

LEO VILLAREAL, *FIELD* (DETAIL), 2007 (PRECURSOR TO *SKY* FOR THE U.S. COURTHOUSE IN EL PASO, TEXAS)

INTRODUCTION

BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

For a new U.S. Courthouse in El Paso, Texas, Leo Villareal took the brilliant hues of southwestern sunrises and sunsets as his inspiration for a computer-controlled light mural that he programmed to present an ever-changing field of saturated colors. This artwork, which Villareal describes as an animated portrait of the sky, will reinforce the building's relationship to its high-desert setting.

For a new U.S. border crossing in Calais, Maine, Spencer Finch has envisioned an artwork that turns on issues of perception. For a triangular field on the U.S. side of the border, Finch has designed a small flock of elliptical weather vanes to be painted various shades of white. These minimalist weather vanes will spin in the wind to create seemingly endless combinations of changing shapes and colors, which will relate to the surrounding landscape in different ways throughout the seasons. The artist describes the effect as reminiscent of the fluttering tonal shifts that appear when flocks of homing pigeons fly in loops around the sky of his Brooklyn neighborhood.

Do-Ho Suh, meanwhile, has proposed an enormous open screen for a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) building in Silver Spring, Maryland. The lattice-like screen will be composed of thousands of small, cast-resin figures that stand on each other's shoulders, visually representing the role of collective effort in many

human endeavors. As in an earlier public artwork by Suh that consists of an army of small figures holding up a monumental but empty pedestal, his FDA screen will depict cooperative achievement rather than a solitary hero. For this commission, Suh also has tailored his figures to the site: they represent both genders, many races, and various professions; he has even portrayed some figures wearing lab coats with the FDA insignia.

Jim Campbell explores a similar theme in a very different way. For his *Broken Wall* (2006), Campbell converted video images of local pedestrians into a light-emitting diode (LED) and glass-block screen set into a former doorway of the Byron G. Rogers U.S. Courthouse and Federal Building in Denver, Colorado. Broken down into glowing pixels, the video images form a constantly moving tableau of silhouetted figures that serve as reminders of the human dramas played out within the building. Inside the building's lobby, three smaller LED screens convey similarly low-resolution images of white-water rapids from the nearby Colorado River, linking the building and its operations to the wider natural environment.

All of these artworks are commissions currently under way or recently finished at federal buildings around the United States. Such works could not be further from the old-style model of public art that often consisted of an equestrian statue in a town square or a tangle of painted



JIM CAMPBELL, *BROKEN WALL*, 2006

metal in front of a corporate headquarters. Instead, these GSA commissions reflect contemporary artists' interests in issues like perception, social interaction, and the natural environment. They also reflect artists' explorations of new kinds of art media, as they draw on digital technology, time-based installations, and the painterly effects of colored light. These four artworks by Villareal, Finch, Suh, and Campbell are not the only GSA projects to expand the definitions of public art and its interactive potential. The roster of recent commissions by the GSA's Art in Architecture program reveals a whole inventory of innovative approaches to the marriage of art and architecture.

An overview of the kinds of projects funded by the Art in Architecture program during its thirty-five year history parallels, in many ways, the evolution of public art during the same period. These GSA commissions provide a map of changing conceptions of national identity as embodied in government buildings like federal courthouses, land ports of entry, and agency headquarters. They also reflect the shifts undergone by contemporary art during the period that straddles the transition from mid-twentieth-century high modernism to the postmodern heterogeneity of today. And perhaps most significantly, the history of the Art in Architecture program reflects changing philosophies about public art, public space, and civic participation in America.

The notion that government buildings should incorporate works of art goes back to the mid-nineteenth century when murals and sculptures were commissioned to adorn the Beaux-Arts buildings housing government functions. These commissions, which long predate the Art in Architecture program, reflected a bias toward European artists and styles and tended to treat art simply as decoration and ornament. However, by the 1930s, the New Deal ushered in various federal art programs, of which the Works Progress Administration (WPA) remains the best known. These programs, involving collaborations among American artists, architects, and other designers, reflected a desire to establish a distinctly American national culture.

