

# The Nine-Year Mystery

## Have you seen this statue?

The rose garden outside the President's House on campus is in bloom now, beautiful as always this time of year. But still missing, as it has

been for nine years, is this statue of Sacajawea by renowned Northwest artist Harold Balazs.

One day while on routine patrol during spring break in 1997, a University Police officer noticed that the copper and brass figure was gone, ripped from the base with only the feet remaining. Suspecting a prank, University Police investigated. No clues ever turned up.

"That's really odd," said Tom McGill, chief of University Police. "In almost every case, somebody says something to somebody, and we hear about it. We get some kind of lead about the who, why or where something ends up. But there was absolutely nothing about what happened to this unique piece of art."

Harold Balazs, whose *oeuvre* includes the well-known abstract aluminum "floating" sculpture in the Spokane River near the Washington Street bridge in Riverfront Park, still lives in Mead and remembers the Sacajawea statue well. When he first crafted it in 1960, it was placed in the rotunda of Showalter Hall, replacing a battered, life-size plaster statue given by the class of 1916. Then in 1986, the Balazs piece was installed in the rose garden.

The plaster depiction of the famous native guide has been refurbished and once again graces Showalter Hall. Still, the University would like to recover the missing idol.

The artist is philosophical. "Well, it's not the first statue of mine that was ever stolen," Balazs remarked. A five-ton, 12-foot by 6-foot concrete

piece he created with college students disappeared from Great Falls, Mont., and a 22-foot tall work was snatched in downtown Seattle.

Are these brazen thefts the work of unscrupulous art lovers? "No, I suspect they took them to sell for scrap," said the artist.

But if the Balazs sculpture still exists, Tom McGill, who can be reached at (509) 359-2777, has this offer to make: "Even now, we are interested in getting the statue back with no questions asked — if it was taken as a prank. Its historical value is important to the University."

