

Sculptures by developer's wife become permanent part of mall

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Mandy Fones

"Dance?" "Rita's Rainbow." "Together."

No, they're not new hot rock groups. They're names for the metal and plastic sculptures set as permanent art at the Hickory Point Mall.

The work of Rita Blitt of Leawood, Kan., wife of Hickory Point Mall developer Irwin Blitt, the sculptures are set in combination with flowing water in the openness of the mall.

"When I create, I do so with deep emotion," she said. Once a painter, Mrs. Blitt uses drawings as the basis for each sculpture she does.

"I just let the ideas flow as quickly as they come. There are hundreds of them," she said. She's recently developed a technique of drawing with both hands at once.

The first sculpture in the mall is "Rita's Rainbow." Made of looped steel, the sculpture will be illuminated and placed in a pool of water. "With the lights, all sorts of colors will show up on the metal," she said.

"Dance?" is a 10-foot-high free-standing yellow metal sculpture rising up from the crest of a waterfall. The third sculpture, "Together," is a series of 7-inch-thick plexiglass sheets.

"I used to get ideas for sculptures by looking at small models of ones I'd already done," she said. Now the flow of drawings she stockpiles serve as the sculpture blue prints.

As a mall art sculptor, Mrs. Blitt has to keep the basics in mind when designing a piece: the space available, the mall architect's concept of mood and design, the sculpture pedestal size and, of course, making sure her creations obstruct no customer's view of store names.

Her first sculpture was placed in a shopping mall in St. Joseph, Mo. Commissioned to create a wall mural, Mrs. Blitt gave the architect an abstract sculpture of birds based on a quick paper and scissors model.

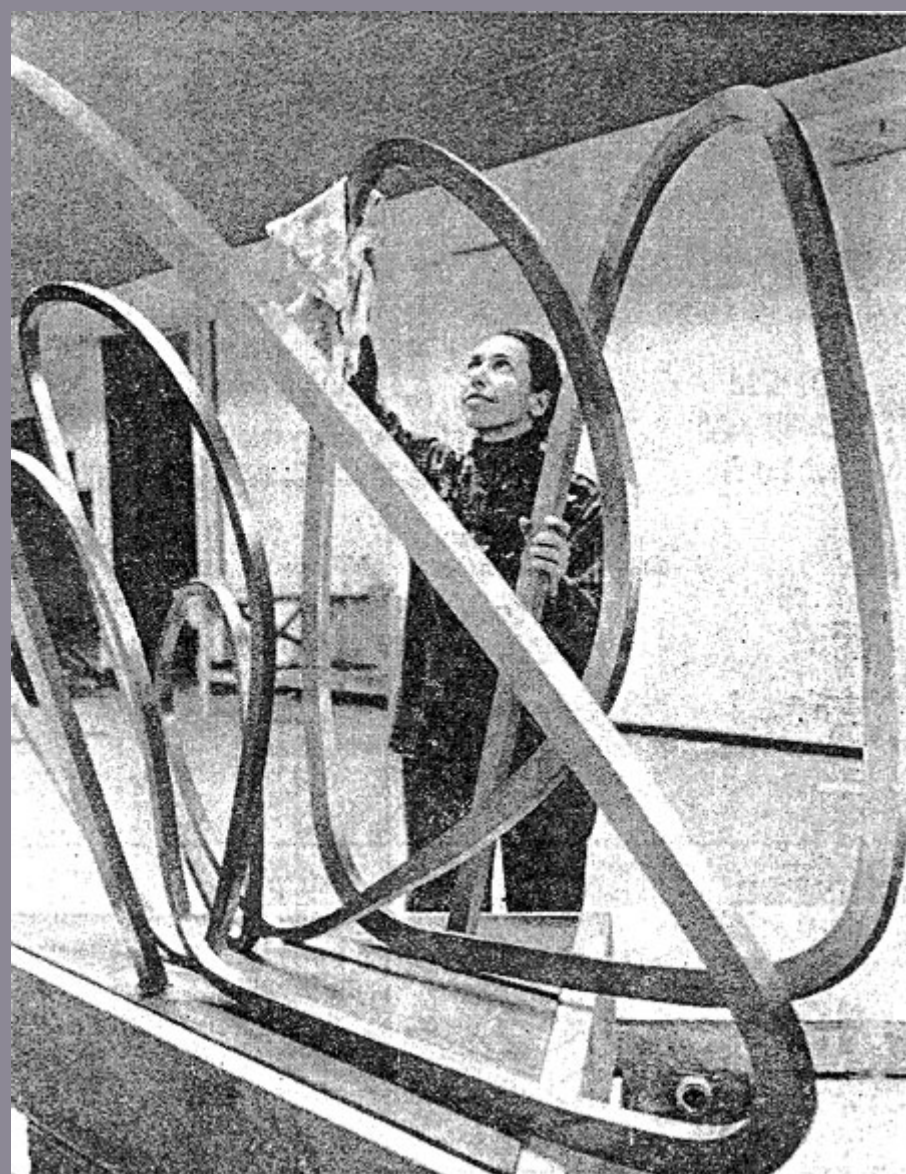
"Once I had created something three-dimensional that hung in space, I couldn't go back to working with paint on flat surface," she said.

Initially she classified her sculptures simply as Orblitts (suspended from overhead), Stablitts (rising from the ground), Aquablitts (water-inspired designs), Alphablitts (designs which seem to create a private alphabet) and Lunablitts (pieces with humor).

"I never used to name my pieces, but then one of the workmen who was helping me install a piece started calling it "Nessie" because he said it looked like the Loch Ness monster. After that it just seemed natural to give them names."

Mrs. Blitt, dressed casually in tennis shoes and denim, crawled about the Hickory Point mall sculpture sites supervising the positioning of her completed pieces. Each one is a personal achievement – a bit of Blitt, so to speak.

"I hope other people can feel my joy for life in these pieces," she said. "People's feelings are universal. I hope others can relate to my sculptures too."



Rita Blitt polishes her 'Rita's Rainbow' sculpture which decorates Hickory Point Mall
Staff photo by Doug Gaumon