UTRGV College of Fine Arts

ARTS zine



FALL 2026 ISSUE 2

CROSSROADS OF CREATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

02 ARTSzine Welcome

04 Message from the Dean

06 Letter from the Editor

08 Distinguished Artist Series

10 New Faculty

14 At the Crosswords of Research & Creative Works

22 Moving Through the Crossroads

27 Transatlantic Conversations In Flamenco

32 Crossroads of Creation: Where Stories, Arts, and Communities Meet

36 College of Fine Arts Fall 2026 Accomplishments

ARTSzine

Where Creativity Moves

ARTSzine is the vibrant digital magazine of the UTRGV College of Fine Arts, a dynamic space where the creative energy of our campus, the Rio Grande Valley, and communities beyond comes alive. Through powerful stories, compelling images, and bold ideas, ARTSzine celebrates the artists, students, faculty, alumni, and community partners whose work is shaping culture, inspiring audiences, and expanding what is possible.

Every issue invites readers to experience the arts in motion: to discover new voices, attend performances and exhibitions, support creative scholarship, and join a growing community of future Vaqueros, patrons, makers, and visionaries.

ARTSzine Assistive AI Attestation

ARTSzine Assistive AI Attestation at ARTSzine, creativity begins and ends with people. Our magazine elevates the voices, visions, and achievements of UTRGV College of Fine Arts students, faculty, alumni, artists, and community partners, and we believe their stories deserve care, accuracy, originality, and human judgment. ARTSzine may use assistive AI tools for editing, accessibility, formatting, and workflow support. All published work is human-created, fact-checked, edited, and approved by the ARTSzine editorial team and College of Fine Arts representatives.





MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN:

Dear College of Fine Arts Community:

Welcome to our Fall 2026 edition of ARTSzine, the digital magazine of the UTRGV College of Fine Arts. We are so proud to share with you the many accomplishments of our students, alumni, and faculty. We have many upcoming events and invite you to attend these on and off campus performances, exhibits, and readings.

Creative work does not happen in isolation and our theme this year, "Crossroads of Creation," illustrates how the arts happen when our paths cross and we celebrate our community of actors, artists, dancers, musicians, and storytellers.

This collaborative spirit is present in these future year highlights:

- **Opening of the Brownsville Visual Arts Complex.** This 46,000 square foot complex will house studios and labs for 2D, 3D, and visual communication design. The centerpiece is the Gallery housed in the original 1929 school building of the former Longoria Elementary School
- **UTRGV in Italy.** Led by the College of Fine Arts, UTRGV is opening a study abroad site at the 14th century Palazzo di Bourbon del Monte in Umbria. A portion of the castle is dedicated to UTRGV to teach and conduct research and creative work. Students from the School of Art and Design will spend the fall in central Italy with another group of theatre students to follow in May.
- **Arts Industry and Workforce readiness.** The College of Fine Arts is creating external partnerships throughout the Valley to incubate new entrepreneurial endeavors in support of our alumni. Plans are underway to house a professional repertory theatre, create a film production studio, facilitate visual artist co-ops for gallery exhibits, and connect vendors to creative writers to sell their work.
- **Distinguished Artist Series**. We have an amazing lineup of artists:
- **Jazz singer Jane Monheit on October 2**, sponsored by the UTRGV Office of the Provost, Sidebar and FreeAgent and Co.
- **Our new annual Christmas tradition**, Merry-posa Christmas with RGV's very own Mariachi Mariposas on December 18 & 19.
- Through the sponsorship of Valley Keyboard, Van Cliburn Bronze Medalist, **Evren Ozel**, will perform a piano recital on January 28.
- **Our season will conclude with Grammy-Award Winner Time for Three**, sponsored by Melhart Music Center, Sidebar, and FreeAgent & Co.

These are just a few things that we are looking forward to this year. Enjoy reading this latest ARTSzine – I can't wait to see you on campus!



Jeffrey Ward, DMA
Dean, College of Fine Arts



FROM THE EDITOR

Dr. Mark Joseph Ramírez

We often imagine the artistic process as spontaneous or indulgent, a realm of inspiration unbound by rules or rigor. Yet, this perception collapses under closer scrutiny. The artist, much like the scientist, works at the edge of the unknown, testing ideas, refining methods, and treating failure as an essential part of discovery. Hypotheses become sketches; experiments become iterations; conclusions become works that invite interpretation rather than closure.

Neither process is linear, and neither tolerates complacency. What emerges is not chaos, but a disciplined pursuit. In both cases, we stand at the crossroads of creation. While creativity itself sits at the intersection of disciplines, many practitioners remain confined within disciplinary silos. Where the scientist often moves to contain uncertainty, the artist often moves to unbind structure. Taken alone, neither stance is sufficient for inquiry or for navigating a complex world increasingly shaped by science and technology.

Martha Nussbaum argues that "citizens cannot relate well to the complex world around them by factual knowledge and logic alone." They also require what she calls the "narrative imagination": the capacity to imagine oneself in the position of another, to interpret that person's story intelligently, and to grasp the emotions, wishes, and desires that shape their experience.[1]

Although Nussbaum grounds this argument in literature and the arts, the same imaginative capacity is vital for scientific and technological citizenship, for sensing the human stakes of data models, policy decisions, quality of life, and for envisioning the social worlds scientific advances help create.

[1] Martha C. Nussbaum, Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 95–96.

Realizing this potential in practice requires forms of inquiry that bring together, rather than separate, artistic, scientific, philosophical, experiential, and contemplative traditions of knowledge, including knowledge traditions sustained by communities indigenous to the lands and waters where this work occurs.[2] The most transformative work, therefore, happens at the crossroads, where methods overlap, boundaries dissolve, and discovery outweighs convention.

Art, in this sense, is not separate from other disciplines but central to them. It is a gateway through which we encounter deeper threads of connection, to ideas, to the shared questions we examine, and to one another. At its best, art does more than express. It creates movement. It disrupts convention, challenges what we know and how we know it, and creates space for new perspectives, questions, and communities. Rigorous, dynamic, and interdisciplinary, artistic process is not above science, but alongside it: an essential practice of questioning, discovery, and societal transformation.

[2] See European Commission, "Culture," 2026, accessed September 1, 2026, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/culture_en, for the Commission's framing of culture as integral to Europe's social future and its effort to integrate cultural perspectives across policymaking.

DISTINGUISHED *Artist Series*

2026 - 2027 ARTIST LINEUP



UTRGV PERMANENT COLLECTION
SEPTEMBER 03, 2026
Curator Talk & Opening Reception



BRAVE LITTLE COMPANY
SEPTEMBER 17, 2026
Theatre for Everyone



JANE MONHEIT
OCTOBER 02, 2026
Two-Time Grammy-Nominated & Chart-Topping Jazz Vocalist



ALVARO SAAR RIOS
OCTOBER 29, 2026
Award-Winning Playwright

*Sponsored by **Office of the Provost** & Sidebar | FREEAGENT&CO.*



THE ART OF LOC HUYNH
NOVEMBER 19, 2026
Artist Talk & Opening Reception

*Sponsored by **International Student Services***



MARIACHI MARIPOSAS
DECEMBER 18 & 19, 2026
A Merry-Posa Christmas with the RGV's Finest All-Female Mariachi!



