

Whither Athenaeum?

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WITH THEIR ROOTS IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY and particularly in the “Hellenic” revival of the Romans under Emperor Hadrian in the second century, Athenaea were revived again in the 18th century and built throughout the world in the 19th and early 20th centuries. One finds them in Latin America and Spain, in Asia (particularly in formerly colonial cities), and throughout Europe and the U.S. No two are alike, and all but one are private intellectual clubs with libraries, collections of works of art, scientific instruments, and rooms for eating, drinking (not always alcohol), studying, and discussing.

Despite being truly global in their reach, they are part of the long tradition of European Mediterranean culture and its progeny. What they *are* about is less what they own—art, books, furniture, and space—than what is done, written, and said in them. They are places where people meditate individually and communicate collectively about subjects which reach from history to the present, from arithmetic to astrophysics, from Plato to Peirce, from sculpture to holograms.

In them, reading groups meet for discussion, chamber music or jazz is performed, plays and poetry are read aloud, ideas are discussed, lectures are held, and classes—many created informally to deal with issues of contemporary relevance—are given. In many ways, they extend the enquiries started in universities into the ordinary lives of modern citizens. Above all, they are intimate—the opposite of mass culture, the spectacle, and the metrics of the digital era.

There is only one Athenaeum at a university—that at the California Institute of Technology, which is, for all practical purposes, a faculty club with a fancy name. Thus, it is not our model for creating what will be called an Athenaeum. It is, rather, to the superb private Athenaea in cities like Boston, Providence, Philadelphia, and La Jolla that we turn to for inspiration for what we hope to be a path-breaking institution for UT Dallas—the W. Ray Wallace Athenaeum. With a

\$10,000,000 matching gift from Mrs. W. Ray Wallace in memory of her late husband, we have private funding to launch our efforts.

In it, our students, staff, faculty, and members from the larger Dallas community will find a unique and highly important collection of European paintings, a world-class library of the history of world art, headquarters of the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History and possibly other centers and institutes at UT Dallas, as well as classrooms, reading rooms, nooks and crannies for discussion and informal meeting, and, in the fullness of time, a restaurant, a coffee house, and spaces for special university collections.

We hope to be directly across from (and possibly connected physically to) the McDermott Library, and eventually will have performance spaces as well as the headquarters for the Wildenthal Honors College, possibly along with completely new student- and faculty-driven clubs or groups interested in our larger mission. We also envision three walled gardens, one each devoted to the great garden traditions of Europe (a cloister garden), India (a Mughal garden) and Asia (a Chinese garden with its own pavilion).

The Athenaeum will function as a bridge between the UT Dallas community and the highly intelligent and varied populations of North Dallas and the northern suburbs of Dallas. With the explosive growth of Plano, Frisco, McKinney, Allen, and beyond, there is a hunger for access to culture, a hunger which is difficult for the distant Arts District to fill and which will be made easily accessible at UT Dallas because of the George Bush Expressway, the Dallas North Tollway and U.S. Highway 75.

Because of the importance of the Asian and Asian-American cultures of UT Dallas and the northern suburbs, we have entered into productive conversations with the Crow Collection of Asian Art, whose varied and fascinating collection of Asian art is largely stored in warehouses, inaccessible to the public. To bring Asian cultures together with Euro-American cultures will be a long-term goal of the Athenaeum, giving it a global mission appropriate for our increasingly global city and culture.

The *Athenaeum Review* will take all the intellectual energy and ambition of what will be the Wallace Athenaeum and give it periodic and temporary form. Indeed, it will stake out the large territories of the mind that will be embodied by the Wallace Athenaeum. None of us who are working to conceive and fund the Wallace Athenaeum will be able to predict the range of activities it will foster on campus, but we can create a beautiful environment for the intellectual and aesthetic ambitions it will encourage.

The *Athenaeum Review* comes first, a clarion to herald the arrival of the Wallace Athenaeum at UT Dallas, and we hope it will spread the word well beyond our beautiful campus. a