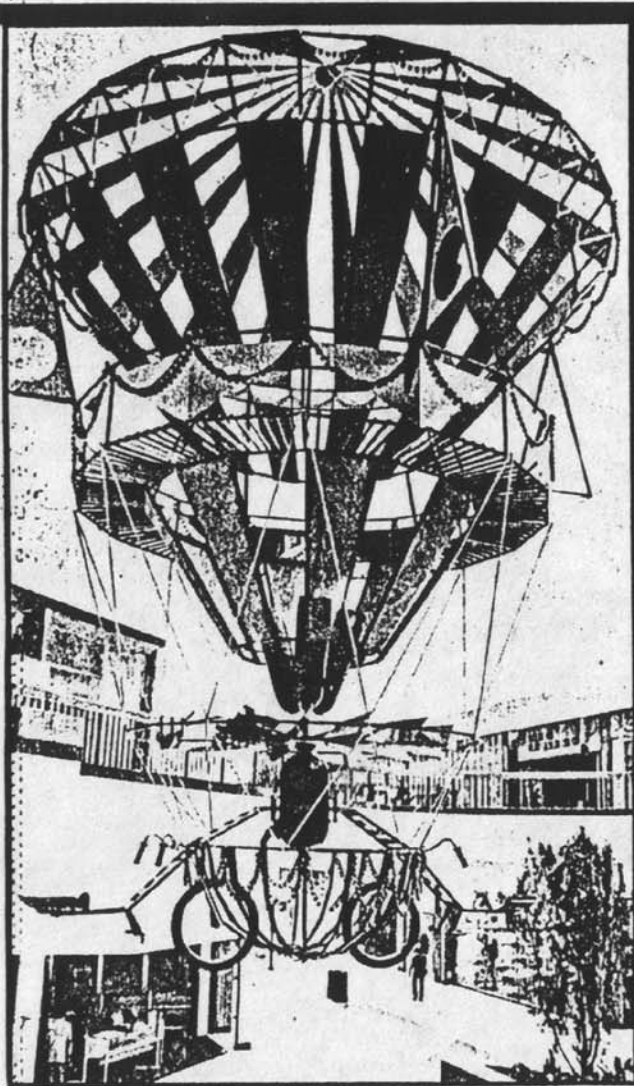


# Art Magnificent Flying Machines



**'BITTERS' WONDERFUL DIRIGIBLES** — Stan Bitters created four strange contraptions carefully disguised as flying machines as the

main pieces of art in the Solano Mall, but admits that he is afraid of heights.

Wilbur and Orville might be shocked to see this flying machine, hanging in front of Solano Mall's new Mervyn's store.

But then again, they might be rather pleased.

It's almost a boat, more than a dirigible, with oars mounted on a bright blue frame, and a tiny green rudder trailing along in midair at the back. But then, it's got these two propellers in front and a couple more props inside a huge box overhead made of orange, yellow and red cloth.

Will it fly? Will it float?

It's those questions that makes Fresno artist Stan Bitters chuckle.

"Something like this has to be a little outrageous and look a little as though it just might take off and fly somewhere to be successful," Bitters said at the Solano Mall preview celebration last week.

"But it comes off as a whimsical happening, a spoof on flight machines, and is just intriguing enough so that people still ask, 'Can they fly?'"

That's exactly what Bitters had in mind more than a year ago when he received the assignment to create four huge, unusual flying ma-

chines that would serve as art for the Solano Mall.

"Ernest Hahn (developer of the mall) is interested in flying, and with Travis Air Force Base so close and the Nut Tree, it seemed natural for the art in the mall to take on an airy, flying motif," Bitters said.