EVREN OZEL
JANUARY 28, 2027
International Award-Winning Pianist

Sponsored by Valley Keyboards & The Piano Gallery



EFREN OLIVARES
FEBRUARY 04, 2027
Author & Immigration Human Rights Lawyer



TIME FOR THREE
APRIL 21, 2027
Grammy & Emmy-Winning String Ensemble

Sponsored by Melhart Music Center & Sidebar | FREEAGENT&CO.

To purchase **tickets** scan the QR Code or Visit: **UTRGVARTS.tiny.us/das**

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sidebar | FREEAGENT&CO. · Valley Keyboards & The Piano Gallery · Melhart Music Center



WELCOME NEW FACULTY

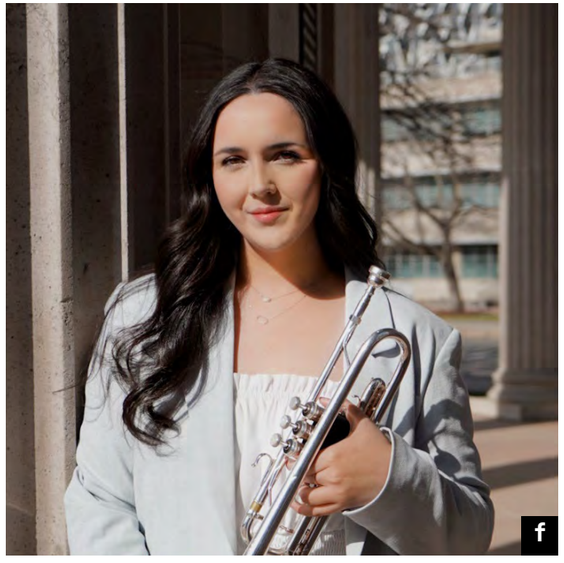

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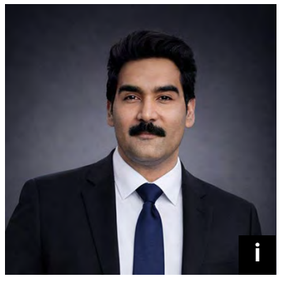

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Azadeh Jalal – *Assistant Professor in Visual Communication Design [a]*

Azadeh is a visual communication designer, educator, and researcher who approaches design as a powerful way to make ideas clear, engaging, and meaningful. With a background that combines professional design practice and design research, she helps students develop creative solutions for real communication challenges.

Erik Deerly – *Director of the School of Art & Design [b]*

Erik is a visual and sound artist whose interdisciplinary work connects sound, installation, video, photography, composition, and new media. As director of the School of Art & Design, he supports a learning environment where students can explore ideas across disciplines, experiment with materials and technologies, and develop a distinctive creative voice. His own artistic practice, exhibited across the Americas, Asia, and Europe, models the curiosity, collaboration, and openness to discovery that help students thrive as artists and designers.

Francesca Lally – *Assistant Professor in Printmaking & Drawing [c]*

Francesca is an artist, printmaker, and educator whose work moves across photography, performance, fiber, cinema,drawing, and printmaking. With a BFA from CalArts and an MFA in Printmaking from the Tyler School of Art, Lally encourages students to take creative risks, develop their individual visual voices, and connect their work to the wider world of contemporary art.

Rylee Henson – *Assistant Professor in Art History and Director of Galleries [d]*

Rylee brings art history to life by connecting classroom learning with the work of artists, exhibitions, and the broader cultural conversations shaping the visual arts today. As director of galleries, Henson helps create meaningful opportunities for students to encounter contemporary art firsthand, engage with visiting artists, and participate in a vibrant exhibition culture.

Xueting Wu – *Assistant Professor in Visual Communication Design (Print Media) [e]*

Xueting is a visual communication designer, researcher, and educator with expertise in graphic design, UI/UX design, and design research. Her teaching helps students see print and visual communication as both creative expression and a tool for connecting people with ideas, information, and communities. Students are encouraged to combine research, experimentation, and strong visual craft as they develop thoughtful work for print, digital, and emerging media contexts.

Rebecca Ortiz – *Assistant Professor of Trumpet [f]*

Rebecca is an accomplished trumpet performer and educator who brings energy, artistry, and a student-centered approach to music-making. Originally from Laredo, Texas, she has pursued advanced study in trumpet performance and pedagogy and has earned recognition through national competition. In the studio and onstage, Ortiz supports students as they strengthen their technical skills, deepen their musical expression, and grow into confident performers,collaborators, and educators.

Josh Kennedy – *Assistant Professor of Practice in Film Production [g]*

Josh is a South Texas-based filmmaker, actor, writer, producer,and director whose career includes more than 20 independent feature films. He brings firsthand production experience into the classroom, helping students understand how films move from a creative idea to a finished project.

Martin Daniel – *Assistant Professor in Screenwriting [h]*

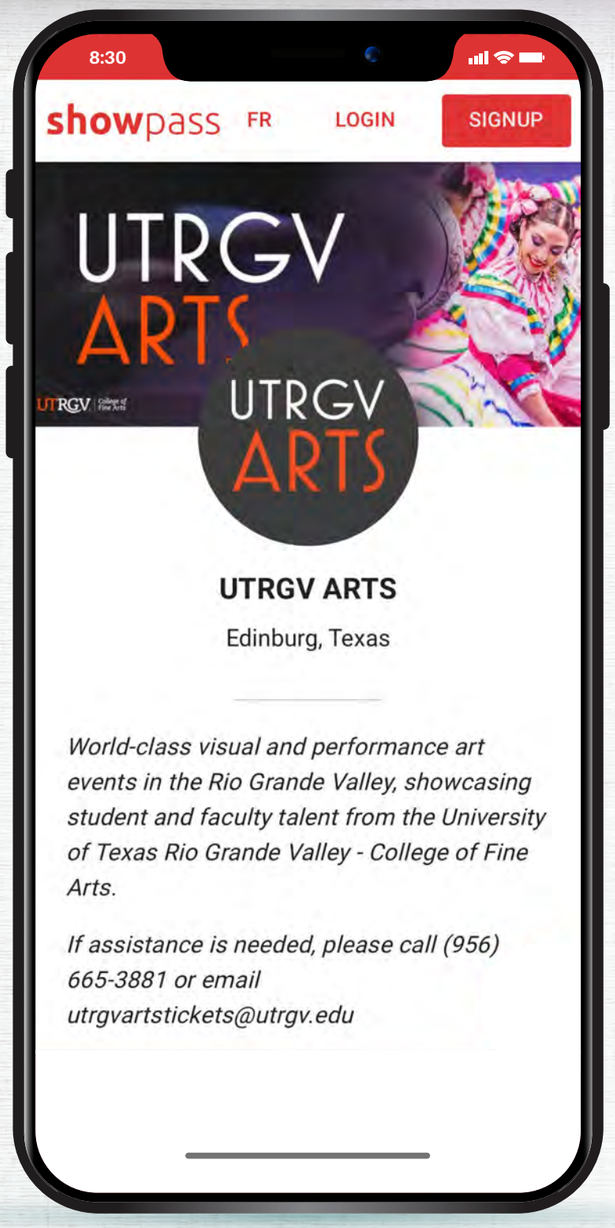
Martin is a screenwriter, script-development consultant, and teacher who helps emerging writers turn compelling ideas into screen stories with structure, voice, and emotional impact. Drawing on extensive international experience in writing instruction and script development, he brings real-world perspective to the creative process from first draft through revision.

