

A singular gift, with thousands of pieces

Ohio receives world's largest collection of rare Vietnamese Taoist art

By Anita Martin



RIK FATECA

A few years ago, an aging Vietnamese art collector decided to sell his unparalleled collection of North Vietnamese Taoist art. He had two stipulations: This — the largest such collection in the world — had to be sold intact. And it could go only to an institution that would properly care for it and advocate for related research.

Late last year, Ohio University acquired the collection, Ceremonial Paintings of Northern Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, through the generosity of Fred Harris, HON '97, an American artist and master of Japanese painting technique, and Robert Fallon, AB '69, an international banking executive. The two jointly

purchased the collection for the sole purpose of donating it to Ohio University.

Harris says the decision to acquire the collection stemmed from his and Fallon's relationship with the university and their confidence that the art would be housed, through Alden Library, with "all the professional care it deserves."

"We hope the addition of the North Ethnic Minorities Collection will inspire future generations of Ohio University students to pursue serious studies of not just Vietnam, but also the entire expanse of Southeast Asian culture," Harris wrote in the collection's catalog.

The donation, which includes some 2,000 pieces, follows Harris' previous

donation of more than 1,200 rare Asian art books in the mid-1990s. Donated at Fallon's suggestion, this collection is housed in Alden's Fred and Kazuko Harris Fine Arts Library.

The North Ethnic Minorities Collection features paintings on recycled rice paper, ceremonial masks, hand scrolls, hanging scrolls and stitched books. Of these, 300 pieces were exhibited recently in Tokyo.

"The collection is ceremonial in purpose," says Gary Ginther, fine arts librarian and the collection's curator. "It's a real treasure of cultural and anthropological value."

ABOVE: Three rare watercolor hanging scrolls now reside at Alden Library.