

Creative Living

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Good, bad and bucolic Assessing public art

By C. L. Rugenstein
special writer

Public art — those corporate monoliths, war memorials or fountains spouting dancing figures, are meant to be more than decorations, according to Charlotte Stokes. They not only document history and mark social change, they say something about the place they occupy and the people who put them there.

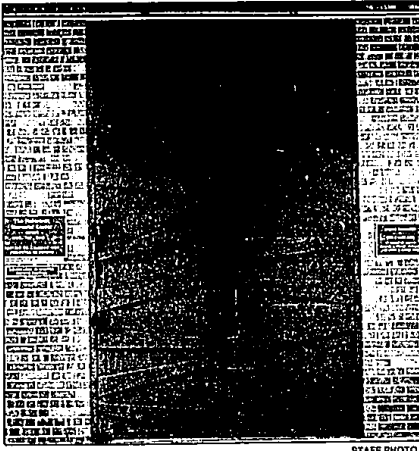
"If you want public art to work for an institution (civic, religious, or corporate) it definitely has to say something about the institution," she explained. "It enhances — sets it up a little, like a woman with beautiful eyes wearing eye makeup." Good public art makes people want to get a closer look, perhaps eat their lunch by it, Stokes said.

Stokes, chairman of the department of Art and Art History at Oakland University spoke recently on the good — and not so good — uses of public art in Oakland County.

She offered illustrations and contrasts in the use of public art through a slide presentation.

One of the first examples was the use of traditional art, a bronze Marshall Fredericks sculpture fronting a Methodist Church in Waterford of Christ with a flock of sheep. "Christ the Good Shepherd" needs no explaining.

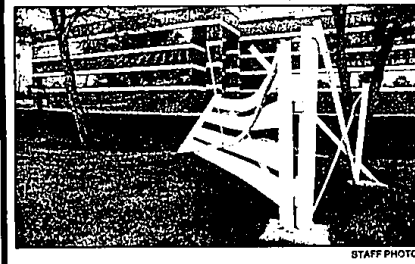
"It illustrates a well-understood story . . . and was not meant to be emotional, because it's so well understood," Stokes said.



Doors of the Holocaust Memorial Center of West Bloomfield were designed by Detroit sculptor Morris Brose. They relate deeply and directly to the human tragedy that is documented at the center.

On the other hand, the "Holocaust Doors" at the Holocaust Memorial at West Bloomfield's Jew-

ish Community Center are less traditional.



Michael Hall's sculpture, "Covington," has been the center of controversy since it was placed in front of a building on Northwestern Highway. While some people appreciate the memories of country life that it evokes, others find it distasteful.

CREATED BY MORRIS BROSE, the irregular lengths of cross-crossed black metal are still recognizable for what they represent — the boxcar doors of the trains that went to the death camps. The doors, with the Memorial's small, barred windows evoke

with power the shrunken space and meanness of what they represent.

"They're not traditional Jewish symbols, they explore new territory," Stokes noted. Jewish institutions in general are more adventurous she added, and will commission "a good proportion of advanced art, in terms of religious art."

Corporate art also came in for its share of attention. Stokes singled out two works with different reactions by their viewing public.

One, the large stone head in front of K mart world headquarters in Troy, does its job very well. The open panel in one side makes a nice statement, according to Stokes. "It asserts the power of the corporation: one must insinuate one's ideas a little but still remain part of the organization," she pointed out.

A controversial piece of sculpture by Oakland County artist Michael Hall, has not been as fortunate. The curving, white-painted work looks like a gate, part of a farm fence.

Placed by art enthusiast and collector Gilbert B. Silverman in front of a building that houses his company's offices in Farmington Hills, neighbors have complained about it and want it taken away. Because the piece is too close to the road, Farmington Hills' zoning board may have the last word about its disposition.

"The piece has no obvious corporate symbolism, but it does contrast on traditional rural America," Stokes said. Placed against a too-green lawn, with sculpted, reflecting pool-bottomed brook — "with duck . . . it's so bucolic, so manufactured."

