

# Downtown gallery opening launches UNT institute

By Lucinda Breeding / Staff Writer

Even with just 2,400 square feet — a pinch of space in the age of “super” retail stores — UNT on the Square feels big, spacious and clean.

The University of North Texas celebrated the grand opening of its new space on the downtown Square on Wednesday evening with an invitation-only party. The gallery and performance space is the public portal for the newly launched Institute for the Advancement of the Arts.

Dr. Wendy Wilkins, provost and vice president for academic affairs at UNT, said the institute and its community outreach are a combined effort to keep the university’s heritage in the spotlight.

“As there is all this continued focus on more national research and engineering programs at universities, we don’t want to lose sight of the arts,” Wilkins said. “The arts are a big part of the university’s history. We’re sticking to our heritage. There was a New York Times article not that long ago about Denton being the next Austin. We can’t forget that. We have to keep pushing on that.”

UNT indeed has a history of achievement and excellence in the arts. The university’s flagship program is its jazz studies program, which has a growing roster of A-list performers, composers and social scientists who work in music research. The College of Visual Arts and Design boasts luminaries with renown here and overseas. Painter Annette Lawrence has work in the Dallas Museum of Art collection. Sculptor Don Schol recently had a suite of woodblock prints based on his experience in Vietnam at the Photographs Do Not Bend gallery in Dallas.

Wilkins said the institute will have two major programs, an artist-in-residency and a faculty fellowship. The inaugural fellows of the institute are Cindy McTee, a regents professor of music and a prolific composer, and Dornith Doherty, an art professor who teaches photography.

“Faculty fellowships are opportunities for faculty to have the valuable commodity, which is time,” Wilkins said. “They submit proposals to be fellows. The idea is to get a semester or a year to focus on their artwork. They request what they need.”

Wilkins said she expects fellows to take time off from teaching, and to drop out of their university committees if they choose, to focus on a project of their choice. It’s akin to sabbaticals, in which teachers take time off with pay to study, practice or focus on a project.

Students get the benefit of visiting artists, Wilkins said. The inaugural artist-in-residence, award-winning filmmaker Guillermo Arriaga, arrived for his first week in the classroom on Tuesday. Arriaga said he wanted to share his experience within the UNT radio, television and film department.

“The university has a good reputation,” Arriaga said. “[Film professors] Ben and Melinda [Levin] are known. I am eager to be here and work with the students.”

Arriaga said he might focus part of his five weeks next spring on a novel.

Wilkins said that vacant faculty spots in the classroom will be filled by visiting artists. “For artists, what they really need is time, and time is actually very expensive,” she said.

UNT on the Square, at 109 N. Elm St., opened with an exhibit from the Print Research Institute of North Texas. The space has a few hip, contemporary furnishings and white walls set off by a curved, green back wall and a curved portion of the ceiling over the entrance.

“My first job is to get a director for the space,” Wilkins said. “That person will be in charge of running that space. We want to build that community presence there. We’d like to create some partnerships with the arts groups in town, maybe showing some of their work here, and vice versa.”



DRC/David Minton

*Red Horse With Tethers* by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, part of a collection from the Print Research Institute of North Texas, hangs in the new UNT on the Square gallery at 109 N. Elm St.