Curtailed after the Second World War, federal art patronage got a new boost during the Kennedy Administration when the Cold War engendered the belief that art could serve as a symbol of American democracy, creativity, and freedom. In June 1962, the President's Ad Hoc Committee on Federal Office Space issued its *Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture*. In addition to advocating quality federal architecture and attention to site, these guidelines encourage incorporating the work of living American artists into public buildings. This led to a renewed focus on the role of art in federal buildings and resulted in the formation of GSA's Fine Arts program, the precursor of today's

Art in Architecture program. Artists were selected from short-lists provided by project architects, with the result that the art was often physically separate from the architecture. This Fine Arts program was suspended in 1966 due to reduced federal building because of the war in Southeast Asia and inflation in the U.S. construction industry, as well as controversies related to individual GSA art commissions, such as Robert Motherwell's abstract-expressionist painting *New England Elegy* (1966) created for the John F. Kennedy Federal Building in Boston. When the program was revived under the Nixon Administration in 1972, it operated in cooperation with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA); the architects of new federal buildings still determined the basic types of artworks for the projects, and in response NEA committees would recommend qualified artist candidates to GSA. The Fine Arts program was renamed the Art in Architecture program in 1977.

The re-launched program's first commission, Alexander Calder's *Flamingo* (1974) for Chicago's new Federal Center, was a resounding success. Paid for with the mandated one-half of one percent of the buildings' construction budget, *Flamingo* was dedicated on October 25, 1974, in Federal Plaza. In fact, dedication hardly seems an adequate word for the carnival-like celebration that accompanied the installation of this

soaring red metal sculpture. Ushered through the city streets with a parade, complete with circus wagons, marching bands, clowns, and even several elephants, Calder enjoyed a hero's welcome. The mayor had declared the day Alexander Calder Day in honor not only of the sculpture but also the simultaneous openings of Calder's retrospective exhibition at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art and the debut of his electronically powered mural *Universe* in the lobby of the Sears Tower. Capturing the mood of the moment, the headline in the *Chicago Sun-Times* proclaimed "A Great Day for ChiCalder!"

More than three decades later, it's clear why *Flamingo* remains such a beloved part of Chicago's urban landscape. Its abstract form rises like an awakening creature from the plaza in front of the Mies van der Rohe-designed Federal Center. The brilliant vermillion hue and supple curves of *Flamingo* provide a pointed contrast to the stark grids of dark steel and bronze-tinted glass of the surrounding federal buildings. Though the sculpture itself rises only fifty-three feet, while the adjacent Kluczynski Federal Building is forty-two stories high, visitors to the plaza who walk beneath *Flamingo* can experience the sculpture float above them and appear to encircle the surrounding architecture, providing a sudden, soaring sense of freedom from the physical constraints of the city street.



