

3 Indian masks purchased at auction will be returned

SHUNGOPAVI (AP) — Members of the Hopi tribe said yesterday they were grateful that a benefactor who paid \$39,050 for three masks planned to return them to their Indian owners.

However, a kachina priest here and an Albuquerque, N.M.-based advocate for Hopi traditionalists said Elizabeth Sackler of New York would defeat her purpose by turning over the masks to the tribal government.

"You must be initiated to touch those masks, so it would contaminate the mask to turn it over to the chairman," Bertha Parker Torres said.

Lori Minkler, a staff assistant to tribal Chairman Vernon Masayesva, said Masayesva was out of the office and unable to say if the two Hopi

triatring these items back to the Hopi tribe," Minkler said.

She and Torres said they had not heard from the Sackler Foundation about further steps to return the masks purchased Tuesday in an auction by Sotheby's of New York.

Sackler, whose late father, Arthur M. Sackler, was a prominent art collector, said she had never bid at an auction before.

In a statement released in the tribal administrative center of Kykotsmovi, Masayesva said he was surprised to learn the masks, which Hopis regard as living representations of sacred, ancestral spirits, would be returned.

"We feel fortunate that the buyer has respect for the religion and traditional values of the Hopi

eby's was willing to sell these items even after we requested that they be withdrawn," Masayesva said.

Sotheby's spokesman Matthew Weigman said the auction house received two letters last week, one from the Hopis and another from the Navajos, asking that it refrain from selling the masks.

"Neither letter makes a claim of ownership," he said. "We responded that we would contact our (seller) and then forward the requests to him. We did that and he decided to go ahead with the sale anyway."

Torres said Hopi priests were certain Sotheby's had erred in identifying the third mask as Navajo. She said the mask was made by Pueblos, members of a tribe scattered among 19