ELABORATE EXHIBITION OF RELIGIOUS FOLK ART
ON VIEW AT THE OU MUSEUM OF ART

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By JILL JOHNSON
OU Museum of Art

NORMAN -- The installation of an art exhibition sometimes is a
good deal more complicated that just hanging pictures on a
gallery wall.

Visitors to the current exhibition at the University of
Oklahoma Museum of Art in the Fred Jones Jr. Art Center will
immediately recognize the result of many weeks of preparation and
hundreds of man-hours that have gone into the elaborate
installation of "Images of Penance, Images of Mercy: Santos and
Ceremonies of the Hispanic Southwest 1860-1910."

The exhibition of religious folk art, called santos --
paintings and carved wooden statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary
-- was organized at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center's
Taylor Museum for Southwestern Studies. It traveled to the
Walters Museum of Art in Baltimore before arriving at the OU
museum in late December.

The shipment, weighing more than 7,000 pounds, was transported
by a fine arts handling company. As many as 140 fragile objects
were packed in more than 25 specially designed and constructed
crates. The delicate task of unpacking began early in January
under the supervision of Roger Tolzman of the Taylor Museum, who
built the crates.
To invoke the appropriate atmosphere and to suitably and safely display the assortment of art objects that makes up this exhibition, museum curators and preparators have constructed a variety of customized display platforms and even created a replica of an old Southwest family chapel.

Museum of Art curator Jim Deighton, who oversaw the installation, says the museum has done more construction for this exhibition than any other in the museum’s history.

"In terms of the installation time and labor required, this exhibition is second only to our Dr. Seuss exhibition in 1988," said Deighton.

Registrar Gail Kana Anderson, who assisted in the unpacking and is responsible for the care of the objects while in the museum, has had the unusual task of dressing many of the wooden statues in their intricate hand-made costumes.

"One of the most fascinating things about these objects is their clothing and the obvious care and sensitivity that went into their making," said Anderson. "The detail is incredible, including four layers of undergarments below the gowns. Some figures have human or horse hair that has been fashioned into wigs -- some delicately braided -- and topped with crowns or veils."

The exhibition, which is free and open to the public, will be on view at the OU Museum of Art, 410 W. Boyd Street, until March 15. The exhibition then will be carefully repacked for shipment to venues in California, Canada and Spain.

The museum is offering bilingual tours of the exhibition, and educational material within the exhibition is written in both Spanish and English.

This project is made possible in part by a grant from the State Arts Council of Oklahoma.

Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday; and 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. For more information on related programs or to schedule a tour, call 325-3272.