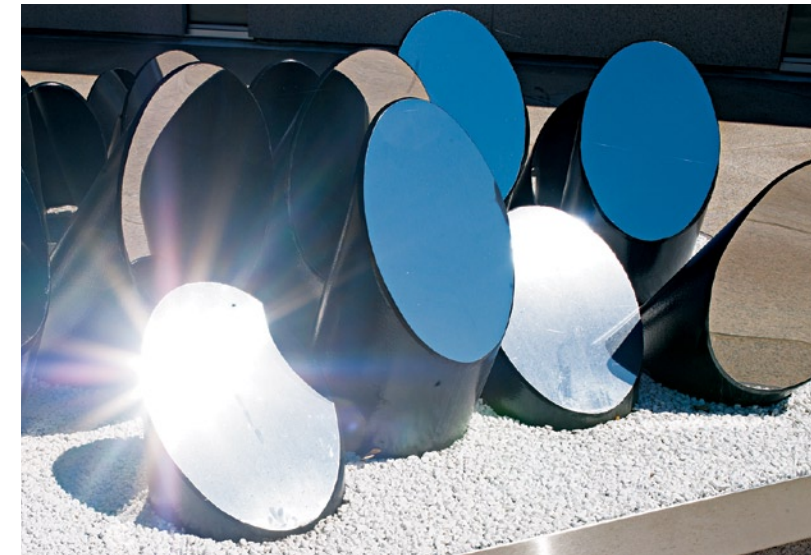
ALEXANDER CALDER, *FLAMINGO*, 1974



LOUISE NEVELSON, *BICENTENNIAL DAWN* (DETAIL), 1976

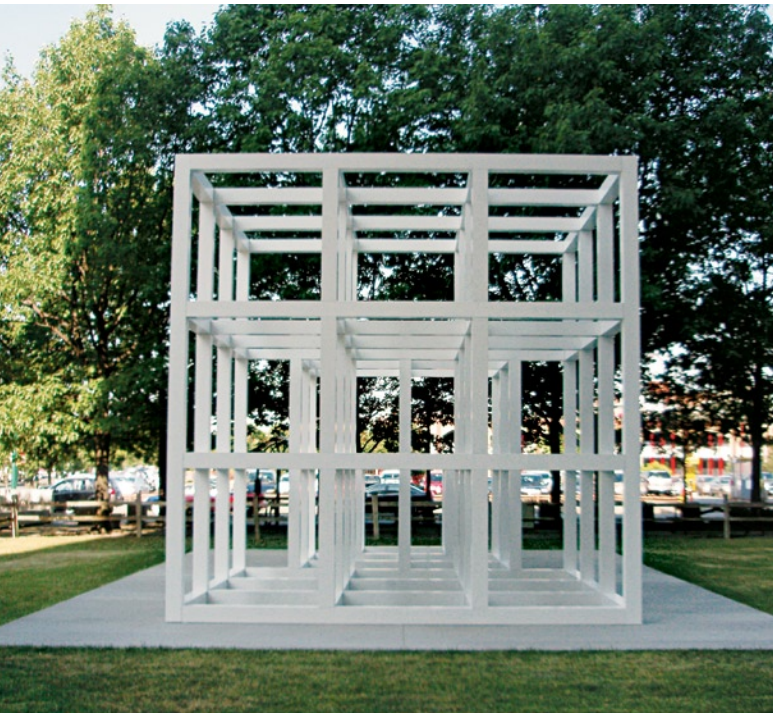
Throughout the rest of the 1970s and into the 1980s, artists commissioned by the Art in Architecture program were nominated by panels of art professionals selected by the NEA. These nominees were then submitted to the GSA for review and final selection. The artworks that resulted from this partnership between the GSA and the NEA were commissioned from many of the nation's most respected artists and reflected the aesthetic currents of the day, emphasizing minimalism, post-minimalism, and pop. Some attention was paid to the then-new notion of site specificity, which mandated the inseparability of artwork and site. By and large, however, artists created discrete works that fit into or beside the clean geometry of the International Style architecture of the federal buildings, much as these artists' smaller works would fit inside the clean white spaces of upscale galleries.

There were many noteworthy commissions during these years. Paramount among them is Louise Nevelson's *Bicentennial Dawn* (1976), which consists of three groups of white, complexly patterned columns rising like totems from the foyer of the James A. Byrne U.S. Courthouse in Philadelphia. These abstract structures serve, in the words of Martin Friedman, then director of the Walker Art Center, as "phantom architecture, alluding to no single time or place." Instead, their noble spires seem to herald optimism for the future, as the title of the artwork suggests. The elaborate dedication ceremony for *Bicentennial Dawn*, which was presided over by First Lady Betty Ford, helped to solidify widespread support for the Art in Architecture program.