CITIES CAME IN for their share of scrutiny, also. Stokes contrasted the way Birmingham and Pontiac have preserved their city centers, or, in Pontiac's case, failed to preserve its centrality.

"Pontiac has lost something with the dispersal of its public buildings," Stokes said. She added that she doesn't think Pontiac will ever regain a strong, central civic sense because of that, but commented on two positive uses of public art there.

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— Jack Lenor Larsen



Larsen predicts new brightness for the '90s

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

Internationally renowned fabric designer Jack Lenor Larsen shared his insider's predictions on the trends and colors of the '90s when he spoke at the Michigan Design Center in Troy recently.

For his presentation, Larsen added to his businessman's gray suit the dash of a sunshine yellow knit tie and glasses with stark white frames. In his design business, he strikes a similar balance between innovation and marketing knowledge by combining his artist's color vision and his weaver's enthusiasm for textures and fiber possibilities, with the acumen of a businessman who for years has dealt successfully in international design markets.

Larsen spoke with enthusiasm of color.

"It is the stuff pageantry and poetry are made of — the stuff of art and humor," he said.

Next to light, color is the most important design element because it powerfully affects how we feel, he said.

From the business point of view, "color is the first and the most important buying decision a consumer makes," he said.

After the beige '70s and the apricot that flared then collapsed in the early '80s, Larsen predicted "new brightness" for the '90s with middle intensity colors, not necessarily bright or primary colors, but a palette that is "vibrant and joyful, cheerful and brave."

He expects to see more blues mixed with red, he said.

"The end of U.S. dominance as a world force will open us to color, especially from Asia and the Pacific rim."

LARSEN ANTICIPATES the return of texture. Nubbler textured fabrics will make inroads on the current vogue for smooth, matte finishes.

"Too much interior color (now) is lifeless, flat and laminated," Larsen said.

Instead of the expanses of flat color now popular, Larsen favors the "broken colors of nature," the shattered, mottled gradations seen in sand, granite, tree trunks and bird plumage.

Luxury is on the upswing. Larsen predicted an increase in "lush, overscaled, textural cloth in iridescent colors and a return to silk, fine linen, good worsteds and Egyptian cotton."

THE NEW technology of faster, computerized looms enables manufacturers to produce fabric less expensively for a broader market. New printing, pigments and half-tone printing techniques that shade colors smoothly from one tone to another dramatically open up fabric possibilities for the future.

Larsen foresees more intricate fabric-making techniques such as printing on the warp before weaving a fabric, printing designs over damasks and other richly textured materials and more two-sided fabrics, he said.

Silk screen printing processes now permit designers to use fireworks of up to 88 different colors and discharge printing, in which fabric is first dyed black and then the color is taken out, creating another intricate craft-like effect.

Larsen expects nonchalant elements and surprise to figure more prominently in future designs, he said.

"I still don't understand museum rooms," he said. "They're stiff, formal and boring, but you see a lot of them — a lot of them get published."

"Consumers will be exposed to more state of the art space," he said. Design will blossom in hospitals and throughout the health care industry, as well as in hotels and the hospitality industry. Hotels embraced the "luxury business" be-

cause they need to make up to consumers for the fact that service sometimes falters, Larsen said.

"The jewel tones and small pattern worsteds (that dominated office furniture) will not carry over," he said.

HE ANTICIPATES an increasing difference between office and residential colors, patterns and fibers, he said. White walls will lose ground to colored walls and to fabric-covered walls.

Light will brighten more dark corners in the '90s with low-voltage lamps coming from many sources. Larsen foresees an increasing awareness of the sensitive relationship between color and light. Both designers and consumers will make more color selections on site, using the actual lights that will reflect on fabrics, he said.

He lamented the "shoe box" design of many modern, dry-walled rooms because they lack architectural interest. In such rooms color and fabric become essential to add design and bring a room to life.

WHEN LARSEN first came to New York to launch his career as a designer, khaki was his favorite color, he said. Personally he finds he is again drawn to the browns because "they're good foils for brighter colors," he said.

