

Creative Living

Co Abalt editor/644-1100



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Thursday, November 20, 1986 O&F

People Mover art

Project demands eye for detail, monumental vision

By Corinne Abalt
staff writer

One of the tags which up to now may have evaded Glen Michaels is inventor. As an artist he is a sculptor, painter, designer and oft labeled renaissance man, but when it comes to the process of art, he is also an inventor.

And when completed and installed, his work of art for Detroit's People Mover station will probably seem as natural to our lives as the light bulb, the radio or the car.

Like many inventors he uses familiar materials in new combinations, sometimes adapting old processes to new materials.

For the station, he is doing 31 panels, 4 by 5 feet each. There will be a block of the panels on the right hand wall at the base of the escalator and a diagonal line of them going up along the escalator and connecting to another block of panels at the top where the people mover comes in.

The panels will be white enamel baked on steel (similar to refrigerator and oven doors) Michaels' designs, with the theme of "weightlessness," will be silk screened on each panel and he will hand paint some color on the black and white panels before they are installed.

This sounds a great deal simpler than it actually is because Michaels is an exacting artist whose attention to detail and involvement in minute detail culminates in grand scale works with a sweeping vision.

He said, "The first thing is to design the raw materials I want to work with."

BY RAW MATERIALS, he means the shapes and he chose many such as fans (one of his favorites) building forms and others which seem to suggest entities forming into complex organic materials.

Once these raw materials are established to his satisfaction, he be-

gins to draw on a scale of a half inch to one foot.

"Then," he said, "I did the whole drawing in a total mood in a total rectangle and I removed it."

The next step was to cut it up and rearrange it into a collage that would follow the form of the final work of 31 panels of art.

When that pleased him, he had Detroit photographer Tim Thayer and his assistant Mary Ann Letasi photograph the collage in 31 sections using special techniques to enlarge and still define all of the fine detail which started on that small half inch to one foot scale.

THEN MICHAELS called upon Helen Cartmell of St. Clair Shores, former member of the Wayne State University art faculty, an artist who is masterful when it comes to fine work with pencil, pen and brush.

She is doing the retouching on the photographs making sure that each is exactly as he planned. The silk screens for the final work will be made from these photographs.

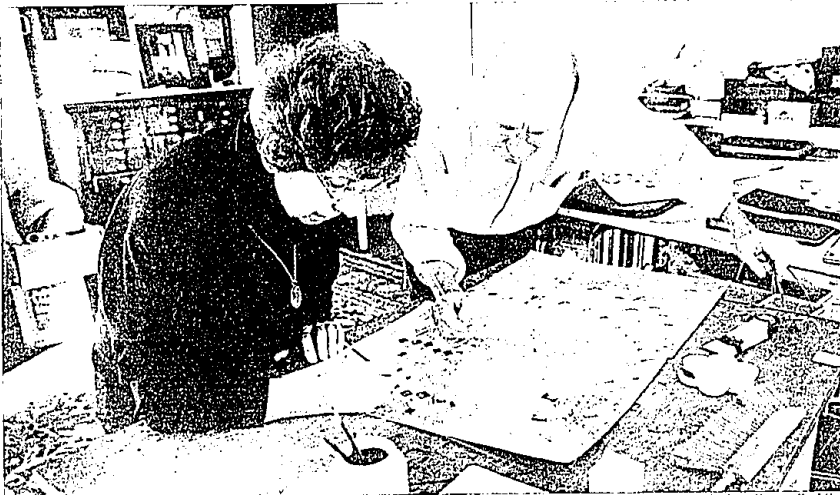
Michaels said that as soon as a small drawing is enlarged, it loses its clarity, adding, "There is enough distortion in the photo that every line has to be retouched."

As he looked over her shoulder while she worked on one of the black and white photos, he said, "This just sort of evolved bit by bit. As you can see I like the precision of things. Helen and I have been working on this for a year."

Although Michaels did many drawings before he had what he wanted -- several because the dimensions themselves changed from what was originally given to him, nothing is wasted.

"Each one will be a source for another work," he said.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT factor all the way along was what Michaels calls "different vantage point requirements."



Glen Michaels tells Helen Cartmell that because of her skill in refining the details of the black and white photos, the final art work will be clean and beautiful. The design she's working on is one of 31 which will be blown up and mounted on the wall of the People Mover station.

For instance, he said the ones seen at the top of the escalator as the people mover comes into the station are bolder than those along the side of the escalator. He mentioned the importance of an after-image for the side section.

"Everytime you go up the escalator, you'll see something different," he said.

Cartmell said of Michaels, "I respect him so much and I believe in

him and his integrity."

As she applied white paint along the edge of fine black line of the photograph, she said, "Everything (in the design) has an origin and an ending . . . I feel like it's another universe."

Michaels sees this as the beginning of many new processes and applications. A computer specialist, Patricia Angel, has put part of the design into a computer, a 26-hour undertaking

which he said could bring him to another frontier, "Carrying this to a three-dimensional surface."

