

■ VERMILLION

# Romanian sees art in cow, bison bones

## USD grad student attaches spiritual meaning to artifacts

By MICHAEL FARRIS  
For the Argus Leader

Romanian artist Ioan Flores's show at the W.H. Over Museum features cow and bison bones the artist has collected in South Dakota.

Flores first became interested in bones when, as a child, he came across several while digging in the forests of his homeland in Transylvania.

At first he thought he had uncovered something of archaeological significance. Only later did he find out the real story.

"Before the revolution when Communism was overthrown," Flores said, "it was illegal for farmers to eat their cows. Everything was controlled by the state, and farmers were allowed to keep one for milk only. When the cow became pregnant farmers would hide it in a barn until she gave birth. When the calf became 1 year old, they ate the cow and buried the bones in the forest."

Flores's exhibit is installation art. He has created an environment to house his work.

The bones are displayed in cavities in large black walls that Flores constructed. He has hung prints he's done on the outer walls. In the middle of the space there is a tall cage-like pillar that houses two levels of bone piles.

"All the farms in Europe are built in a circle," he said. "There is a fence around the house, and this creates a microcosmos, a world within. Mentally, their houses symbolize the most important part -



Michael Farris / For the Argus Leader

Ioan Flores, a Romanian artist, poses with works from his show, *Axis Mundi*, at the W.H. Over Museum in Vermillion. Flores incorporates cow and bison bones found in South Dakota into his works.

the center of the universe."

He has arranged the bones with the walls to represent an alphabet or hieroglyphs.

The artist said he was compelled by the connection bones have with both spiritual and material life.

"Bones are something that remain after life. They contain information of the thing that was alive and is now dead," he said.

Last year Flores received a \$500 graduate research grant for artifact research in South Dakota. The show is funded by part of the grant.

Flores finds the cow bones at farms throughout the state. He randomly stops to look for them. He found buffalo bones along the Missouri River. In fact, people often come up to him and tell him they know a place where he can find

bones. He collects monthly.

"Ioan finds the things he needs," said USD painting professor Jeff Freeman. "I could walk along the river or down a country road and never find a 400-year-old buffalo bone or an Indian ax head, but he will find them. They come to him."

Flores came to USD in 1998. He chose South Dakota for graduate school because he was intrigued by American Indian culture. He also likes the fact that South Dakota has a wealth of archaeological sites with buffalo bones.

In 1995, Flores received a diploma in painting from the Lucafarul Academy of Fine Arts at Bucharest, Romania. There he studied under prominent Romanian painter Teodor Moara.

At USD, Flores is working



Argus Leader / AP/WIDE

### If you're going

The show "Axis Mundi" runs through the end of February.

The museum is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday 1 to 4:30 p.m.

The W.H. Over Museum is located next to the DakotaDome on the University of South Dakota campus.

toward a master of fine arts in painting.

"Part of his concern is the mystical sense of energy that he feels he gains from working with the material. There are religious overtones for what he's doing. He's not merely trying to be trendy or use provocative novelty," Freeman said.

Fellow painting student David Kitzler has been assisting Flores in setting up the shows.

"It's interesting working with a foreign artist," Kitzler said. "We communicate and discuss art. It's like a world language."

His professor agrees. "Having him here in the program leads a real level of depth to insights we might not otherwise have," Freeman said.