Karo Ahmadi Dehrashid – *Assistant Professor in Visual Communication Design [i]*

Karo is a multidisciplinary designer and educator whose work brings together graphic design, UI/UX, motion, poster design, and emerging technologies.

Pablo Guerra-Monje – *Assistant Professor in Theatre Design [j]*

Pablo is a theatre and scenic designer whose international training and award-recognized work bring a broad creative perspective to theatrical design. Drawing on studies in Madrid and Memphis as well as professional engagement with major design exhibitions and theatre festivals, Guerra-Monje encourages students to experiment boldly, collaborate generously, and transform imaginative ideas into memorable stage environments.



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AT THE CROSSROADS OF RESEARCH AND CREATIVE WORKS

How the Marialice Shary Shivers Endowed Chair in Fine Arts is using artistic practice to connect research, regional opportunity, health, and community engagement at UTRGV.

Dr. Mark Joseph Ramírez





Dr. Mark Joseph Ramírez brings a distinctive perspective to his role as the newly appointed Marialice Shary Shivers Endowed Chair in Fine Arts at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. He approaches the position with deep respect for its ceremonial significance and institutional legacy, yet his deeper interest lies in what a chair can build: an Arts Institute for Innovation (AI²), centers, public tools, durable partnerships, and forms of storytelling that are less hackneyed and empty, stories capable of carrying an idea beyond its enthusiasm.

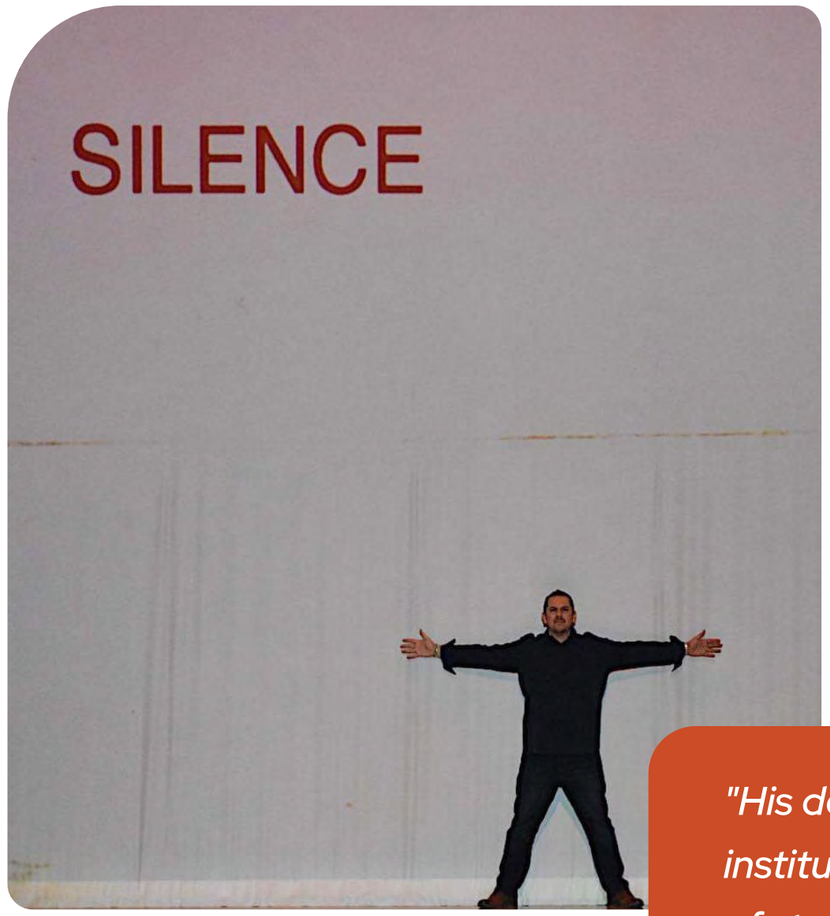


"The artist, like the scientist, works at the edge of the unknown: testing ideas, refining methods, and working through failure not as a verdict, but as part of discovery."
- Dr. Mark Joseph Ramírez

The Chair as Blueprint

Dr. Ramírez comes to the Marialice Shary Shivers Endowed Chair in Fine Arts as a creative artist, mixed-methods researcher, and educator equally at home in the studio, the archive, and the community. His work sits at the intersection of creative practice, research, and public engagement, with a consistent through line: finding ways for the arts to help people understand where they are, who they are with, and what can be imagined together. That orientation makes him a natural fit for a position built nearly fifty years ago through the generosity of Marialice Shary Shivers, a civic figure and arts advocate with deep connections to the Rio Grande Valley. Its original purpose was both commemorative and practical: to secure a lasting future for the arts at a university serving a rapidly changing region. Ramírez reads that inheritance as a mandate rather than a monument. The question guiding his work is at once modest and radical: What changes when the arts are understood not as enrichment or an add-on but as infrastructure for opportunity, health, learning, and collective innovation?

His answer is architectural in the most ambitious sense. Innovation, in his view, should have a question, a community, a method of evaluation, a governance structure, a student role, and a plan for what happens when its original champions have moved on. To him, a promising project is unfinished until it has figured out how to remain useful.





"His deeper interest lies in what a chair can build: an arts institute for innovation-AI²...durable partnerships, and forms of storytelling that are less hackneyed and empty, stories capable of carrying an idea beyond its enthusiasm."

The Art of Building

Colleagues describe Ramírez as a systems thinker, a phrase that can suggest either visionary planning or an alarming number of flowcharts...In his case, it means that every idea is considered in relation to what will sustain it: who will run it, how it will be documented, what data it will produce, where its funding might come from, and how students and community partners can eventually make it their own.

The endowment is catalytic, not self-contained. Ramírez hopes to use it to attract larger federal and foundation grants, establish institutional partnerships, and create initiatives that will eventually seem so integral to the College of Fine Arts that students may scarcely remember they were once new. The desired legacy is not simply a sequence of events but a landscape: research labs, recurring public programs, organized research units, and enduring habits of collaboration.

At the center of this effort is the Arts Institute for Innovation, or AI², an institutional home for projects that refuse the conventional borders between disciplines. Its vision is to position UTRGV as a national leader in reimagining higher education through the artistic process as a connective force linking scientific inquiry, technological experimentation, public policy, entrepreneurship, and cultural work in pursuit of a more creative and sustainable society.