HE SEES an application for architecture, "I would love to do this for the exterior of a building. I would like to pull the symbolism out of the architecture itself -- I wouldn't want it as upholstery."

While he is working on this he also has several other major projects underway, two more in the attic stu-

dios and another in the basement. He runs up and down the back stairway of the beautiful old manor house he is restoring as easily as a 5-year-old, moving from one project and one mental set to another with amazing speed.

Like the tiles and pieces of his huge wall sculptures, his ideas build one of top of another to come tumbling forth in an avalanche of creative thought.

New spa leads to complete renovation

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

One good thing leads to another in home remodeling as well as other aspects of life. That's what a couple of owners learned this summer when they decided to add a spa to their newly acquired older house in northern Birmingham.

From this little foray into remodeling they ended up giving the whole house the once-over and added 300 square feet to the building's dimensions.

"It was a challenge. When I walked in, this was a mess," said Jeffrey G. King, president of Metro Spa and Gavin Design & Construction in Bloomfield Hills. King takes care of the design and operations aspect and Fred J. Colp handles the construction business.

Their first challenge was to cantilever the ceiling of the second floor bedroom that looks down on the spa. With the roof line straightened, the curving greenhouse walls of the spa could be added to the home.

The spa, with its sunken whirlpool, has a separate temperature control from the rest of the house. That allows the owners to keep the spa cooler than the main rooms during the winter and gives the spa a steamy sauna effect.

"It's a great conversation piece," said King. "We find that instead of coming home from work at the end of the day and drinking wine and bitching, they're relaxing in their spa. It brings a family together."

The room is softly lit at night by fan-shaped sconces throwing light upward. Vertical blinds that can be discreetly moved aside to allow occupants to see the soon-to-be landscaped backyard also provide privacy.

TWO ROUND BAMBOO chairs offer thick cushions to those

who'd prefer to just sit in the airy room.

After the spa was completed, the owners had the same experience as anyone who's washed one wall and then discovered the remaining three look even dingier by comparison. Pleased by the results, they decided with King and Colp to change some of the home's architecture.

As is typical with houses built 50 years ago, the structure was divided into a warren of small rooms and tiny closets. In the end, only the kitchen and the tiles in the second floor bathroom remained from the old house.

The heating system was modernized. Air conditioning was added. Then it was discovered that the electrical wiring and plumbing sorely needed updating. At that point, the owners decided to replace the windows.

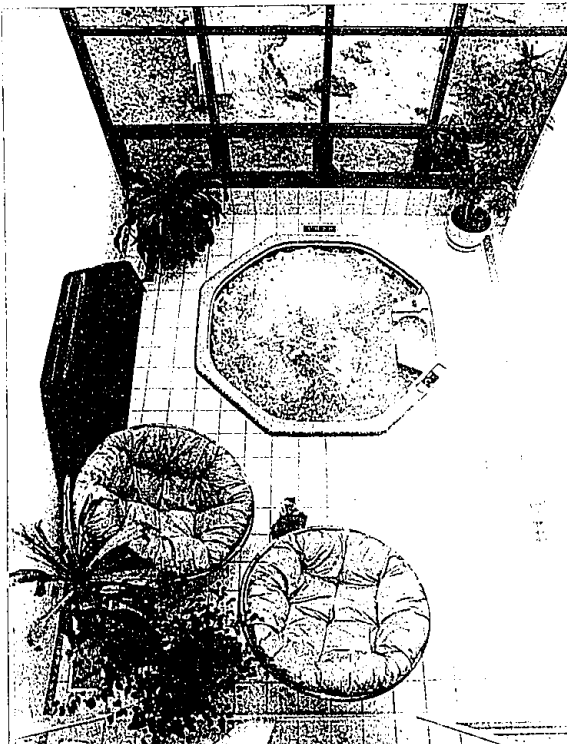
By that time, it seemed only natural to remove a wall on the second floor, transforming two small bedrooms into one large master one. A section of the wall that putted out into the bedroom and hid the chimney inspired the owners and designer to add a sleek fireplace to the room.

"We specialize in space plans which give contemporary convenience and style to an old home," King said. "We take into account traffic flow and bigger closets."

"I don't want anyone to know that additions have been made. We don't do dormers," he said.

He cut into the low, old-fashioned arches above doorways to give the impression of more space and light. A low overhang in the stairway off the living room was also cut to make walking upstairs more comfortable and to allow furniture to be carried to the second floor.

Even the old front door was replaced by a new one that remains in keeping with the home's older style facade. "It wasn't planned this way," the owner said.



A dip in the spa after a hard day at the office may someday replace the martini for its soothing effect. This one was installed in a traditional Birmingham house by Metro Spa of Bloomfield Hills

photos by Jerry
Zolynsky

The living room with a mirrored fireplace, new door and updated features still retains a distinct identity and link to its roots.