

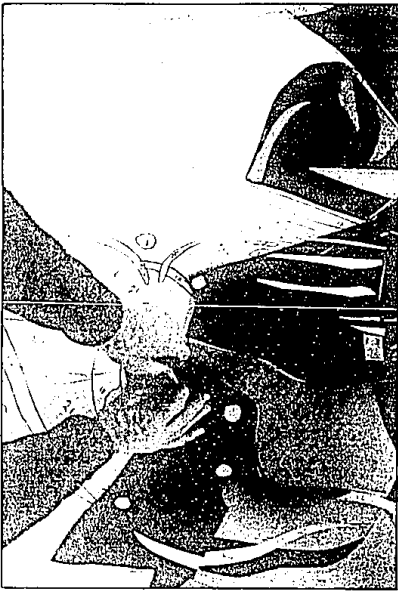
Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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Glen Michaels, sculptor, said he was pleased with the way the glass wall catches the reflections of his fused glass art, now partially installed (15 feet below). He is shown in open Center

Courtyard of the new Michigan Library and Historical Center in Lansing. At left, in the Ainsworth Glass Works studio, Michaels makes sure that the fired piece fits the pattern perfectly.

Michigan reflections

Fused glass puzzle falling into place



Glen Michaels, left, and Don Ainsworth discuss sign and dissolve into a Chinese device of v. a completed section on the studio floor. The ribbons, near their feet, start in a Moorish de-

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

THE SCULPTURE POOL that Glen Michaels designed for the new Michigan Library and Historical Center in Lansing is one-fourth installed and already dazzling.

The Kresge Foundation gave \$500,000 for this work of art. Michaels, a Troy resident and nationally recognized sculptor, has been working on the project for approximately five years. It has undergone revisions, modifications and delays.

When the last section is installed sometime next spring, it will "be the largest piece of fused glass in the world," Michaels said.

Dan Ainsworth and Richard Novak of Ainsworth Glass of Detroit, who are doing all of the fabricating, will vouch for that.

MORE THAN 4,000 pieces (most about the size of a slice of pizza) will be in the completed work and each of those is fused from many smaller pieces of glass, Novak said.

"This will be the largest piece of fused glass in the world with no other materials. We know because it's the most glass ever ordered," he said.

Seven kilns in the Ainsworth studio have been going night and day for many months on the project.

"This is the largest of its kind since the Egyptians did it on the walls of the tombs," said Ainsworth, a teacher and student of glass history.

And Ainsworth is prepared to show that the ancient Egyptians were no slouches when it came to fused glass. He has slides of Egyptian fused glass from the collection of the Smithsonian Institute. Some of the techniques these "ancients used are still not understood."

THE 12 FOOT WIDE POOL circles a 50 foot tall Michigan white pine in the open, center rotunda of the new building, which is several blocks west of the Capitol in downtown Lansing.

As soon as Michaels completed the painting of what the pool would look like (his third complete design), the arduous planning began for what he smilingly described as

"the largest paint-by-number project in the world." The glass mosaic basis of the pool is a reproduction of that painting.

The theme is Michigan waterways. To reproduce the colors and patterns in the painting in glass mosaic on such a scale presented no end of challenges and problems.

As much as any artist around today, Michaels is accustomed to incorporating a massive number of elements into a magnificent entity. That's what he does in his commissions for huge wall sculptures made of tiles, cast bronze, glass and other objects.

HOWEVER, BEFORE this could be put together, Ainsworth blew the painting up to actual scale on a computer and made a full-size paper pattern of the design.

He determined 93 colors were in the painting, not counting the shadows. He and Michaels laid the full-size pattern sections out on a gymnasium floor to make sure they were true to scale.

"I had nightmares it would turn out to be an oval or a square," Michaels said.

With the shape ascertained, the design was drawn on the pattern sections. The individual pieces were determined and numbered, the colors of the design of each piece marked by number and the individual pattern pieces cut.

IT IS indeed not only the largest paint-by-number project, as Michaels jokingly described it, but it may be the largest jigsaw puzzles on record as well.

"It's a pretty involved process," Ainsworth said. "There's a lot more to it than first appeared. And we drew every one of the (pattern) pieces twice."

Another consideration, he said, is that all of the glass used, the clear, all 93 colors and the iridescents, must be compatible — heat in precisely the same way — or the pieces would shatter in the kiln.

Undulations are in the surface of the pool, so, Ainsworth made the pattern pieces smaller and sometimes thicker at those places to compensate for the changes.

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Richard Novak opens the lid of the kiln to check the progress of pieces inside. The temperature must reach 1,600 degrees before firing is completed.

staff photos by Jerry
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