Nationally, more than fifty R1 universities operate comparable institutes as strategic hubs for external grant funding and collaborative innovation. Without an integrative structure, individual centers can pursue siloed goals, compete for scarce resources, and lose the benefit of shared methods and infrastructure. AI² offers a different model: one built around shared resources, cross-pollination of methods, trans-disciplinary projects, and research-governance structures that can support work across the university.

Support from the Shivers Chair will help solidify AI²'s foundation while enabling the potential for developing future centers in Arts Entrepreneurship, Arts as Medicine, and Arts of the Fronteras and the Americas. Together, these efforts aim to expand UTRGV's external funding capacity, strengthen collaborative networks, and deepen the creative vitality of the Rio Grande Valley.

A Regional Mirror

One of Ramírez' proposed anchor initiatives, the UTRGV Center for Arts Entrepreneurship, begins with a difficulty familiar to many communities in the Valley: cultural abundance is not always matched by data, investment, or institutional visibility. The region possesses festivals, artists, cultural centers, informal gathering places, university programs, and a substantial network of creative workforce. Yet much of that activity can be difficult to measure with the standard indicators favored by policymakers and funders.

*"**A promising project is unfinished** until it has figured out **how to remain useful**."*

The center's proposed keystone tool, the Innovative Arts Capital Calculator, abbreviated as IAC², would attempt to make this ecology more legible. It would combine arts participation, cultural tourism, educational and demographic data, and patterns of collaboration in a shared analytic and visualization platform, designed especially for under-resourced and data-scarce contexts.

A dashboard, of course, is only as useful as the decisions it changes. The ambition of IAC² is therefore not simply to produce elegant charts. A city planner, school-district official, arts administrator, or community organizer should be able to use it to see where participation is high, where cultural tourism is growing, where educational outcomes lag, and where a coordinated intervention might matter. The project would also invite local partners into the interpretive process. They would challenge the indicators, identify what is missing, and help shape reporting formats that reflect lived realities rather than merely the preferences of a spreadsheet.



Care as a Creative Practice

A second project moves from the regional economy to the intimate terrain of care. Under the working title "The Arts as Medicine," Ramírez and a team of collaborators are developing a pilot protocol for arts-based interventions for people living with mild to moderate dementia and Alzheimer's disease. The project does not propose that art replace clinical treatment. It asks something more practical: whether structured, personalized engagements with music, movement, visual art, and storytelling can be delivered safely, acceptably, and consistently alongside standard care. The early focus is feasibility, recruitment, retention, session completion, caregiver response, safety, staff training, and the unglamorous but decisive question of whether a real clinic or community organization can sustain the work.

This is where Ramírez' preference for infrastructure becomes especially clear. The aim is not merely to demonstrate that an arts intervention might be beneficial under ideal research conditions. It is to create manualized workflows, manageable data collection, training structures, and adaptable protocols that staff members can use after the researchers have left the room.

Cost, access, and adaptation are treated as central evidence rather than afterthoughts. What resources are necessary? What must change to serve participants with different linguistic, cultural, or physical needs? How much training does a facilitator require? The goal is a model that can scale, moving from a pilot study to other care sites and from a promising idea to routine practice.

The Long View

The Center for Arts Entrepreneurship and Arts as Medicine project might initially appear to occupy separate universes: one concerns creative economies and regional opportunity; the other, cognition, care giving, and dignity. But in Ramírez' conception, both belong to the same argument. The arts are not an auxiliary benefit distributed after the supposedly essential work has been done. The arts are part of how communities learn, organize, heal, make meaning, and imagine viable futures.



Students are meant to occupy the center of this ecosystem rather than its margins. Ramírez' model of mentorship puts them into active roles, as research assistants, co-authors, creative collaborators, proposal writers, analysts, and translators of complex ideas for public audiences. For many, such work may provide a first sustained encounter with funded creative research and with the possibility that artistic and analytic skills can travel into education, health, public policy, entrepreneurship, and community development.

The Shivers Chair is rooted in the histories and conditions of the Rio Grande Valley: its borderland character, multilingual communities, cultural traditions, institutional needs, and uneven access to resources. Yet its projects are designed to speak outward, offering models for other regions that are likewise rich in culture and constrained by conventional measures of value. The visible results may eventually include new centers, grants, partnerships, exhibitions, publications, and public programs. The less visible results may prove equally consequential: students who understand themselves as civic and intellectual actors; local organizations equipped with better tools for decision-making; families encountering arts-based forms of connection in the midst of care; and administrators who regard the arts as a public necessity rather than an amenity. In that sense, the Shivers Chair transforms recognition into responsibility and legacy into resilient infrastructure.





MOVING THROUGH THE CROSSROADS

At UTRGV's Dance Department, a season of choreography, travel, and collaboration becomes a small atlas of motion, from UTRGV dance studios to New York sidewalks and an Austin festival stage.

Dance often starts before the music. It begins by gathering in the studio: shoes brushing across marley, a dancer running the same eight counts again because the body has not caught up with the mind. At the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, spring and summer unfolded that way: through rehearsals, departures, returns, and the steady work of making something brief feel worth sharing.

The department's spring concert featuring faculty works included "Americanas," a work by guest artist Jose Zamora of South Texas College. Drawing on Bad Bunny's music, the piece considers self-awareness, relationships, and women taking up space, onstage, and perhaps beyond it. Zamora described the work as a portrait of dancers grounded in the present, rather than focused on proving themselves. They are not performing for approval so much as inhabiting the moment, real people moving in real time.

Professor Garcia's works approached a different kind of pressure. "The Re:currence," a quartet that grows out of Garcia's 2024 duet "SELVES," follows patterns as they emerge, dissolve, and reappears. Its dancers encounter duality through the force of repeated movement and the tension of opposites. Garcia's newer octet, "LUMEN," continues to take shape this summer in preparation for Bailando International Dance Festival (Corpus Christi, TX). It examines overload, what it means to remain present while change arrives faster than it can be absorbed. Energy gathers, spills, recalibrates. Control meets release; attention meets overwhelm.

In February, the Houston-based artists Joel and Lizzy Aguilera, of Mezclada Dance Company, arrived to set "She Moves" on eight UTRGV dancers. Originally created for Mezclada's Mind, Body, & Soul, the work was reimagined in only three rehearsals. Its starting point is hip-hop, but its vocabulary expands through Latin movement, music, and aesthetics, as well as contemporary dance. The result is a study in physicality and spatial awareness, a conversation between technique, expression, and the evolving language of a body in motion.

*"It examines overload, what it means to **remain present while change arrives** faster than it can be absorbed."*



For several graduating dance majors, Arlet Juarez, Rebekah Matias, Analisa Ochoa, Hannah Perez, Isela Saavedra, and Anel Valdivia, the season also marked a threshold. Graduation produces the familiar mixture of ceremony and uncertainty: a last performance may look very much like a first rehearsal, except that everyone involved understands the time has become more precious. The dancers leave with the invitation to keep moving, into whatever comes next.





