

September 2025

A New Beginning for the International 'FL3TCH3R' Exhibition in 2026 at The Fischman Gallery

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Dear Stakeholders, Supporters, and Friends of the FL3TCH3R Exhibit,

It is with deep disappointment and serious concern that we write to inform you that East Tennessee State University (ETSU), along with the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services, will no longer support or host the annual International FL3TCH3R Exhibit.

After twelve years of positive collaboration, shared purpose, and meaningful engagement with the university community, this decision was not communicated in writing, but rather via a single phone call. ETSU indicated that its future goals and direction are no longer aligned with those of the FL3TCH3R Exhibit, and thus no future exhibitions will be held on campus.

This decision comes at a particularly troubling moment. Across the country, we are witnessing rising political pressure against freedom of expression, particularly in the arts and in academia.

Unfortunately, ETSU's decision appears to be part of that broader trend. Fear of political backlash—especially from right-wing conservative lawmakers during the Fall 2024 exhibition—seems to have played a decisive role in the university's withdrawal of support. Rather than standing firm in defense of academic freedom and diverse ideological discourse, the administration chose to step back from a long-standing commitment to foster critical engagement and student awareness on its Appalachian campus.

We specifically note that State Senator Rusty Crowe, a powerful member of the Tennessee Senate Education Committee, was among the most vocal critics of the 2024 exhibit. The committee on which Crowe serves influences legislation and funding related to public higher education, employee compensation, museums, libraries, and cultural affairs—including ETSU's own Center of Excellence for Appalachian Studies and Services, under which the Reece Museum operates. Senator Crowe's political influence regarding state funding as well as calls for the premature closure of the 2024 exhibit that also came from U.S. Representatives Tim Burchett and Diana Harshbarger could have affected this decision.

We also understand that the 2024 campus groups- Campus Reform & perhaps Turning Point USA have been submitting FOIA (Freedom Of Information Act) requests to the University-ETSU-every month November 2024 through March 2025. They request all correspondence / information between the university and the FL3TCH3R Exhibit and/or the Dyers & artists including contracts, email, etc. This occurrence is for your information. If you are concerned to know what has been shared to these conservative groups by the university, you also have a right to submit a FOIA request for all

information the university has shared to outside entities about the correspondence had between the university and the FL3TCH3R Exhibit from November 2024 through March 2025. For INFO how to submit a FOIA request to ETSU, Go to:

<https://dynamicforms.ngwebsolutions.com/Submit/Page?form=3b5f4d4d-c813-4eea-b298-9755de5bd27e&ion=947622&page=438066&token=kPMmIk1kZdoymboLuwA0f1x8ow0xXJRBGVQrgh709Sc>

Despite this setback, we remain proud of the values the FL3TCH3R Exhibit has stood for since its founding: the amplification of underrepresented voices through socially and politically engaged art on an international scale, the promotion of critical discourse, and the empowerment of students and communities through creative expression. Moreover, the exhibition has served the university community and the Appalachian region with integrity and purpose.

Although ETSU's withdrawal marks a turning point, it does not mark an end. The FL3TCH3R Exhibit remains steadfast in its continuing mission. We are actively seeking new partners, venues, and communities who share our commitment to academic freedom, artistic courage, and cultural dialogue.

To all who have supported us over the years—artists, educators, students, community members, and institutional partners especially including the Slocumb Galleries for getting us started in 2013, and the Reece Museum for hosting us from 2014-2024—we thank you. Your solidarity, energy, and belief in the power of art to inspire change have been the cornerstone of our work as well as our son, brother and friend, Fletcher, whose mission and legacy fueled our cause in his memory! We look forward to continuing this journey together, stronger and more resolved than ever!

Thank you for your passion & support! If you have any questions or would like to talk via phone, don't hesitate to call-.

In Solidarity,
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NOTE:

A short time after this letter was created. An article was published by *Hellmouth Magazine* (Knoxville, TN) with a detailed account of the events summarily described here and can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.hellmouthmag.com/editorial/fl3tch3r-art-exhibit-censorship-in-east-tennessee>

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email: fl3tch3r.exhibit@gmail.com

For more information about Fletcher Dyer, visit <http://fletcherdyer.com/about.html>.

For more information about the FL3TCH3R Exhibit, Visit: <http://www.FL3TCH3Rexhibit.com>