalachians: A Contemporary Cultural Perspective.”

“It was a very large, multidimensional project that involved music and film, literature and the arts. It really involved the community in getting them to ask questions about cultural identity, specifically Appalachian identity,” she said.

The Paul and Lulu Hilliard University Art Museum opened in spring of 2004. Located at 710 East Saint Mary Boulevard, it’s open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. For more information, call (337) 482-2278 or go to <http://museum.louisiana.edu/>