A City in Eight Counts

New York, meanwhile, offered its own choreography. Organized by Professor Rebeca Gamborino, with support from Professors Garcia and Gina Laurenzi, a group of UTRGV students traveled to the city for Gibney's Learning and Leadership Program. There were classes, panel discussions, and the practical education of navigating a city whose tempo does not pause for anyone.

Angelica Aguirre, Brianna Alanis, Jennaka Martinez, Servando Salinas, Georgina Zamora, and Marlen Zamora studied at the Alvin Ailey Dance Studio and Steps on Broadway. They rode the ferry to the Statue of Liberty, walked through Central Park, and folded bits of site-specific dancing into the spaces between destinations. Little Italy, Times Square, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a performance of Chicago became part of the itinerary, not merely landmarks, but materials for future work.



"The deeper lesson is that ***movement is rarely only movement.*** *It is a way of carrying a place with you"*

The Work Continues

The department's travels extended to Austin in early June, when Professor Gamborino and five students presented Détente at the Connec(TX)ions Dance Festival. Angelica Aguirre, Sofia De la Cerda, Rebekah Matias, Jennaka Martinez, and Natalia Montiel participated in classes and performed the new choreographic work, a brief migration northward, undertaken for the old and necessary reason that dancers go where the work is.

Closer to home, the inaugural RGV Rooted Dance Festival took place from July 12 through 17, alongside the week of RADICLE. Classes were taught by choreographers and featured guest performers, offering a local audience the chance not simply to watch the work but to enter its practice.

Professor Laurenzi also led free 45-minute movement classes for UTRGV students at the Recreation Center: Barre Workout on Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 6:30 p.m., followed by Yoga Flow at 7:30 p.m. The invitation was uncomplicated: move, cool down, begin again.

Ballet Folklórico, directed by Professor Miguel Pena, had recently completed another season with a performance in Ouroboros. The title, with its image of a serpent circling back upon itself, seemed unintentionally apt for a department in which one performance continually became the condition for the next.

On July 16 and 17 at 7:30 p.m., Professors Laurenzi and Gamborino presented RADICLE: The First Seed to Sprout, an intergenerational concert in partnership with the Edinburg ACE Center. The program brought together student and professional performers, visual-art works by UTRGV Professor Timothy Gonchoroff, poetry by UTRGV Professor Emmy Perez, and original live music

A dance department can look like a place where people learn steps. But the deeper lesson is that movement is rarely only movement. It is a way of carrying a place with you: a studio at UTRGV, a Manhattan street, a festival stage in Austin, a body trying to find its balance in the noise. Then the music begins. Or maybe it has been there all along.





CROSSINGS: TRANSATLANTIC CONVERSATIONS IN FLAMENCO

Dr. Kurt Martinez

Esencia Flamenca is poised to turn the Rio Grande Valley into an unexpected listening post for Madrid's contemporary flamenco, threading a direct artistic line between UTRGV's School of Music and one of Spain's most influential guitar voices. [oscarherreroediciones]

Flamenco has always lived in tension between inheritance and reinvention, and guitarist-scholar Dr. Kurt Martinez, Director of the UTRGV School of Music, is leaning fully into that duality. His new recording project, Esencia Flamenca: The Music of Oscar Herrero, is not just a tribute album; it is a tightly woven dialogue between South Texas and Madrid, between a performer deeply rooted in borderland musical cultures and a composer who has helped codify flamenco pedagogy for the modern era. [flamencolive]

*"This is flamenco as an authored, **evolving repertoire**, not just a folkloric archive.*

From the outset, the project positions the Rio Grande Valley as a site of global flamenco exchange. Martinez's decision to devote an entire album to Herrero's concert works aligns with a broader shift in flamenco, treating its guitar repertoire not merely as accompaniment, but as a sophisticated, standalone literature worthy of focused curation and academic scrutiny.

Oscar Herrero: Redefining How Flamenco Is Learned

In contemporary flamenco, few figures have reshaped the way guitar is taught as decisively as Oscar Herrero. Internationally recognized for his methodical approach to technique and style, Herrero has built a far-reaching body of études, concert pieces, method books, and instructional media that have become canonical tools for students and professionals alike. [oscarherreroediciones]

His editorial imprint, Oscar Herrero Ediciones, and method series such as Flamenco Guitar Step by Step have effectively created a lingua franca for teaching flamenco guitar outside Spain, allowing conservatories and universities worldwide to engage the genre with a level of rigor once reserved for classical repertoire. Framing an album around his works is, therefore, both an artistic and pedagogical statement: this is flamenco as an authored, evolving repertoire, not just a folkloric archive. [oscarherreroediciones]

Mapping Flamenco's Emotional Spectrum

The track list for Esencia Flamenca reads like a condensed cartography of flamenco's inner universe. Martinez traverses a wide stylistic range, Soleá, Petenera, Tangos, Tanguillos, Taranta, Farruca, Fandangos, Rumba, Guajira, Sevillanas, Bulería, each palo offering a distinct emotional temperature and rhythmic architecture.



- Soleá and Taranta sink into introspective, often austere spaces, where silence and melismatic lines carry as much weight as the guitar's rasgueado.
- Petenera and Farruca explore darker, more enigmatic atmospheres, historically freighted with myth and melancholy.
- Tangos, Tanguillos, Rumba, and Bulería push toward kinetic release, their compás driving dance floors and tablaos worldwide.
- Fandangos, Guajira, and Sevillanas trace routes through regional color and transatlantic dialogue, with Guajira in particular hinting at the deep historical entanglement between Spanish and Latin American musical idioms.

Taken together, Herrero's works become a prism through which Martinez exposes flamenco's rhythmic vitality and emotional complexity, inviting listeners, many of them encountering these forms in South Texas for the first time, to hear the genre not as monolithic "Spanish guitar music," but as a sophisticated ecosystem of interconnected styles.



Composer & Performer, In Real Time

What elevates Esencia Flamenca beyond a conventional repertoire recording is the intimacy of its creative process. Rather than treating Herrero's scores as static documents, Martinez has engaged the composer in an ongoing, iterative conversation: recording each piece, sending drafts to Madrid, and incorporating Herrero's detailed feedback on articulation, phrasing, and expressive intent.

This kind of transatlantic co-direction blurs the line between interpretation and co-creation. The culmination, Herrero's own guest appearance on one of the tracks, gives the album an added layer of authenticity, not as a stamp of approval but as an audible moment of shared authorship. Listeners will be able to hear the composer's voice literally embedded in the recording, in dialogue with Martinez's finely honed technique and sensibility.

Sounding Like Flamenco, at the Source

Sonically, the project is committed to flamenco's core vocabulary. Martinez anchors the guitar with traditional percussion and palmas, the rhythmic hand-clapping that is as much an instrument as any cajón. These elements are not ornamental; they are structural, shaping the compás and framing the guitar's discourse within a communal rhythmic fabric.

The decision to have the album mixed and mastered by an audio engineer in Madrid further underscores the project's aesthetic north star. It is an insistence that the final sound should resonate with the genre's birthplace, not as purist gate keeping, but as a way of situating this Rio Grande Valley, based recording inside a global conversation about how flamenco ought to sound in the streaming era. The production choices become part of the pedagogy: students and listeners alike will encounter flamenco timbres curated from within the tradition's own sonic culture.

