

February 20, 2026

Harrison Keller, President
Rachel Barone, Board Secretary, UNT Board of Regents
University of North Texas
1155 Union Circle, #311425
Denton, Texas 76203-5017

Sent via Electronic Mail to president@unt.edu and rachel.barone@untsystem.edu

Dear President Keller and Board Secretary Barone,

As nonpartisan organizations dedicated to freedom of speech, thought, and inquiry, the National Coalition Against Censorship and the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas are alarmed by reports that an exhibition was abruptly taken down at the College of Visual Art and Design Gallery at the University of North Texas (UNT). Absent any credible reason, it would appear that the decision was made in response to the political viewpoints expressed within the exhibition, in violation not only of the school's exhibition policies, but of the guiding principle of academic freedom and the constitutional principle of free expression. Being a public university, UNT is bound by the First Amendment, which prohibits it from silencing speech based on its viewpoint. We urge UNT to apologize for its error, and publicly recommit to its own existing exhibition policy and the imperatives of academic freedom and the First Amendment.

The following factual recitation reflects our current understanding of the pertinent events; we recognize that there may be additional context or information, and we welcome any clarifications you may wish to provide. It is our understanding that an exhibition of work by the renowned artist Victor "Marka 27" Quiñonez, titled *Ni de Aquí, Ni de Allá (Not from Here, Nor from There)*, was invited, installed, and opened at UNT's CVAD Gallery February 3rd, with a reception planned for February 19th. The exhibition addresses the critically important and timely themes of immigration, Latin American culture, and the complexities of dual national identity. Notably, some works are critical of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), with the artist reimagining the agency logo, dubbing it "U.S. Inhumane and Cruelty Enforcement."

Though the exhibition was to remain on view until May 3rd, within days of opening, the windows to CVAD Gallery were covered with brown paper, exhibition announcements were removed from UNT social media and websites, and the work was deinstalled. On February 11, after students first reported the closure to the artist, Quiñonez received official notification from UNT that his loan agreements were canceled and his work would be returned, with no reason provided. Media reports suggest that on February 10 and 11, UNT administrators notified CVAD employees of the cancellation, but forbade them from speaking about it publicly at risk of termination.

The abrupt and unexplained closing of the exhibition and subsequent events raise serious First Amendment concerns. Presenting works addressing politically contested subjects can be challenging in the university context, but it is vital to the health of our democracy and to the preservation of academic freedom. As the Supreme Court of the United States has emphasized, the First Amendment robustly applies on public university campuses, whose facilities make up the "marketplace of ideas."¹ Indeed, the Supreme Court has long acknowledged academic freedom's "vital role" in maintaining our democracy:

To impose any strait jacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our Nation . . . Scholarship cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Teachers and students must always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding; otherwise our civilization will stagnate and die.

Sweezy v. State of N.H. by Wyman, 354 U.S. 234, 250 (1957).

That principle applies whether it is a student distributing a publication on campus² or an artist displaying their work in a gallery.³

These principles inform UNT's own policy for [art exhibited on campus](#), namely in that,

The University does not discriminate against works of art based on its content or the viewpoint(s) expressed. Further, exhibiting or promoting a work of art does not represent an official or unofficial endorsement of the ideas, opinions or views expressed by the artist, nor does it necessarily represent the views, opinions or positions of UNT, its student body, employees or officials.

In closing the exhibition, UNT has betrayed the principles of academic freedom, trampled upon artistic freedom, and very likely violated the First Amendment. We urge UNT to demonstrate its recommitment to its mission and policies that explicitly protect and support artists' and curators' rights to explore political subject matter and engage in social commentary in on-campus programming. Please let us know your plans for doing so no later than Monday, March 2, 2026.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Larison
Director, Arts & Culture Advocacy
NCAC

Brian Klosterboer
Senior Staff Attorney
ACLU of Texas

Chloe Kempf
Staff Attorney
ACLU of Texas

¹ *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967).

² See *Papish v. Board of Curators of the University of Missouri*, 410 U.S. 667, 670 (1973).

³ See *Hurley v. Irish-American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Group of Boston, Inc.*, 515 U.S. 557, 569 (1995) ("[A] narrow, succinctly articulable message is not a condition of constitutional protection, which if confined to expression conveying a 'particularized message,' ... would never reach the unquestionably shielded painting of Jackson Pollock, music of Arnold Schoenberg, or Jabberwocky verse of Lewis Carroll").