

THE DENVER ART MUSEUM NEWS RELEASE

100 West 14th Avenue Parkway
Denver, Colorado 80204

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Media Contact:

Deanna Person (303) 640-2466

Joanne Dant (303) 640-2933

Peg Ekstrand (303) 866-3670

May 4, 1995

DENVER ART MUSEUM REPATRIATES RELIGIOUS OBJECT TO BLACKFEET TRIBE

DENVER -- Nancy Blomberg, Curator of the Denver Art Museum's Native Arts Department, today announced that after several months of positive discussions with Blackfeet tribal and religious leaders in Montana and Canada, the Denver Art Museum has repatriated its first American Indian object in accordance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990. The Elk Tongue Beaver Bundle, a sacred article used in the Blackfeet Beaver Ceremony, was officially returned to the Blackfeet tribe on April 10. Traditionally held in the spring when the waters are high, the ceremony celebrates renewal and allows people to make contributions and commitments to the spirits.

The most important Native American human rights legislation ever to be passed by Congress, NAGPRA requires museums and federal agencies to provide tribes with summaries of culturally affiliated collections and inventories of human remains and associated funerary objects. The act also calls for consultation between museums and Indian tribes, Alaskan Native villages and corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations. The legislation encourages development of a new partnership between museums and native people, allowing for a greater understanding of Native American societies and helping to improve public education through better exhibits, programs and publications. In the nearly five years since its passage, the act has led to a dramatic increase in positive face to face communication between museums and tribal representatives.

The repatriation of the Elk Tongue Beaver Bundle was facilitated by Jhon Goes In Center, the first Native American to serve on the Denver Art Museum's Board of Trustees. A member of the Lakota Tribe, Goes In Center says, "The process enhanced the relationship between the two parties and ultimately brought benefits to both the museum and the Blackfeet people."

-more-

The return and reintegration of cultural objects to tribes makes it possible for Native Americans to strengthen their religious heritage and revitalize community cultural traditions. "We not only educate the museum community, but our people too, because they have lost a great deal of knowledge about our culture, traditions and language. We can now be free to once again celebrate our heritage," said Joyce T. Spoonhunter, Repatriation Coordinator for the Blackfeet Tribe. "We appreciate the Denver Art Museum's respect and understanding during this process."

In January, the Denver Art Museum and Colorado Historical Society jointly received a grant from the National Park Service. The funds were used to hire Roger Echo-Hawk to serve as Repatriation Coordinator, assisting both institutions in complying with NAGPRA. Echo-Hawk divides his time between the museum and the historical society, organizing consultation negotiations between the museums and seven specific Indian tribes (three Ute tribes, the Northern Cheyenne, Southern Cheyenne, Hopi and Osage). A citizen of the Pawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Echo-Hawk serves as tribal historian, and was recently awarded a Master of Arts degree in history from CU/Boulder (in Indian History with an emphasis on ancient Indian History).

Since January, Echo-Hawk has helped organize visits by tribal representatives to the Denver Art Museum and Colorado Historical Society on repatriation business and responded to inquiries for information about the collections. The museums have hosted representatives from the Blackfeet, Crow, Pawnee, Winnebago, Jicarilla Apache, Menominee, and Hopi tribes, and are planning future visits from the Osage, Cheyennes, and Utes. The museums have applied for a second grant from the National Park Service that will allow them to bring additional tribes in.

Echo-Hawk feels that through the repatriation process, "Indians will come to see museums as having relevance to their communities and will welcome the extension of the museum mission into their own communities. They will become important partners in preserving Indian heritage." Blomberg adds, "The Denver Art Museum is committed to working in direct consultation with Native American communities to help assure survival of their traditions into the 21st century and beyond."

For more information about repatriation efforts by the Denver Art Museum and Colorado Historical Society, call 303-640-7631 or 303-866-4531.