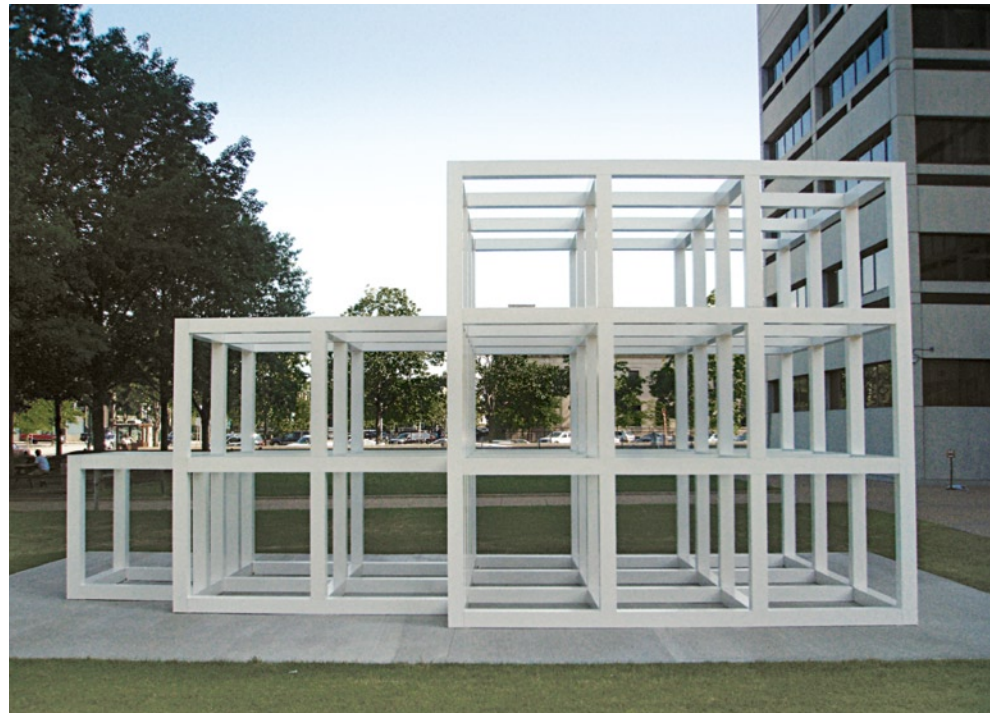


LOUISE BOURGEOIS, *FACETS TO THE SUN* (DETAIL), 1978

A similarly poetic sculpture from this era is Louise Bourgeois' *Facets to the Sun*, installed in 1978 at the Norris Cotton Federal Building in Manchester, New Hampshire. The sculpture is a field of thirty-six cylindrical steel forms, all arranged with southern orientations and at slightly varying angles so that their faces seem to be straining toward the sun. Describing the effect of the completed artwork, Bourgeois stated, "Some of the oval mirrors showed a blue sky and some reflected the white light of the sun; this is what the piece is about."

