Government makes mark as art patron

By CORINNE ABATT

The landscape around federal buildings across the country is decidedly more exciting since the federal government-began to sponsor-and fund public art projects.

Cities such as Grand Rapids, Akron, Ohio and Fabrabanks, Alaska are now as much a part of the contemporary art scene as New York and San Francisco. Grand Rapids has a di Sivereo (and a Calder), Akron, a William King and Farrancisco, and the contemporary art size of the contemporary art size of the contemporary art size of the contemporary art size. And many more middle size metropolisan communities as well as the big ones are the site of major works by American contemporary artists. It was in 1983 during the Kennedy administration, the federal algency that oversees the design and construction offederal buildings, first earmarked half a percent of the estimated construction cost of each new building for line arts.

Since then, more than \$4 million has been spent. As a result, American contemporary art and sculpture have enjoyed a wider addince can correted a special content of the contemporary art and sculpture have enjoyed a wider addince can corrected a station of the content of the content of the content of the content of the story of the government as an art patron is detailed in a new book by Donald W.Thalacker, "The Place of Art in the World of Architecture."

Thalacker following the story of the government as an architect and director of the GSA Art-in-Architecture Programs since 1972, the was the logical one to take on the writing project. But no one is more surprised than the author himself that this work, published by Chelsea House at \$35,

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practically sold out before it ever made it to the bookstores.

The title is slightly misleading. Not that the subject matter isn't what the title implies, it just sounds slightly intimidating to the average person — the kind of thing a few select intellectuals might ponder over.

But, in fact, Thalacker is a communicator. Dorothy Allen, one of his teachers at Seaholm, remembers him as "an excellent student." But, even then, he must have been a first rate chronical and storyteller. Seldom does a writer pick up that skill overnight.

and storytener. Settonic does a writer pick up that skill overnight.

AND THAT'S ONE THING that separates this book from others on contemporary art. Thialacker presents the agrates that shoroughly human even through they are amply endowed with art skills and vision.

Each artist who received a GSA commission for a major work through the Art-in-Architecture Program is altotted a section in the book along with black and white andr color photographs of the work.

To give the reader a sense of being part of the project, the author includes excerpts from conversations and correspondence and events in the lives of the artists as many of them received the largest commission of their careers. The reader shares the frustrations and triumplas behind the final installation.

Thalacker describes his call to a sculptor whose name was Warren Johnson before he changed it to Blue Sky. When Thalacker skeet to speak to Johnson, he was told the person not onger existed Blue Sky, however, was alive and well and delighted to create a mural for the lobby of the federal

building in Florence, S.C.

Lyane Golob Gelfman had two surprises: in one week, the GSA commission (a) and large acrylic for the U.S.

and the large acrylic for the U.S.

anew halp daughter.

he story of the installation of the di Suvero sculpture in Grand Rapids and the secentific for a movie—the townspeople, the newspapers and city officials were all into the act before: the project was completed.

While Thalacker, as administrator of the program, doesn't give himself a chapter, it would have been interesting if he had.

Judging by the projects which he application of the project was completed and the second of the project was completed as a side, well-traveled road. He went instead for a courageous and innovative route.

One of the most controversial was

stead for a courageous and innovative route.

One of the most controversial was Claes Oldenberg's Batcolumn for the Social Security Administration Building in Chicago. Even U. S. Sen. William Proxmire took a cut at him for that

one.

MICHIGAN ART AND ARTISTS occupy a respectable share of the book. Gerhardt Knodel, had of the Cranbrook. Academy of Art fiber department, is given star treatment with several black and whites plus a full page color photo of his plee. "SigRilbons: An Oklahoma Tribute" which is in the two-story entrace lobby of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City.

P. Murrah Federai Building, Usianoma City.

Jane Knight of Birmingham has a fi-ber work in this same building and a photo of it is in the book.

The connecting links to this area are many. Weaver Sherri Smith of Ann Ar-bor was commissioned to do an elabo-

rate piece for the lobby of the federal building in Ann Arbor. Glen Paulson of Bloomfield Hills was the architect.

Two sculptors featured in the book, George Sugarman and William King, both recently completed commissions for the new Detroit General Hospital in the Wayne State University medical

the Wayne State University medical complex.
Irene Walt, who chaired the committee to raise money to acquire those two sculptures, plus some others for the sculptures, plus some others for the paragraphs of reedits for her for chair sing to augment the amount GSA had available for sculpture for Detroit'S McNamara Federal Building.

The result was a \$100,000 commission to John Chamberlain for the plaza of the McNamara Building.

At first, Thalacker was reluctant to take on the book idea. He already had his time so tightly budgeted that it would make even greater demands on

nis time so tigntly outgeted that it would make even greater demands on himself and his family. His wife, Helene (Hely), whom he met when she was an AFS student at Scaholm from Luxembourg, encouraged him to go ahead with it in his spare time.

"It meant writing, researching and proof-reading nearly every night and weekend for two years," he said, adding. "There was just no time for family life, not even cutting the lawn." If a single book could help change American atitudes, particularly the negative ones toward public art, this one has a good chance. It has the ability to establish a bond between the artists and the general public and to build a sense of pride in and understanding of the art process.



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