

The Underground Guides Tours of MOA Untamed Spirits Exhibit
by Rosemarie Howard

"We are all related," a phrase commonly used among many Native American Indians, might be the mantra for "Untamed Spirits: Animal Imagery in Native American Art," an exhibit currently on display at the BYU Museum of Art (MOA). The exhibit explores the relationship of the native American people to animals and their symbolic use of animals in the clothing, jewelry, and other objects commonly used in their everyday lives.

For example, many native Americans the butterfly is a symbol of transformation and fertility; sometimes they are seen as gifts from the Creator. The life cycle of a butterfly is one of transformation from egg, to larvae, to cocoon, to butterfly.

One of the items on display, a ceremonial dress yoke from the early 1700's, is richly and beautifully beaded with butterflies. The yoke was used in a ceremony celebrating a young girl's passage from girlhood to womanhood.

Over 70 pieces of art and artifacts are included in the display. Included among them are a fringed skirt made of grass and leather decorated with abalone shells and pine nuts, a Sioux headdress from the 1800's, a cradle board and a katsina.

Other elements of native American culture examined by the exhibit are: how the introduction of domesticated animals, the influence of new materials, and the contact with tourist trade have impacted the Native American culture. These elements, isolated or combined, affected the continual evolution of Native American art objects.

"Untamed Spirits" is especially geared to be accessible to students in kindergarten through twelfth grade and was recently the focus of an Evening for Educators. So it would make sense that junior high and high school students from the MOA Underground program assist as docents for the exhibit.

If you think the "Underground" sounds a little mysterious and dark, it is, to the contrary, a group of enlightened junior high and high school students who find playing docent at the BYU Museum of Art a lot of fun as well as a great learning experience.

The program, was begun in the spring of 2000 by MOA education director, Judith McConkie, and is directed primarily at junior high school students. Start-up money for the program, was provided by Provo, Nebo, Alpine, Jordan and Wasatch School Districts.

During the first year, forty junior high students from the five contributing districts were trained and accepted into the MOA docent program. Some of those students have continued to participate and are now high school students.

These teen-age docents direct their peers, other students from their classes and schools, in museum tours.

"I like being at the MOA. I learn stuff I didn't know before, have a lot of fun, and meet lots of people," said Alisa Jenkins of Spanish Fork Junior High. Brandon Archuleta (also a Spanish Fork Junior High student) agreed, saying he also enjoys being a tour guide.

A new group of students will begin training the first part of February in 2002.

Participants in the Underground program must be at least 14 years old and available and willing to commit three Saturdays from 10 to 3 p.m. for basic training. A lunch is provided at each training session.

Interested students may phone 378-1140 and leave their name, phone number and address along with a request for an application.

"Untamed Spirits" will be at the MOA through March 16, 2002 and is free of charge. The MOA is located on North Campus Drive on the campus of Brigham Young University and is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., with hours extended to 9 p.m. on Monday and Thursday evenings. Saturday hours are 12 noon to 5 p.m. The museum is closed on Sunday. More information about current programs and exhibits may be obtained by phoning 801-378-ARTS or by visiting the MOA website: www.byu.edu/moa.