Local collectors loan American Indian art

Art — Collectors, including U.S. Sen. David Boren, donate works to a new display at OU.

By Gregory Potts
The Oklahoma Daily

Paintings, photographs, weavings and sculptures are featured in a showing at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art entitled "Sharing the Heritage: American Indian Art from Oklahoma Private Collections."

Among the collectors donating to the exhibit are Sen. and Mrs. David Boren.

"We have a collection that includes works by more than 45 Native American painters and sculptors," said Boren, D-Okla. "Our collection includes Native American baskets and pottery as well as paintings.

"Molly and I over the years have been very interested in Native American history — perhaps partly because of our own ancestry," he said. "Molly has Choctaw ancestry and I have some Cherokee ancestry. Both of us were taken by our families when we were young to Native American dances and ceremonials.

"After we got married, we discovered that we shared a common interest in Native American art. We started five years ago to seriously collect Native American paintings and art.

"I think Native American art especially speaks to me because it is often an expression of the deep spirituality of Native American culture," he said. "It also reflects the Native American belief that art should not be considered as something separate and apart from the rest of life. This is a lesson we all need to learn."

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U.S. Sen., D-Okla

"It's truly a remarkable body of works to be held by private collectors," he said.

Strickland is a legal historian of Osage and Cherokee heritage and the director of the American Indian Law and Policy Center and professor of law at OU.

"The exhibition demonstrates the depth and diversity of art which is created by Native Americans," Strickland said. "It is also fun to look at different approaches to collecting... For example, one collection features primarily Navajo art. Another is mostly Hopi Kachina dolls. And Dr. Ed Wade's [of Tulsa] collection has some great, ironically, political pieces."

Russ Walker, one of the collectors donating to the exhibit, said, "[The exhibition] is an exceptional view into what Oklahomans are doing with their heritage."

The Walkers' collection consists mostly of southwest art. The Walkers have been collecting art for about fifteen years. Their interest began largely because of Mrs. Walkers' American Indian heritage.

"My wife is a direct descendant of Louis Ross, the brother of John Ross, the Cherokee chief," Walker said. "I can't help but feel some of that connection in the art."