



Students admire Irwin Blitt Fellowship recipient Stevie Delgado's acrylic chandelier, Suncatcher, at the opening of Delgado's curated exhibit in 2019. *Photo by Jeremy Wangler*

Enlightening Work

Fellowship lets students curate Mulvane exhibit, create accompanying piece

By Jeremy Wangler • jwangler@wualumni.org

Stevie Delgado perked up at the opening of the Rita Blitt Gallery and Sculpture Garden in 2017 when she heard a new fellowship would allow a student to work closely with the Rita Blitt Legacy Collection. Her sculpture professor, Benjamin Todd Wills, assured Delgado she could handle the extra work while earning her art degree.

"They announced it, and he turned to me and was like, 'You're going to enter that and you're going to win,'" said Delgado, bfa '19.

A year later, Delgado was essentially handed the keys to the gallery – with guidance from staff – as the inaugural recipient of the Irwin Blitt Fellowship.

Rita Blitt, h '19, donated a large collection of her paintings, sketches and sculptures in 2015 to the Mulvane Art Museum at Washburn University. Her husband, Irwin, died weeks before the gallery opened in 2017, and Rita announced the fellowship to honor him. In the spirit of her collaboration with

dancers and musicians, the selected fellow studies the intersection of artistic disciplines and creates an exhibition, multi-media presentation, research paper, catalogue or performance. Delgado named her curated exhibit "To Kiss the Sun" and created an acrylic chandelier, "Suncatcher" as part of the exhibit.

"We couldn't have asked for a better inaugural fellow in Stevie," said Rebecca Manning, collections manager at the Mulvane Art Museum. "The exhibition came together beautifully. The unifying theme or concept was to examine artworks Rita Blitt created that incorporated natural elements or were emulating natural elements – in particular, Stevie seemed to respond to Blitt's interest in the interaction of light and water. And she was able to create an original artwork that alludes to Blitt's acrylic sculpture work but is not derivative."

Delgado capitalized on curating with Manning and other Mulvane staff.

“Curation is something not a lot of fine artists get to do, especially as an undergraduate. It teaches you different ways of looking at art. You have to understand there are so many notions behind a particular piece,” Delgado said. “I realized how prolific of an artist Rita has been in her life and how much she loves collaborating with others and having her art be inspired by others.”

Her faculty mentor for the fellowship, Assistant Professor Wonjae Lee has expertise with 3D printing, laser cutters and software that creates 2D and 3D plans. He helped Delgado with a three-step process for the chandelier that first involved cardboard and tape for a mockup, then laser-cut cardboard and last, the laser-cut or 3D-printed final pieces.

“I’m pretty picky about this design stuff, but she was following very wisely,” Lee said. “Always in art, in any field of study, one-to-one, individual instruction is very rewarding because you have very tight communication and feedback.”

Junior Jak Kendall was at the opening of “To Kiss the Sun” in 2019, and Delgado’s presentation inspired him to apply for the fellowship. The philosophy major is now this year’s Irwin Blitt Fellow.

“I saw the way Stevie’s chandelier captured the light,” Kendall said. “Instead of capturing the light, I want to be the beacon of light that shines out like how art reaches out to us. I want to approach this with philosophical things in mind about how we interact with art, how it affects us, the impact it has on us in an emotional sense.”

He plans to pair works from the Blitt collection with music he wrote and will air throughout the gallery. He might also create a sculpture that shines light onto some of Blitt’s paintings in sync with the music.

Delgado and Kendall appreciate the donor-funded fellowship and hope their experience enhances art on campus and in the community. Kendall, who has been visiting the Mulvane since third grade and works there as senior gallery assistant, wants to attend graduate school and continue working within museums.

“The Mulvane feels like home for me,” Kendall said. “Having this fellowship come from donors who support the museum, I want to be an extension of the museum and part of that family.”



Stevie Delgado, bfa '19. Photo by Jeremy Wangler



Jak Kendall poses in front of Rita Blitt's "Seeking Inner Peace." Photo by Doug Stremel

The Irwin Blitt Fellowship is open to juniors and seniors in any major who wish to study the intersection between the Rita Blitt Legacy Collection and an artistic discipline that interests them.

Visit wualumni.org/irwin-blitt-fellowship to learn more about the fellowship.

Delgado will pursue a master of fine arts at the University of Iowa.

“Donors are vital in helping fund the arts and helping fund people who are going to continuously dedicate themselves to the arts,” Delgado said. “My ultimate goal is to become a university professor and give back to the education that allowed me to grow up and make my own way. I’m very grateful.” 🙏