

Integrating art in a building shows the designer 'cared'

By EVEY RUSKIN
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Stan Bitters is a California architectural sculptor who is interested in integrating art into the environment rather than tacking it on later.

A building with an interior-exterior ceramic wall separated by glass panels would be an example of integration. Bitters has personally designed two-story fountains in office lobbies, and steel-and-fabric mobiles for a shopping center.

But he is a bit hard pressed to find such examples in Anchorage.

"Typically, in the early growth stage of a community, enrichment of life through the integration of art is ignored," says Bitters who spoke recently to a group of local sculptors and others at the Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum and in an interview later.

"There is too much of the



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monolithic building ethic that has no relation to man. You see it a lot in fast growth areas, like Houston."

Bitters likes to get in at the concept stage of architecture, before the blueprints are drawn.

At that point, for instance, you can incorporate ceramic sculptural walls into a building.

A whole lot could be done to warm up Anchorage's downtown area visually, thinks the visiting artist. In general he says that downtown needs more humanizing.

An exception is the landscaped sitting area on Sixth Avenue in front of the Municipal Parks and Recreation Building, a project of the Soptimist Club.

"It makes a small statement of caring," says Bitters.

He noted also the Carr-Gottstein Building on K Street between Third and Fourth Avenues with its whale sculpture,

benches and native Alaskan plantings.

To Bitters, a building is more than a machine for living or working. The environment created by a building affects the people who see it and use it and should be created with full consideration for its human impact.

Throughout history, Bitters points out that art and architecture have been joined to express the values of the societies they represent. One thinks of Notre Dome in Paris, with its stone gargoyles and stained glass windows.

It should be done more in our own society, says Bitters. Aware of the 1 percent money allocated to art in new state buildings in Alaska, Bitters thinks it might be possible for him to do work here.

Starting out life as a painter major, he went to work for a Fresno adobe brick manufacturer who wanted to get into

pottery as a sideline and he thought he would try the new medium.

He found he loved clay and lots of it. Fortunately tons of clay was at his disposal and the factory kiln was huge.

"I needed bigness. I like the large size of things; tea cups didn't interest me. I started to do huge wall clay wall murals, making them on the floor in one piece and then cutting them into tiles and painting and firing them and then installing them," explains Bitters. Branching into other materials, Bitters has also done bronze doors for a convention center and huge clay panels that enlivened the exterior of a corporate headquarters.

Whatever the venture, Stan Bitters comes back to two convictions: Sculpture has to have a strong relationship to the buildings around it. And you have to think about people, not just buildings.