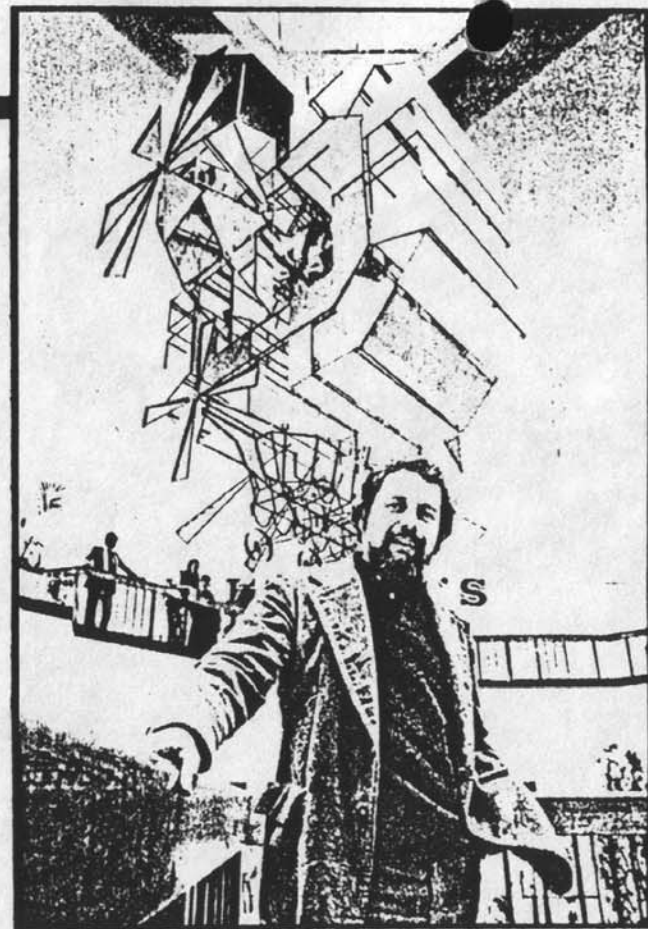
So Bitters, who has created many large-scale ceramics and other sculptured forms for commercial businesses and private homes, designed four whimsical flying machines to hang in strategic positions in the mall. Three of the four are hanging now. The last piece to come will be hung in the Macy's courtyard later this year.

The dirigibles are all large structures made of hollow steel tubing with stretched fabric in bright colors. Some have wheels, bicycle seats and handle bars, propellers, oars and rudders. Though they all break down into eight-foot pieces, it is Bitters' hope that the art never has to be moved.

"Personally, I can't stand heights," the artist admitted with a laugh. But that didn't stop him from creating the huge flying machines. He hired Roger Dupzck to construct the mammoth pieces and to hang them.

"After I did all the painting, added the fabric and details, Roger was hung by a harness on his back from the ceiling to hang the stuff," Bitters said. "It was very comical, but I'm glad I didn't have to do it."

There are tricks involved in creating any piece of art, particularly ones for public display, Bitters admitted. Problems with the environment for his art were paramount in designing the flying machines.



**THOSE FANTASTIC FLYING MACHINES** — Whimsical creations by Fresno artist Stan Bitters

hang in the newly completed Solano Mall, prompting many people to wonder, "Can they really fly?"

"We could not obliterate the name of any major store and originally I was to only use transparent fabrics," he recalled.

He submitted his plans for the art to the developer, bright colors and all and got them approved, much to his delight. "Art tends to get pushed into corners, and while I think they (the flying machines) could stand more open space, I'm pleased with the results."

Bitters has spent many years creating art for building facades and finds architectural sculpture an art form much to his liking. "In our culture, shopping centers are also becoming centers for the arts. We're seeing a lot of large art projects in public places due to the cost and the enormity of some of these projects," Bitters said.

But having his works in the Solano Mall is something the artist has

looked forward to for a long time. "There's always the problem of how arty can you get and still relate to the public and have them appreciate what you've done," Bitters admitted.

But so far, public acceptance does not seem to be a problem. On his few visits to the mall, Bitters has received numerous compliments on his work, from store managers to the general public.

"There's a fine line between creating a dirigible that is between a Smithsonian replica and something you made up," Bitters noted. "I think I reached that point."

"You know," one woman who attended the mall opening said to her husband, "They look they're going to start moving any minute."

"You know," said Stan Bitters, overhearing, "I think you're right."