

http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_ec3b1608-d313-5e7c-8d39-fff03939600e.html

World-class glass art makes med center worth a visit

By John DrsqoAddario Special to The Advocate **OCT 21, 2015 - 12:39 PM**



Medical centers aren't usually the kind of places you go unless you have to.

But if the new University Medical Center on Tulane Avenue between South Galvez Street and South Claiborne Avenue wasn't on your list of places to visit this month, you may want to reconsider: Two world-class art installations in the new building are well worth seeking out.

Occupying a space in the center of the atrium lobby of the main Rev. Avery C. Alexander Academic Research Center building is artist Ray King's soaring, shimmering "River Spirit" (2015), with its geometric planes and cascading expanses of steel and colored glass.

At first glance, the piece looks like an abstract melange of architectural-inspired forms. It's only when you're standing directly beneath it that you recognize a familiar crescent shape, and it becomes clear that the piece is an axiometric map of New Orleans, built around hundreds of cubes of sparkling blue-tinted glass forming the Mississippi River and complete with street markers and different-colored panels representing 40 neighborhoods in the city.

Fittingly, the information desk in the center of the atrium affords a "sweet spot" view of the piece where all the layers line up to form a cohesive whole. Walkways surrounding the second and third floors of the atrium provide different and constantly shifting viewing perspectives as well.

In fact, "River Spirit" consists of five layers of maps, representing the city in expanding stages throughout its history from the early 18th century to the present day. Steel spheres embedded in the various layers represent the location of previous Charity Hospitals in the city as well as the current location of the new University Medical Center.

Measuring 32 feet high, "River Spirit" is made of approximately 5,000 glass pieces in addition to more than one ton of stainless steel components. The piece was installed in the atrium over a two-week period earlier this summer.

According to background information on the piece provided by the artist, the "inverted asymmetrical conical shape shows the explosive organic growth of New Orleans and how the river shapes its geometry."

Based in Philadelphia, King spent his childhood summers at his grandfather's dairy farm outside of Covington. "River Spirit" is his first commissioned work in Louisiana.

Translucency and color also play a part in another new artwork at the center: Dale Chihuly's "Crystal Blue and Amber Tower" (2015). Installed over a stone-lined reflecting pond between two buildings and formed from dozens of individual pieces of sinuously twisting glass, it resembles an otherworldly piece of vegetation springing from its watery surroundings.

Chihuly is, of course, the most prominent American glass artist working today, and his works are already familiar to New Orleans audiences from his frequent shows at Arthur Roger Gallery as well as dozens of high-profile installations and special exhibitions across the country. "Crystal Blue and Amber Tower" is a variation on the artist's "Chandelier" pieces, which are among the artist's most recognizable works.

"I am honored to present artwork at University Medical Center New Orleans," Chihuly said in a statement. "The artwork on view is from my Tower series, which I started in 1997. I began to create Towers as a variation on the Chandelier form for places where suspending sculpture was impossible. The idea just came from looking at one of my Chandeliers and imagining what it would look like upside down. With the long, curly branches of glass reaching outwards and upwards, we're reminded the liveliness of nature comes from asymmetry. I hope those visiting the facility will enjoy the artwork."

Both Chihuly's "Crystal Blue and Amber Tower" and King's "River Spirit" were funded via proceeds from the Louisiana Percent for Art Program, in which one percent of the total construction costs for a new state-funded building are earmarked for public displays of visual art. According to material provided by the program, it has placed approximately 186 artworks in buildings across the state since its inception in 1999.

While both pieces are viewable to the public during regular business hours, the center will be hosting a community event to officially introduce the works along with the rest of the new University Medical Center as part of the citywide Katrina10 events commemorating the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina on Saturday, Aug. 29.

It's definitely one medical center appointment you won't want to miss.

You May Like

Sponsored Links by Taboola

"White Oil" Discovery Could Make OPEC Obsolete

Oil & Energy Investor