South Texas as a Flamenco Gateway

For Martinez, the stakes of Esencia Flamenca extend well beyond personal artistry. In his own words, working directly with Herrero has been both "a professional milestone and a personal honor," a chance to record repertoire that has shaped countless guitarists, including himself, with the composer's active guidance. The project operates as a living archive, preserving a significant body of contemporary flamenco works while opening them to audiences that might never set foot in a Madrid tablao.

Institutionally, the recording aligns seamlessly with the UTRGV College of Fine Arts' commitment to creative scholarship and global engagement. By connecting a regional public university in South Texas with one of Spain's foremost flamenco pedagogues, Esencia Flamenca becomes a case study in how higher education can function as an artistic bridge, collapsing geographic boundaries through sustained, expert collaboration.

When the album drops in Spring 2027 on major streaming and download platforms, it will carry with it multiple layers of resonance: a curated snapshot of Oscar Herrero's compositional voice, a meticulously crafted performance by Kurt Martinez, and a sonic corridor linking the Rio Grande Valley to southern Spain. For listeners, especially those in South Texas, this is more than a new release, it is an invitation into flamenco's present tense, heard through the shared artistry of two musicians who understand the genre as both heritage and horizon.

*"The **Rio Grande Valley** becomes a site of global flamenco exchange."*







CROSSROADS OF CREATION:

WHERE STORIES, ARTS, AND COMMUNITIES MEET

In the Rio Grande Valley, culture is rarely just one thing. It lives in the region's rich perspectives and community traditions, in the rhythm of a family story, in an ensemble rehearsal, a theatre, and a teacher helping a child discover the book that makes reading feel less like an assignment and more like a door opening. This is the setting for FESTIBA 2027, the Festival of International Books and Arts, which will return from February 1 through March 7 under the theme Crossroads of Creation: Where Stories, Arts, and Communities Meet.

FESTIBA 2027 will begin building momentum in fall 2026 through Fall FESTIBA, a series of events designed to invite audiences into the festival well before its official opening. These programs will take two forms: Engagement Events that add new dimensions to existing campus performances and exhibitions, and "Around the RGV" events that carry FESTIBA's ideas into communities throughout the region. The approach is simple: People connect more deeply with the arts when they have more than one way to enter the experience. An exhibition, for example, might begin with an artist talk thirty minutes after the opening, followed by a performance from a musical group. Rather than moving quickly through the gallery, guests would have time to stay, hear directly from the artist, and experience the space not simply as a place to view objects, but as a place to gather and connect.

"People connect more deeply with the arts when they have more than one way to enter the experience."







Crossroads of Creation: Where Stories, Arts, and Communities Meet is an invitation to move beyond the divisions that too often separate literacy from performance, education from pleasure, tradition from experimentation, and campus from community. It recognizes that these experiences are already connected. In the Rio Grande Valley, creativity has always flourished where nations, traditions, and artistic forms meet. FESTIBA 2027 brings these connections into public view, giving them a place on the calendar, a stage, and a shared space for the community. More than a festival to attend, FESTIBA 2027 is an invitation to participate: to read, listen, speak, perform, remember, and imagine together.

Join us in celebrating the stories, voices, and creativity that connect our region.



Festiba

Crossroads of Creation:
Where Stories, Arts, and Communities Meet

2026-2027

The Festival of International Books and Arts (FESTIBA) was established in 2006 to promote the importance of literacy, culture, and the arts to students, parents, educators, and community members throughout the Rio Grande Valley. Each year, FESTIBA celebrates the transformative power of the arts to connect, inspire, and educate.

FESTIBA Call for Entries

We're excited to receive your submissions!
[Submit Entry Here!]

For any questions, please email:
jessica.trevino@utrgv.edu

ARTZINE FALL 2026

College of Fine Arts Accomplishments

Creative Writing Hightlights

MFA Candidate in Creative Writing, Winner of the Texas Association of Creative Writers Graduate Poetry Competition.

- **Creative Writing Faculty Publications, New Works, and National Recognition.** Emmy Pérez expanded her major body of published work with Paper america: New and Selected Poems, forthcoming in TCU Press's Texas Poet Laureate series in spring 2026, alongside the fall 2025 release of her chapbook, Boxes with Zero Tolerance, from Mouthfeel Press. Her poetry and lyric essay also appeared in five recent anthologies and literary publications. Robert Moreira advanced new work for both page and stage: his musical Taino is under contract, while his short play Proxima b was presented at Playfest '25 in Monterey, California. His play Miriam's Song was also selected for the 2026 South Texas New Play Festival. José Rodríguez and Steven Schneider extended the department's literary reach through publications and nationally distributed anthologies. Rodríguez's work appeared in Bellingham Review and was reprinted in The Norton Introduction to Literature, while Schneider placed five poems across the Blue: a Hue Are You and All The Men Came and Danced anthologies.

- **Students and Alumni Earn National Recognition in Creative Practice.** MFA student Elizabeth Barrera, has an essay forthcoming in Texas Monthly in fall 2026. Recent graduate Jo Reyes-Boitel placed work in major queer and Latinx literary venues, including the Academy of American Poets' Poem-A-Day, the forthcoming I Love Us: Queer on the Borderlands, and Flower Song Press's JOTA: A Queer Latina/Latinx Anthology. Avery Castillo built an especially wide-ranging publication record across poetry, criticism, performance scholarship, and feminist writing. Their work appeared or is forthcoming with Feminist Press's WSQ: Body Matters, Aunt Lute Books' El Mundo Zurdo 10, The Rumpus, Host Publications, and Unsolicited Press, reflecting a creative practice that connects embodied writing, cultural criticism, and literary advocacy. Alumni and MFA students earned recognition on regional and national stages. Kenan Phillip published the poetry collection The Ego Rhythm with Flower Song Press and will appear as a featured poet at the 2026 Valley International Poetry Festival. Caroline de la Garza won the 2025 Valley International Poetry Festival Slam, while Kristin Montez extended the program's interdisciplinary reach through documentary film making, film-production credits, and invited presentations at the Houston Cinema Arts Festival and the 2026 Desert Nights, Rising Stars Writers Conference.



ARTZINE FALL 2026

College of Fine Arts Accomplishments

Department of Dance Highlights

Dance faculty and students expanded UTRGV's artistic reach through distinguished guest residencies, extensive regional performance activity, and new choreography that bridges Mexican folklórico, flamenco, contemporary dance, and community engagement.

- **Dance Faculty Research, Creative Achievement, and National Visibility.** Dana Shakleford expanded the department's interdisciplinary research profile through a collaboration with Dr. Juan Gonzalez of Kinesiology. Their study, Red light Wellness: Embracing Red and Infrared Light to Accelerate Recovery for Dancers, was presented at the International Association of Dance Medicine and Science Annual Conference in Las Vegas. Shackelford also collaborated with composer-pianist Lisa Ruth Niemeier and violinist Dr. Diana Seitz at the 2026 La Frontera International Piano Festival. Gina Laurenzi gained national and international visibility for environmentally focused dance research and performance.

