‘Youniverse:’ The Slowest Part of New York

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The fast-paced lifestyle of New York City is palpable. Residents live in a constant state of stress and rush of forward momentum. The lifestyle is addictive, but New Yorkers and tourists alike see the importance of stepping back, looking within and finding peace amidst the chaos. The curators of the new gallery exhibition “Youniverse” at Apexart understand the idea of inner peace and mindfulness, and have made it available to the public with their interactive exhibition.

The crisp white walls and unusually tall ceilings of the gallery seem cold and unwelcoming at first glance, but those feelings fade away as soon as the viewer approaches the interactive pieces. Wires connect varying sizes of headphones to iPhones, televisions, projectors and sound machines. Yet the screens give no insight as to their purpose. There are no instructions, no clues. The brochure at the door describes this place as “what human life is about — being happy, healthy and in harmony.” It is all up to the participant to use the technology as they see fit, and see where the labyrinth of sound and visual image leads.

From recordings of humpback whales to a polychromatic film that moves with the sound of your breath, “Youniverse” strives and succeeds in its goal of fabricating a new level of mindfulness about one’s existence and the importance of looking within to facilitate self-discovery. Being with others during the interaction with the art, whether friends or strangers, is at first uncomfortable, but has a purpose.

The peeling back of New York’s confident and collected facade in such a stark and foreign environment reveals a sort of nakedness and a definite air of self-consciousness. However, the exhibit is “centered around fun, non-judgmental, compassionate, caring and kind togetherness” as the placard claims, so when the headphones are on or the theater curtain closes, participants are immersed. The white walls seem to dissolve into the deepest corners of peripheral vision.

Through the imaginative and unexpected uses of technology in “Youniverse,” participants are able to interact with the devices of their everyday lives for the purpose of relaxation and exploration rather than stress and isolation. Despite the lack of instruction in the exhibition, the ease and familiarity of the medium between viewers and the artistic experience calls into question the role of technology in everyday New York City. It even transcends the boundaries created by the boroughs. An iPhone is not merely a facilitator of an accretion of emails or deadline alerts. It can be programmed and used to create the environment of self-empowerment and unity present in the Apexart Gallery.

“Youniverse” embodies the yogi theory that everything one could ever need is within one’s self. There is no need for a special person or machine to create the environment and feeling of emotional contentment that radiates from both a vinyasa class and this exhibition. All that is needed is time for reflection and self-healing, and even New Yorkers can reap the benefits of peace and stability on a Tuesday evening.

“Youniverse” is on display at Apexart Gallery at 291 Church St. through Dec. 17.

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