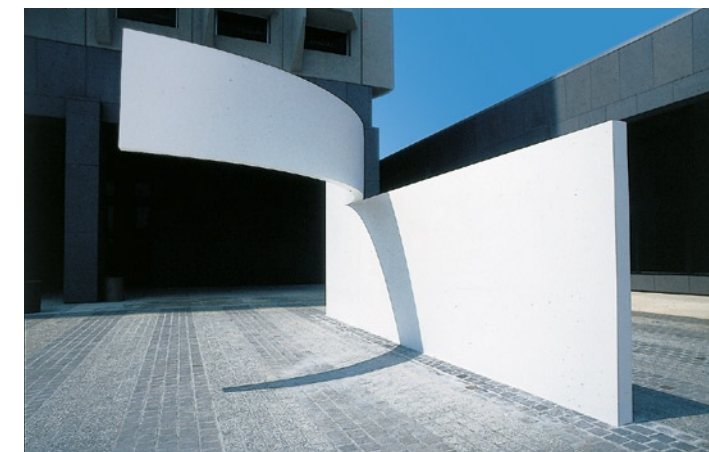


SOL LEWITT, *ONE, TWO, THREE*, 1979



More strictly minimalist are works like Sol LeWitt's *One, Two, Three* (1979), a rigorously geometric set of white, open cube structures for the James M. Hanley Federal Building in Syracuse, New York, and Barbara Neijna's *Right Turn on White* (1979) for the Strom Thurmond Federal Building in Columbia, South Carolina. This elegant sculpture, with a curving arc peeled away from the top of its rectangular body, was designed to create, in the artist's words, "an awareness of space through new relationships" among viewers, the sculpture, the surrounding plaza, and the buildings.

BARBARA NEIJNA, *RIGHT TURN ON WHITE*, 1979





DAN FLAVIN, UNTITLED, 1980

The period's experimentation with new media is shown by Dan Flavin's 1980 untitled light piece for the Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Anchorage, Alaska. Flavin used fifteen green fluorescent lights to create a 60-foot diagonal stripe across the lobby's north wall, plus a horizontal band of twelve rose-colored lights along the ceiling of the mezzanine above. These simple, utilitarian light fixtures are strong graphic elements, but they also transform perception of the surrounding spaces by painting the walls, floors, and ceilings with glowing color.

Other artists created two-dimensional works for interior and exterior walls. Jennifer Bartlett's *Swimmers Atlanta* (1979) for the Richard B. Russell Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Atlanta, Georgia, presents an impressionistic ocean voyage with a group of enamel-on-steel and oil-on-canvas paintings. Bartlett combined free-hand marks with organizing grids to evoke the water's shimmering surface and various thematically related elements, such as an iceberg, a boat, rocks, seaweed, and an eel. William Christenberry's *Southern Wall* (1979) for the Dr. A. H. McCoy Federal Building in Jackson, Mississippi, is an assemblage work using weathered boards from a hundred-year-old barn, corrugated tin, and vintage commercial signs for soft drinks, cigarettes, and tobacco snuff. Alex Katz's 1980 untitled painting for the Silvio V. Mollo Federal Building at St. Andrews Plaza in New York City is a rare representational work from this period, featuring five individual faces in his flattened, figurative style.



ALEX KATZ, UNTITLED, 1980

Public art, by its nature, can be controversial. Unlike the self-selected audiences who visit galleries and museums, viewers of public art often have little or no experience with contemporary art and can be highly sensitive to manipulation by critics and commentators with other agendas. When this happens, public art can become a magnet for frustrations that have little to do with the actual art object. In the early days of the Art in Architecture program, controversies tended to center around money and questions of aesthetics, often turning on what appeared to some members of the public and the press as the baffling nature of contemporary art.

For instance, Isamu Noguchi's *Landscape of Time* (1975), created for the Henry M. Jackson Federal Building in Seattle, Washington, came under fire when a *Seattle Times* columnist's complaint about the artwork's \$100,000 budget was picked up by national pundits. Noguchi had created an environmental installation of specially chosen, naturally formed granite boulders that he carved with designs and arranged in the plaza amid trees and other plantings. Vice President Nelson Rockefeller—himself an avid art collector—sent a letter that was read during the dedication ceremony for *Landscape of Time*, saying that “it is rewarding to see works of this caliber becoming part of our federal buildings for the benefit of all the people.” Critics who were unfamiliar with Noguchi's distinguished career or the intentions behind his Zen-like sculpture questioned why pieces of rock should have such a high price tag.



ISAMU NOGUCHI, *LANDSCAPE OF TIME*, 1975



CLAES OLDENBURG, *BATCOLUMN*, 1977

Another example, Claes Oldenburg's *Batcolumn* (1977) for the Harold Washington Social Security Center in Chicago, Illinois, had the misfortune to be dedicated on April 14, the day before tax deadline, allowing Walter Cronkite to use Oldenburg's sculpture as the punch line to his evening news broadcast about how taxpayers' dollars were being spent. Editorials in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times* all praised the sculpture, however.