Colors often run in 30-year cycles, and Larsen sees in the return of bronze-khaki evidence that avocado, the blockbuster color of the early '60s, may have come full circle, he said.

Since 1951 when he opened his studio in New York, Larsen has earned an impressive array of honors and has designed for Stevens, Martex, Dansk, Pan Am, Braniff and the Rockefeller, just a few of the big names recognizing his expertise.

LARSEN'S NEW line of linens for Marlex, "Reflections," will be in stores at the turn of the year. It features finely woven, all-cotton sheets.

"It's the first time I've been allowed to design bed linens in all cotton," Larsen said.

They are priced higher than blends, but "they feel wonderful to sleep on, and require little or no ironing," he said.

He described the new line as "classy, country, with some elegance." Two of the new design groups are based on old quilt patterns, he said.

HIS COMPANY, Jack Lenor Larsen, runs production centers in 31 countries worldwide and has added carpet, leather and furniture divisions to its original line of fabrics. He is affiliated with 41 institutions and schools, including the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where he studied in his early years.

One of the boards on which he serves recently chose the palette that will dominate upholstery fabrics, carpeting, tiles, towels, drapery panels and linens in 1991.

The aim of the group is to coordinate colors in all the design industries. It includes Mary McFadden, designer for wealthy clients, as well as the president of Pittsburgh Paints, which sells largely to middle market Americans.

Each member of the group submits 40 fabric swatches for consideration. Then the board meets for most of a day to discuss the nuances of color, to debate intensities and compatibilities in order to arrive at seven or eight colors that will break into the limelight at furniture shows in a year or two, colors that will be splashed across future pages of Architectural Digest and will eventually dominate the middle market.

In 1991, brides will pick towels in hues Larsen recently helped select. New sofas and chairs in those hues will be carried into homes and dental offices across the country and around the world.

Unusual programming continues as Artists Series opens season

American Artists Series opens its new season with a chamber concert at 3 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 29, in Kingswood Cranbrook Auditorium.

The series, founded 19 years ago by Joann Freeman, artistic director and pianist, will continue on four more Sundays, Jan. 15, March 5, April 9 and May 7.

The opening concert will feature the American Artists Chamber Players — Hart Holliman, viola; Linda Snedden Smith, violin; John Thurman, cello; Ervin Monroe, flute and Freeman, piano. Holliman, Smith, Thurman and Monroe are members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

The program includes the Piano Quartet by Saint-Saens, a string trio by Beethoven and trio for flute and strings by Max Reger and Albert Roussel.

For ticket information, call 851-5044 or the AAs office, 647-2230. Season tickets, \$45, and individual tickets, \$9.50-11, are available at Harmony House, Royal Oak, Farmington Hills; Metro News Center, Telegraph and Maple, Bloomfield Township; Book People, Orchard Mall, West Bloomfield; and Everything Music, Farrell Shopping Center, Southfield.

For the January concert, the New Baroque Solists from New York will present compositions by Giovanni Legrenzi, Johann Joachim Quantz, C.P.E. Bach, Johann Friedrich Fasch, Francois Couperin, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach.

In April, guest pianist Jutta Czapski, wife of Maestro Gunther Herbig, will join Freeman in a performance of Schumann's Andante and Variations for two pianos, two cello and French horn. Ronald Fischer, violin, and Eugene Wade, French horn will join the Chamber Players for a

program that includes the Horn Quintet by Mozart and the Piano Quintet by Saint-Saens.

For the final and only evening concert of the season on May 7, Jane Rosenson, Detroit Symphony Orchestra harpist, will be the guest artist with the Chamber Players in a pro-

gram that includes Danzas Sacree et Profanes by Debussy, "Masque of Death" by Andre Caplet and the Trio Elegique by Rachmaninoff. In her programming, Freeman is dedicated to presenting the unusual, the seldom-played and obscure works of great composers.



The camaraderie that has developed over the years among the Artisan Artists Series Chamber Players results in notable teamwork when they perform. Shown in rehearsal, from left, they are: Hart Holliman, viola; Linda Snedden Smith, violin; Joann Freeman, pianist and artistic director; and John Thurman, cello.