ADA — Two Hardin County natives are coming home this fall in a two-woman art show at the Ohio Northern University's Elzay Gallery of Art. Marilyn (Turner) McPheron and Judith Steele are calling their exhibition “Home Is Where The Art Is” and it opens Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. The art pieces created by the pair will continue to be on display at the gallery, located at 503 S. Gilbert Street, Ada through Oct. 27. On Wednesday, Oct. 4, McPheron and Steele will discuss their art in a presentation at the gallery from noon to 1 p.m.

The homecoming exhibit allows family and friends to see the artistic creations which the two have displayed as part of arts shows in Columbus and other areas throughout the state.

They secured the gallery at ONU in hopes of providing a centralized location for the showing.

McPheron graduated in 1972 from Ridgemont High School and was influenced her senior year by the new art teacher in the district, Annie King. Until King's arrival there had been no art program at Ridgemont.

“We didn’t have an art room,” recalled McPheron. “We didn’t have many supplies. We spent a lot of time drawing.” But for the first time, she said, someone encouraged her artistic talents.

Hardin Northern had an art department when Steele was in high school, she said, and the influence of teacher Jackie Ludwig Sperling through junior high and high school was “very instrumental” in guiding her future. Sperling assisted Steele in composing a portfolio which earned her a scholarship to the Columbus College of Art and Design following her HN graduation in 1981.

Following that training, Steele worked as a designer for retail interior design and architectural illustration before striking out on her own in 1988 as a freelance designer. Yet, Steele spent most of her free time experimenting with making prints.

McPheron’s artistic background was not such a direct path. She continued to create artistic pieces after she...
graduated from Southern Ohio University with a degree in textile marketing. She was working in its study abroad program when she went with the students to France. While there, a new French friend encouraged her to return to school and pursue her dream of being an artist.

At the age of 50, McPheron took an art class and never looked back. She concentrated her artistic skills on print making.

When she and her husband, Bruce moved to Columbus, McPheron joined the Phoenix Rising Printmaking Cooperative and met another print maker, Steele. After the two became friends and shared their work, they realized they were both Hardin County natives.

“I didn't know Judith, but I later found out my parents knew her mom and dad,” said McPheron.

The two women share a love of print making as an art form.

Steele's art work consists primarily of relief printing, she said, while McPheron's pieces have a wide range of subjects and methods.

The ONU exhibit features several prints of various size and color created by Steele which focus on maple seeds. She has made models of the twirly seedlings from linoleum to position in various combinations and colors.

Those forms go through a printer any number of times until she has the effect she is seeking. The beauty of the art form, said Steele, is her original vision of any certain project may change many times before she finds the right combination of color, shape, position or size.

McPheron's art work also includes some relief printing, but intaglio prints and artist books as well. The limits to the creations are only limited by the artist's imagination, said McPheron.

One of the pieces on display at ONU features a mannequin head with its hair formed into a wiry nest filled with booklets. The head is attached to a wooden stand with a jar of keys beneath it where guests are encouraged to drop their outdated keys.

She calls the piece “Key to Creativity.”

Keys, along with manhole covers, are common subjects of her work, said McPheron.

One of her prints, which features kitchen items, has been printed on fabric to make an apron, which is a popular item with the public, said McPheron.

The work is called, “Everything But The Kitchen Sink.”

But sales are not the main focus of their prints, agreed the artists.

“People ask me if I make a lot of money selling my work,” said McPheron. “When I tell them I don't, they ask, ‘Then why do you do it?’ I make things because I'm not happy if I am not doing it. I don't really care if it sells or not.”

“My husband tells me he can tell when I have been printing. I am happy and calm,” said Steele. “There is a joy I get just when I first smell the ink.”

Their common rural background is an advantage to their artistic approach, said the women.

“We see things in how they relate to the world,” said Steele. “Nature is so reflective. When you live in the country, you respect that more than people who live in the city.”

“I think we notice a lot of things most people don't,” agreed McPheron.

By DAN ROBINSON
Times staff writer