

2-1-2000

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"Artist Bing Davis Taps into Legacy to Create University of Dayton's 'Virtue with Leadership' Award" (2000). *News Releases*. 8824. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/8824

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Feb. 1, 2000
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NEWS RELEASE

ARTIST BING DAVIS TAPS INTO LEGACY TO CREATE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON'S 'VIRTUE WITH LEADERSHIP' AWARD

DAYTON, Ohio — Willis "Bing" Davis feels as passionately about art as he does deed. Both are touched by the past. Both can inspire the future.

"Our legacy is priceless," says the Dayton-based international artist. "It's the gift our ancestors leave to us and what we give to future generations. It is the same way with art."

Davis has embraced that personal precept, along with hands, heart and soul of a deeply spiritual man, to create a work of art destined for the embrace of a virtuous leader.

The work is titled Ancestral Spirit Dance #276.

The leader is Elizabeth Dole.

Dole, known for her extensive public service that has included heading the American Red Cross, will be in Dayton at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 10, at the University of Dayton's Kennedy Union to accept the school's first Leadership with Virtue award.

The University announced last spring its intentions to create an annual Leadership with Virtue award and symposium, and espoused the need for strong leaders with integrity from all walks of life. In December Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., UD president, announced that Dole would be the award's inaugural honoree.

A daylong symposium will be held in conjunction with the banquet on Friday, Feb. 11, in Kennedy Union. Both events are sponsored by the University of Dayton and its National Alumni Association as part of a series of events celebrating UD's sesquicentennial.

Davis' piece is an oil pastel and part of a series of "African-urban expressionistic paintings" he began after a trip to Africa in 1974, where he witnessed *egunguns*, festive ceremonies performed to invoke ancestral spirits.

"This experience of music, dance, drama and oral history was intense and moving," recalls Davis, who last year had several pieces of his Ancestral Spirit Dance series featured in a Smithsonian Institution exhibit. "It stayed close to my consciousness."

The artist's celebration of his African ancestry and his U.S. urban roots are the twin muses guiding the Ancestral Spirit Dance collection, Davis explains. Numbering nearly 300, each work in the series shares a similar geometric pattern juxtaposed with a swirling cloud of mostly yellows,

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greens, blues and reds. The patterns, he adds, represent the urban influence and the swirls of color represent the African influences in his work.

The works are created on a canvas of silicon carbide — a bluish-black surface with a sandpaper texture — allowing them to be both a visual and tactile source of inspiration for the artist, Davis says. Even the canvas shapes of some of the works take on meaning, such as the circular #276.

“Working with silicon carbide allows me to explore the creative journey beginning with a dark surface and applying light colors, as opposed to starting with the more traditional white canvas and then applying darker colors,” says Davis, whose painting will be encased in Lucite and set among three white columns to finish the award. “It gives another dimension to my art.”

Davis, who also creates in sculpture, photography and mixed media, has been an educator for more than 40 years, using art to teach values of math, learning and literacy. “Being an artist, to me, satisfies the aspect of being alive. Art is as important as air, as breathing in and breathing out.”

When the University decided it wanted a local artist with international recognition to create the award’s centerpiece, it didn’t have to look very far, says Joan Swedlund, project director for the Leadership with Virtue event.

“Bing was the first and last person we thought of,” she recalls. “There is such a powerful spirituality to his art that he was a perfect match for us,” she explains.

Susan Hayes, a member of the awards-banquet committee, agrees with Swedlund.

“His works exhibit an integrity and spirituality that speaks to each person in a different way,” she says. “And I believe that is what leadership with virtue is all about — to be able to have integrity and a spirituality and an ability to touch each person in a unique way.”

Last June UD’s Leadership with Virtue committee contacted Davis to see if he was interested in the project. He was and, after he completed nine works, the committee selected #276.

This project was a “challenge and an honor,” says Davis. “The concept of leadership with virtue in this day and age is a bold cause to stand up for. But it’s something you would expect from a leader in Catholic higher education.”

Davis believes that leadership and legacy are inseparable.

“Each time I’ve done one of my Ancestral Spirit Dance series, I’ve created a visual, aesthetic prayer for those ancestors who have gone before me and a legacy for those who will follow me. Virtuous, principled leaders leave a similar type of mission and responsibility. They are touched by the past and can inspire the future.”

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For media interviews, contact Bing Davis at (937) 276-3507, Joan Swedlund at (937) 229-3262 or via e-mail at swedlund@udayton.edu and Susan Hayes at work (937) 279-6101 or at home (937) 299-299-0933. More information on the banquet and symposium can be found on the Web at www.udayton.edu/leadershipwithvirtue.