

Art comes alive at new YAYA Center

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Located in the LaSalle Street Corridor in Central City, the YAYA Arts Center will serve as a hub for the arts. Construction is nearly finished on the new building, which has space for young people to learn creative arts, complete their projects and sell them in the YAYA gallery. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

Known for its celebration of the arts, New Orleans has a new creative asset ? a 6,000-square-foot home for the Young Aspirations/Young Artists program ([YAYA](#)) designed by the architecture firm of Tulane University professor [Byron Mouton](#).

The new YAYA Arts Center opened in June at 3322 LaSalle St. in Central City to serve

as headquarters for the 27-year old organization, which teaches young people creative and life skills for a career in the arts. Offering free after-school programs in painting, sculpture and glassblowing, YAYA also has a gallery where the budding artists sell their work.

Those elements come together in a building conceived by Mouton and Lauren Hickman of [bildDesign](#). Both also teach at the Tulane [School of Architecture](#).

Mouton's involvement in community projects led to his work with YAYA. He is director of the [URBANbuild](#) program at Tulane ? his architecture students have designed and built nine homes, several in Central City, and a community market over the past decade.

"Now YAYA has a facility located in a community that can benefit from the exposure to these creative methods. It's pretty amazing, actually," Mouton said. The connection with Tulane goes deeper as well ? the CEO of YAYA, Gene Meneray, is a Tulane alumnus.

The new facility has a gallery and a large studio in the front, custom-designed space. A modular metal building in back is "a raw industrial studio" ready for a second-level mezzanine later. The project was fast-tracked for quick completion and with an eye to minimizing costs.

With the dust still clearing from the move, YAYA anticipates a full complement of programs this fall. Workshops will feature local community members, in keeping with YAYA's mission as a hub for the arts.

"We want them to feel like YAYA is an extension of what's already going on in the community," said Timeka Junius, YAYA's executive director of programs. "We want them to feel like this is a home."

In other words, that dust on the floor may be permanent, which is exactly how YAYA likes it.

Freelance writer Benjamin Morris contributed to this article.

“Anyone in the creative world here knows what the YAYA organization is about. It was great to be invited to get involved.”—architect and professor Byron Mouton