Following completion of the Nan Giordano Jazz Program Certification at the professional level, Laurenzi presented Wasteland at the Aimed Dance Festival in Beaumont, a work examining fast fashion's ecological consequences.

Five of her ocean-themed screen dances were featured in the UN Decade of Ocean Science–affiliated OCEAN International Sound & Video Exhibition in Seoul, South Korea, and she presented her multimedia solo |beneath at Dance City Festival in New York City. Rebeca Gamborino and Gina Laurenzi strengthened the Rio Grande Valley's contemporary-dance ecosystem through Radicle: The First Seed to Sprout, an original production uniting choreographers, composers, local artists, and guest dancers. Gamborino's El Poder en lo Femenino was selected for the American College Dance Association South-Central Regional Conference Gala Concert, and she received the College of Fine Arts Emerging Scholar Award in recognition of her scholarly and creative achievement.

- **Dance Students Earn Regional Recognition and Professional Networking Opportunities**. Two senior capstone works represented UTRGV at the 2026 American College Dance Association South-Central Regional Conference at the University of North Texas. Martha Cervantes' Cardinal was selected for the conference's adjudicated concert, while Anel Valdivia Catalán's Fragmentos de Ausencia was chosen for informal-concert presentation, recognizing the students' choreographic achievement on a competitive regional stage.

Professor Rebeca Gamborino sponsored six dance majors to attend Gibney's Learning & Leadership Intensive in New York City, providing professional-development access to Angelica Aguirre, Briana Alanis, Jennaka Martinez, Servando Salinas, Marlen Zamora, and Georgina Zamora. The opportunity strengthened students' engagement with contemporary dance practice, leadership development, and the wider professional field.

The UTRGV Dance Ensemble sustained a robust statewide and regional presence, performing at the Jaramillo Dance Concert, Aimed Dance Festival, Brazos Dance Festival, Bailando Festival, the Texas Butterfly Festival, the American College Dance Association South-Central Regional Conference, and the Transcendence Dance Concert.

The ensemble also paired public performance with community access through the Rooted Dance Festival and Radicle, which premiered two new works by Gina Laurenzi and Rebeca Gamborino. UTRGV Ballet Folklórico Company served as a cultural ambassador across Texas and the Southwest. Its engagements included performances with Mariachi 7 Leguas in Baton Rouge, the Mexican Consulate Grito in Brownsville, a Tarleton State University residency, a New Mexico holiday tour, and multiple major UTRGV Performing Arts Center events, including Alegría, Ouroboros, and Summer Alegría.



ARTZINE FALL 2026

College of Fine Arts Accomplishments

School of Music Highlights

The School of Music achieved exceptional national and international visibility through first-time ensemble invitations, influential faculty research and performance, and a strong record of student and alumni placement and competition success.

- **Faculty scholarship, artistry, and pedagogy drew broad professional recognition.** Dr. Francis Favis performed at the Transplanted Roots Percussion Research Symposium in Porto, Portugal; the 2025 Percussive Arts Society International Convention; and the 2026 Festival of Contemporary Artists in Music. In collaboration with Dr. Alex Sanso, he completed an Ohio recital tour featuring performances at Ohio State University, Capital University, Bowling Green State University, and Ohio Wesleyan University, as well as chamber music masterclasses at Capital and Bowling Green. He was also admitted to the Percussive Arts Society's New Music/Research Committee. Dr. David Sadlier serves on the voice faculty for the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera.

  Dr. Scott Roeder was invited to perform Ralph Vaughan Williams' Tuba Concerto with the Cuenca Symphony Orchestra and the Guayaquil Municipal Philharmonic in Ecuador, under the direction of Dr. Norman Gamboa. He also appeared as a featured soloist at the 2026 International Tuba-Euphonium Association South Central Regional Conference, performing John Stevens' Grand Concerto for Four Tubas with the UTRGV Wind Orchestra. Dr. Shayna Isaacs earned the Pan American Vocology Association's Best Pedagogy Poster award for research on singers' use of compression garments and received a $1,500 Collaborative Vocology Outreach Award to support respiratory-behavior research.

  Dr. Jonathan Helmick received Argentina's Diploma al Maestro: Miembro Honorario and led UTRGV Wind Orchestra premieres and recording projects while presenting music-education research in Switzerland and at national conferences. Dr. Teresita D. Lozano presented research on border music and migrant experiences at leading national conferences, including the Society for Ethnomusicology, American Musicological Society, American Anthropological Association, and Society for American Music.

  She also served as a featured speaker in the Historians of Catholic Mexico international seminar series and as an invited presenter on Rio Grande Valley music heritage and ecological activism for the ARISE Program, in collaboration with The University of Texas at Austin, American Forests, and Texas Parks and Recreation.

- **UTRGV ensembles reached major state, national, and international stages.** Under Dr. Norman Gamboa, the UTRGV Symphony was selected for the first time as the invited college ensemble at the Texas Music Educators Association convention and recorded two albums for Edison Gramophone/Universal Music: Noches de México, featuring works by Samuel Zyman and Silvestre Revueltas, and A New Dawn, featuring music by Dr. Justin Writer. Gamboa also conducted national premieres with the Guayaquil Philharmonic Orchestra in Ecuador and the National Ballet and National Orchestra of Nicaragua.

- **Student and alumni achievement demonstrated the strength of UTRGV's professional preparation.** Student and alumni achievement demonstrated the strength of UTRGV's professional preparation. Graduates Paul Gutierrez and Nicholas Gomez secured public-school music positions in Laredo and San Benito ISDs, while percussion student Adam Reyna placed fifth nationally at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention. UTRGV trumpet students advanced to the National Trumpet Competition Large Ensemble semifinals for the first time in program history and performed at the International Trumpet Guild Conference at the Eastman School of Music.

  Alex Escamilla became the first UTRGV student accepted to the National Trumpet Competition Solo Division, while Fabiola Ahuja was appointed principal trumpet with Chicago Summer Opera Theatre and Christian Ramirez performed as lead trumpet in the Southeastern Summer Theater Institute's production of All Shook Up. Angel Gomez was accepted into the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Metropolitan Opera. The UTRGV Saxophone Quartet, Leo Duenes, Jay Rodriguez, Juan Zamarripa, and Roman Valenciano, performed at the 2026 Texas Music Educators Association Convention in San Antonio. At the 2026 South Central Regional Tuba/Euphonium Conference, Victor Cruz earned second place in the Artist Tuba Solo Competition; Noah Jaramillo placed third in the Artist Euphonium Solo Competition; Eduardo Zamarripa placed second in the Student Tuba Solo Competition; and Juan Tijerina placed second in the Student Euphonium Solo Competition. Jaramillo also competed in the 2026 Jeju International Euphonium Competition in South Korea with support from a UTRGV Engaged Scholar Award.

