

Creative Living

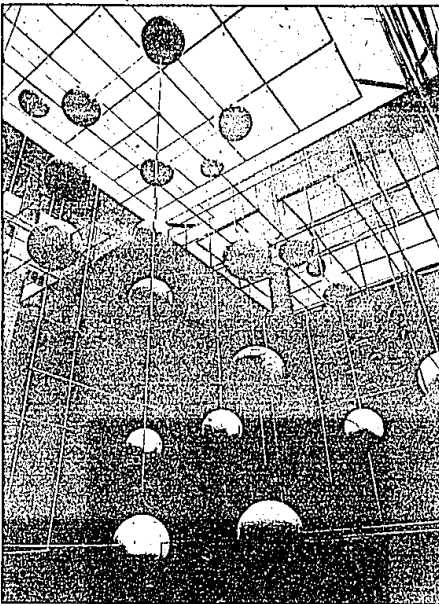
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In this work by Joseph Kinnebrew, inspired by molecular structure, the center ball is bright yellow, and all the rest are white. The installation problems with this one might have stymied a lesser group.



Lee Hoffman stands in the midst of George Sugarman's brightly colored, metal courtyard sculpture that is functional as well as full of fun and charm.

Major effort brings great satisfactions

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Probably nothing Lee Hoffman of Bloomfield Hills has done continues to give her more pleasure than the art collection at Detroit Receiving Hospital.

And it was a time when, though a career art dealer, there was no fee involved. Professionals are always being asked to give their services free to friends and groups. For obvious reasons they often have to decline. But, Hoffman felt so strongly about this one that she worked on it as a volunteer for seven years.

Certainly, she wasn't alone. She was a member of the Joint Arts Commission that included Richard Dillman, Eugene Driker, Olga Dworkin, Dr. Dewey Mosby, Dr. Harold Gardner, William Kesler and Irene Walt.

And these eight people, each of whom Hoffman said had a special area of expertise, managed to install in the hospital one of the most outstanding art collections in the country.

And they raised a half a million dollars to finance it, all through private donations.

IRENE WALT, who spearheaded the project, said, "Lee's role was very special. She was our tastemaker."

Hoffman said, "When we saw the physical place, we knew you couldn't just put anybody in there."

Kesler, the architect, had designed a spectacular, contemporary structure with wide corridors, vast areas of natural light and open, interior courtyards. Floors, walls, furniture and accessories in a palette of primary colors make

the hospital one of the most lively, cheerful places imaginable.

Precedents were being broken and sterile traditions cast aside, setting the stage for more of the same in relation to the fine art.

Contemporary art is Hoffman's first love. When she had her gallery on North Woodward in Birmingham and now as a dealer building private collections, she puts her emphasis on quality and innovation.

Detroit Receiving Hospital was the ideal setting for this great achievement. The committee members sensed this and rose to the occasion — not, however, as a rubber stamp group.

Walt said, "One of the greatest things about this art commission — we met frequently for seven years — is that there were lots of strong words, we nearly destroyed the project, but now we're all good friends."

HOFFMAN said, as if she still didn't believe they had actually completed everything. "We had such problems. When you work with artists and installations — that's where Irene was so incredible, nothing stood in her way. The obstacles were unbelievable, but Irene and Olga were always positive and cheerful."

When the arts commission was first established, they looked to Grand Rapids for inspiration — that city had acquired some outstanding sculptural works by internationally known artists.

Besides Hoffman was interested in Joseph Kinnebrew, the Grand Rapids sculptor who had done the famous "Fish Ladder" for his hometown as well as other major works.

While Lee was admiring the "Fish Ladder" on a visit, she spoke to the man standing next to her about its importance and significance. It turned out to be the artist himself.

KINNEBREW did one of the most engaging courtyard sculptures at Detroit Receiving Hospital.

"He is almost like a Renaissance man the way he conceives his space," said Hoffman.

What pleases her particularly about Kinnebrew's work is that 24 aluminum spheres (23 painted white, one yellow), arranged on a grid, appeal and delight on so many levels.

Children respond to it on the level of a game. Scientists like the molecular structure.

Saying she could listen to him talk for hours, Hoffman said of Kinnebrew, "He's an engineer, he's a visionary, he's an environmentalist — what he has always wanted to do are purely environmental pieces."

Two other unusual courtyard installations were done by William King and George Sugarman, both internationally known artists.

King's work, "Help," in the third floor courtyard is two figures of one inch thick aluminum. The taller one is 33 feet high.

Hoffman said of King, based in New York City, "He taught at Cranbrook. He looks just like his figures, tall, lanky, with great humility. He has done some other wonderful big pieces."

The initial objections to the piece were that it was too frivolous and that it was figurative.

There is still controversy about Sam Gilliam's 36-by-7-foot, mixed media

work in the main floor corridor that connects the hospital and the University Health Center.

"Irene went to Washington, D.C., and interviewed him (Gilliam) and I thought it was a wonderful choice," said Hoffman.

The lack of graffiti both pleases and amazes the art commission members.

"It reinforces the fact that you can give people an aesthetic experience, and they'll live up to it," said Hoffman.

The response of the thousands of people who see the works of art, patients, staff and visitors and the quality of the works themselves has had a decided effect on Hoffman and the members of the arts commission.

"ONE OF my dreams has been to do something on a grandiose scale in a public level. I feel art is very central to civilization. It is not a peripheral thing. In these times of chaos it is more important than ever."

"What really has survived from past civilizations is art, architecture and artifacts. . . This (hospital) is such a gay, exhilarating place, there's not another hospital in America like it. I think this is truly a place for me. I get chills while I'm standing here."

She was standing in front of a painting by George Vinos opposite the entrance to the University Health Center. "It could not have happened without Irene Walt. It could not have happened without Olga Dworkin."

Hoffman recalled she was told in Grand Rapids by a member of the art commission that this Detroit Receiving

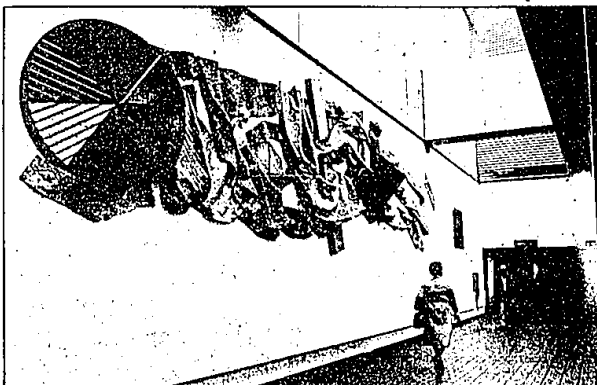
Hospital project would never make it without a consultant.

But, not only did these eight people accomplish what they had been told was impossible, they did it on a scale that will be the precedent for others throughout the world.

Staff photos by Mindy
Saunders



The 14-by-17-foot bas relief in the center lobby is the work of Gian Michaelis of Troy. The design and subtle shading of the gray and white tiles, combined with cast silver, creates a feeling of movement and excitement. Below is William King's monumental aluminum work, "Help," commissioned to honor Sen. Carl Levin, a member of the Detroit Common Council 1971-78 and paid for by the Friends of Carl Levin.



The multi-color, multi-media acrylic painting by Sam Gilliam of Washington, D.C., 36-by-7 feet, is in the corridor that connects the clinic and the hospital.

