

Art collection grows



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY PCS FINE ART GALLERY

FAMILY: Zisla's daughter Beverly Welber, right, and his wife Doreen, 90, sit in front of several of Harold's pieces at the Harold Zisla Studio in South Bend.

Two Zisla abstract pieces added to collection

BY ANTHONY LOMBARDI
alombardi@perutribune.com

The artwork of the renowned artist Harold Zisla are owned by individuals and institutions across the world. Two of those pieces now hang in the Peru Community Schools Fine Art Gallery.

The works, "Untitled" and "Cracked Sky," are the first abstract pieces of their kind in the school's collection.

Alexandria Blong, the gallery's curator, feels that Zisla's style represents art in its pure form – an expression of thought and of one's inner being.

"Art is everywhere," Blong said. "I think a lot of times many artists hold themselves back a little bit, because sometimes they



ZISLA: Paintings "Untitled," left, and "Cracked Sky," far right, are some of the first abstract artworks in the high school's gallery.

are doing just what they think people want versus what they want to do."

Born June 28, 1925, in Cleveland, Ohio, Zisla

grew up a poor child, according to his daughter Beverly Welber. He often spent time at a recreational center near his apartment,

where he partook in activities with other local children. When he was 11,

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he started to participate in the center's art class. The instructor immediately noticed Zisla showed an artistic talent, and he told the boy's widowed mother that Zisla should be in art school.

His mother enrolled him in classes at the Cleveland Museum of Art, where Zisla developed a love for his craft. After a three-year stint in the Navy, Zisla returned to school and earned his diploma from the Cleveland Institute of Art, where he majored in painting. He also received a bachelor's and master's degree in art education from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Zisla's inspiration came from a belief that art serves as a deliverance from one's body and a detachment from the norm.

"I believe that paintings should be, more than anything else, a liberation into the spirit of the artist, and to have presence, impact, dynamism, freedom from the trite, the contrived, the boringly dead," he says in a quote on his website. "They must be alive."

Upon completion of college, Zisla began to share his knowledge and passion for artistic expression as he became the executive director of the South Bend Art Center in 1957. The center is now known as the South Bend Museum of Art. He then became a professor of fine arts at Indiana University South Bend in 1966, where he taught for more than 30 years.

Ever humble, Zisla was a beloved figure to the majority of people who were lucky enough to cross his path. The affect he had on people can be seen today by the number of Zisla pieces that are owned by his former students, friends and acquaintances.

Through his journey he never forgot where he started.

"What shaped my father [was] that someone recognized his potential," Welber said. "If you asked him if he was an artist or a teacher, I think he would say that first and foremost he was a teacher and a mentor."

Welber added that when it came time to distribute her father's work it was important that many of the pieces would be displayed in educational facilities, so that younger people and the community would be exposed to his work.

When the opportunity arose for the PCS Art Gallery to add a few Zisla's to their own collection, the school jumped at the chance.

Blong said she will use the acrylics "Untitled," one of Zisla's later works, and "Cracked Sky," an earlier piece, to help teach students and the community about the differences in art styles.

"A lot of art programs throughout the state, throughout the country, are being compromised for funding," Blong said. "It's one thing that we have that will probably never go away here at Peru. A lot of it is because of the gallery."

Zisla died on March 18,

at the age of 90. Many of his works can be seen at his website – <http://www.haroldzisla.com>.

The Peru Community School's Fine Art Gallery, located in Peru High School at 401 N Broadway is open every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. The Gallery will be closed for Christmas vacation from Dec. 23 - Jan. 8, Jan. 16, and Feb. 20. It will also be closed for school weather closings.

The Gallery will reopen on Monday, Jan. 9.

For additional showings or viewings, contact Alexandria Blong at 765-475-2425 or ablong@peru.in.k12.us for availability.