  Jose Castillo earned the bronze medal in the Artist Euphonium Division at the 2026 Leonard Falcone International Euphonium/Tuba Competition, where Cruz was named a semifinalist in the Artist Tuba Division. Adrian Mares received a graduate assistantship to pursue a master's degree in euphonium performance at the Cincinnati Conservatory.



ARTZINE FALL 2026

College of Fine Arts Accomplishments

Department of Theatre Highlights

UTRGV Theatre combined a full season of ambitious productions with expanded faculty expertise and substantial student recognition, reinforcing its role as a regional center for theatre-making, film, and Latino arts engagement.

- **UTRGV Theatre delivered a four-production 2025–26 season that gave students sustained professional-style production experience.** The season included The Rocky Horror Show, Bright Ideas, The Book of Will, and Mariela in the Desert, positioning performance, design, technical theatre, and collaboration as central components of students' education.
- **The department broadened its faculty capacity across film, design, and creative writing** with the addition of Joshua Kennedy in film production, Estevan Medrano in film production, Pablo Guerra-Monje in theatre design, and Martin Daniel in creative writing and screenwriting. Their appointments strengthen interdisciplinary preparation for students working across live theatre and motion-picture production.
- **Student achievement earned regional recognition and created a strong pipeline of original work.** The department supported more than 20 student-directed plays and films, while Jolyssa Perez, Diego Sifuentes, Kiana Saldana, and Mathew Castaneda received acting commendations at ACTF 2026. Additional commendations recognized ensemble performance, touring adaptability, student-centered production, and stage-management teamwork, reflecting the department's collective excellence on and off stage.



ARTZINE FALL 2026

College of Fine Arts Accomplishments

School of Art and Design Highlights

The School of Art and Design expanded its national and international profile through distinguished faculty exhibitions, publications, and funded research, alongside robust student participation in residencies, juried projects, conferences, travel opportunities, and community-engaged creative initiatives.

- **Faculty scholarship, creative practice, and externally supported research generated significant national and international recognition.** DM Witman was named a semifinalist in the 100th Annual International Competition at The Print Center in Philadelphia and presented the solo exhibition Ecologies of Mourning | Ecologies of Restoration at Schilt Gallery in Amsterdam; her work was also reviewed in Musée Magazine and featured in a Lenscratch interview. Dr. Riccardo Pizzinato received a €60,000 Belgian Science Policy Office P4Science grant as co-principal investigator for the CARVES sustainability project and earned a UTRGV International Study Programs Faculty Award. Coleton Lunt published in the internationally recognized journal Ceramics Art + Perception, had work selected for World Stage at Clay Gulgong 2026 in Australia, led an Ancient Chinese Ceramics workshop at Notre Dame in collaboration with the Imperial Kiln Museum, and was invited to participate in Material Mugs X at Companion Gallery.

Dr. Dan Li's article on preparing pre-service art teachers to design inquiry-based routines for K–12 art criticism is forthcoming in the International Journal of Arts Education, and she received $4,500 as principal investigator for research examining ethical considerations of AI-generated imagery in high-school digital art education. Lilia Cabrera advanced the Hogg Foundation–funded Art as Grounding collaboration with Social Work and served as project manager for the RGV Mural Project in Peñitas, an initiative connected to the Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural and Educational Center's $2.5 million Lilly Endowment award for Flight and Faith: Latinx Migration in the Art of Belief. Josie Del Castillo and Walker Tarver completed Flower Shop Residencies, while Marcus Farris was selected as one of six artists for the Soaring Gardens Artist Residency and Retreat in Pennsylvania and presented collaborative exhibitions in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Bergen, Norway.

- **Student achievements reflected growing national engagement, creative leadership, and professional preparation.** Karla Valadez Muñoz, Evelyn Hernandez, and Kaitlyn Garza were accepted to the Palette Project hosted by Daniel Keys at the Scottsdale Artists' School in Arizona. Daniela Giambra and Alexander Martinez participated in an international design conference in Canada, and Natalie Lawler received College of Fine Arts support for design-conference travel. Robert Martinez received a College of Fine Arts Global Travel Award for study in Brazil.

April Pardo and Erika Lina completed Flower Shop Residencies in Brownsville; Lina also earned a residency with Robin and John Gumaelius at the Tolovana Arts Colony in southwest Washington and a UTRGV Palette Project Workshop Student Research Travel Scholarship. Priscilla Sanchez led a sgraffito workshop for a Beginning Ceramics class. Karol Rodriguez Garcia received a CLAA travel grant to attend the 2026 NCECA Conference and co-curated Remnants of the River with Nicole Logan and Gael Garcia Gonzalez; Logan additionally received the Puentes Internship at Museo del Westside in San Antonio, was named a 2026 Gulf Scholar, and exhibited in Support Local, Part Two at Comminos Studios.

Esperanza Garza received ESAA support for Two Countries, One River, while Elyse Castillo and Katelyn Aguirre received ESAA funding for Shaping How You Feel. UTRGV visual communication students earned broad recognition across publication design, branding, packaging, animation, digital media, and illustration, demonstrating both technical range and competitive excellence in juried creative work.

Students received multiple Gold and Silver ADDY honors, along with Bronze and Honorable Mention distinctions, across categories including magazine design, digital publications, logo design, posters, integrated brand campaigns, packaging, animation, and digital creative technology.

Top recognitions included Best of Show for Andrea Gonzalez's The Sweater Bear | Odyssey Studios, a Special Judges Award for Animation for Minh Mai's Neon Dust Animation Trailer, and a Special Judges Award in publication design for Ris Cortez's Margins. Gold ADDY recipients included Natanael Garza for Kuii-Redesign, Ashley Sanchez for UnHarmed Cruelty Free Guide, Camila Luna-Zamora for Brightline Brandbook, Devin Garza for Insects: Scientific Infographics, Jeanette Sanchez for Flux - Brand Campaign, and Aylen Zuniga for Sub Dermal Magazine

Silver ADDY honors went to students including Camila Luna-Zamora for Interactive Magazine POWERHAUS, Yahaira Lopez for Churros del Mar, Maya De Castro for Interlude Interactive Magazine, Paul Sanchez for InnoVaqueros Brand Identity, Andrea Gonzalez for Pulse for US Open, Carlos Revilla for Star Flair illustration, Itzel Aldaco for Design Is Human, and Rebeca Santos Chavez for The Future of the LRGV. The awards also highlighted a strong cohort of emerging designers whose work earned Bronze and Honorable Mention recognition. Geraldine Barboza, Zayra Martinez, Daniela Martinez, Emily Barron, Yuri Garcia, Alyna Lizcano, and Stephanie Jimenez received bronze honors, while Kate Purdum and Sandrine Agbeko earned Honorable Mention distinctions. Collectively, these outcomes reflect a student body producing award-winning work across print, interactive, and campaign-based media under the mentorship of multiple faculty advisors.



FALL 2026 ISSUE 2

For additional information, or to inquire about having your artwork or achievements featured in a future issue, please contact the Dean's Office at COFA@utrgv.edu or visit utrgv.edu/cofa