



Stan Bitters ... CREATIVE SCULPTOR

Today's sculptor often sees his role as that of a redeemer, and Fresno artist Stan Bitters is no exception. What he and many of his contemporaries are "saving" is the humane quality which they find lacking in much of modern architecture, with its emphasis on minimal form and maximum function. Design sterility leads to alienation, according to the young sculptor, who uses clay and bright colors to create a feeling of earthiness and warmth to which people can relate—his goal, to integrate these forms in architecture.

His most recent commission supplied him with a golden opportunity to do just that. Problem: to "humanize" and re-design the three concrete block and glass buildings of Duncan Ceramic Products in Fresno. Bitters tied the buildings together with a steeply pitched steel roof and re-created the facade with a varying pattern of ceramic panels, walls and sculptures, in a direct use of art as architecture. The photo top left is a 22 x 20 foot section of the job, executed in deep red, blue, black and gray. The same "sunburst" feeling is utilized at other points along the facade in the creation of "lollipops", highly decora-

tive, free-standing discs on steel pedestals. Bitters' artistic kinship to the work of primitive artisans is clearly visible, and his dedication to a hand-crafted feeling in his art—to offset the "machine precision" aspect of modern architecture—extends to the actually shaping and working of the material with his hands and with the blunt ends of two-by-fours. His work is then broken down and assembled by hand, naturally, on site. Bitters views art as the heightening of environment. "Historians remind us of what we value most in the soul of past cultures. Perhaps we can re-acquire what man felt so important to his past. The books are filled with exciting photographs of cave painting, pyramids, statues, cities and whole hillsides encrusted with man's monumental effort to add another dimension to his existence."

Perhaps the profound significance of his artistic objectives account for the almost majestic scope and feeling of his work, seen best in the 25-foot bronze doors which he sculpted for the Fresno Convention Theatre, or the equally massive clay relief walls of the Midland Savings and Loan, top right. His dedication

to "relatedness" however, saves his work from the arrogance which often accompanies lofty goals and grand scales.

A prime example of his humor and artistic acknowledgement of the value of whimsy and fragility in the human experience is the fountain at the Water Tree Inn, lower right. A dynamic expression in welded stainless steel, this work is directly and warmly communicative, certainly the dominant visual experience in the immediate environment.

The Water Tree Fountain is the perfect visualization of another of Bitters' objectives. "I have eagerly pursued the chance to do what so many professional people talk about . . . the exciting task of integrating art in architecture. Like Antonio Gaudi's environment in Barcelona, and Juan O'Gorman's mosaics at the University of Mexico, the concern is not only for the people who are contained, but also for the public who cannot help but be affected by the contact.) In this case, an unforgettable image is being formed by the viewer which will have far reaching effects and will promote more goodwill for the company than a thousand matchbook covers or a hundred-foot sign."

