

Institute offers respite to New York artists

► The Santa Fe Art Institute opens its doors to estimated 50 NY artists

By DEBORAH BAKER
The Associated Press

New York painter Teresa Valla was supposed to be doing work for an upcoming show in Italy. Instead, she roamed the streets of Manhattan, taking photographs.

In the days following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, she felt numb, distracted, ill at ease. Her income ebbed as art projects in public schools were delayed.

In need of a respite, she found the prospect of one in New Mexico.

Valla is among an estimated 50 New York City artists expected to take advantage of free living and studio space this fall and winter at the Santa Fe Art Institute.

Residencies of two to four weeks are being offered

from mid-October through early March.

"What I really hope is to get more centered again, and ... to feel safer than I feel right now," said Valla, whose two-week stay begins Oct. 22. "Kind of be away from ground zero and to visually make sense of what's just gone on."

The emergency program was conceived by the institute's new director, Diane Karp, who had left New York just before the attacks to take the Santa Fe job.

When a dozen friends and relatives called her to say they had fled Manhattan and holed up at her house at the New Jersey shore, Karp realized the importance of being able to escape.

"We've had artists who have written and simply said that they're so rattled, their lives are such a shambles, that they just need a way to get out of New York City," said Karp, an art historian and former director of a visual-arts magazine.

"It's been very harrowing," said Joseph Nechvatal, who does computer-based paint-

ings and lives on Manhattan's Lower East Side, about a mile from the trade-center site.

"You smell this ongoing smoke that's billowing out of the ruins," said Nechvatal, who also teaches at the School of Visual Arts. "It's foul. It smells like burning brakes. It's a little bit electrical and a little bit medical."

Nechvatal says he has been unable to work, focusing instead on trying to process what has happened.

"Emotionally, it was just very depressing and shattering, and I thought I could use a little break to get back into making art," said Nechvatal, who will visit in November.

The privately funded Santa Fe Art Institute, with a budget of about \$500,000 a year, sponsors residency programs for emerging artists to study and work intensively with artists of national or international stature.

No programs had been scheduled for the next few months to give the new director time to learn the job and make her own plans for 2002.

For the past 2½ years, the

institute has occupied a boldly designed, vibrantly colored, 16,000-square-foot building by Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta. It has a dozen simple bedrooms with private baths, along with a common living-dining area, conference room and more than 5,000 square feet of studio space.

Karp says artists might choose to work during their respites, but it isn't required.

Teresa Valla, who is getting ready for the Biennale Internazionale Dell'Arte Contemporanea in December in Florence, Italy, wants to respond to the events of Sept. 11 through her work.

"It's such an important time to take a negative and create a positive," she said.

Fran Siegel, who watched the collapse of the trade center from the roof of her apartment in the Bowery, said she feels it might be too soon to make art about what happened.

"It's very hard to visually digest violence ... to somehow make sense of it," said Siegel, who does site-specific

light installations.

Siegel, who will arrive at the institute in December, had been fascinated for years by the twin towers.

"I thought of them as my mountains," said the artist, who teaches painting at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. "I would watch the light and how it changed on the surface."

Karp says to run the emergency-respite program properly — to provide modest stipends for the artists, for example — will take between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a month.

About \$20,000 is available from the institute's operating budget. Karp has rounded up another \$6,500 in donations and is looking for more. Southwest Airlines has donated 20 round-trip vouchers, and Karp hopes to raise more money for transportation.

She is also prepared to contribute \$10,000 of her salary to make the program viable.

"We're running this now on a hope and a prayer," Karp said. "But it was the right thing to do. And we all felt enormously better — much less helpless."