George Sugarman's *Baltimore Federal* (1978), a colorful metal abstraction commissioned for the plaza in front of the Edward A. Garmatz Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in Baltimore, Maryland, became embroiled in an especially intense controversy when a few of the building's occupants denounced Sugarman's proposal on the assertions that his sculpture would not suit the design or function of the building and that it would serve as a hiding place for potential muggers, explosives, and terrorists. The Baltimore newspapers seized on the story and vigorously defended both Sugarman and the public's right to enjoy his sculpture, which public funds and a clearly delineated public process had commissioned. To address the dispute, GSA convened a public hearing, which was attended by many esteemed public officials, civic group leaders, museum professionals, local artists, and members of the general public, nearly all of whom testified in favor of Sugarman's proposal. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that Sugarman himself received the longest applause of the day. Thanks to an outpouring of public support, the sculpture was fabricated and installed. For the celebratory dedication



GEORGE SUGARMAN, *BALTIMORE FEDERAL (DETAIL)*, 1978

of *Baltimore Federal*, Sugarman wrote, "The openness and accessibility of the forms and the variety of experiences they allow—and needing no special knowledge to 'understand' this work of art—are concepts which I feel are vital to public-government interaction."

All three of these GSA artworks were eventually embraced by the communities in which they were installed, revealing how perceptions of public art can change with time. But time doesn't heal all wounds. *Tilted Arc*, a sculpture commissioned from artist Richard Serra for the Jacob K. Javitz Federal Building in downtown Manhattan, became the only project in the Art in Architecture program's history to be removed because of public criticism. This sculpture, a 12-foot-high and 120-foot-long curtain of Cor-Ten steel, was installed

diagonally across Federal Plaza on July 16, 1981. Almost from the beginning, office workers in the two buildings fronting the plaza complained that the sculpture cut off their access and views, casting deep shadows on an already bleak square and providing a magnet for graffiti. A movement formed to remove *Tilted Arc*, leading to a three-day public hearing in March of 1985. People working in the federal building and community residents contended that *Tilted Arc* was an ugly and meaningless object foisted upon the public by insensitive government bureaucrats and a condescending art establishment. Some also warned that *Tilted Arc* was a security hazard that blocked views of the street and could be used as a shield for bomb-throwers. Supporters of the sculpture argued that its removal would constitute an act of censorship by the government and violate the rights of the artist. The art community maintained that important, forward-looking art always challenges the society that produces it, and so the removal of *Tilted Arc* would be a hasty and shortsighted act. Serra declared that *Tilted Arc* was a site-specific work, the form and meaning of which were inseparable from its location on Federal Plaza. He said that to divorce the sculpture from its intended context would destroy it. Despite efforts by artists and art professionals to defend the sculpture, a five-member GSA-appointed panel voted four to one to remove the sculpture from Federal Plaza. In March 1989, *Tilted Arc* was dismantled and its pieces were placed in storage.

Out of this controversy came a new way of thinking about community participation in public art that extended far beyond the GSA. *Tilted Arc* precipitated a much-needed debate about the role of public art in American society, and the rights, responsibilities, and interests of artists, their patrons, and the public.

The firestorm ignited by *Tilted Arc* altered the direction of the Art in Architecture program in profound ways. Internal discussions about public accountability, the procedures for selecting artists for GSA commissions, and the mechanics of the GSA/NEA partnership had been in flux for years before the *Tilted Arc* controversies erupted. The responses to Serra's sculpture and its removal accelerated several major changes in the Art in Architecture program's procedures. The GSA and NEA collaboration ended, and GSA assumed direct administration of the artist selection process. The Art in Architecture program implemented a new set of guidelines in 1991 that gave representatives of the local community, the client agency, and the GSA's regional administrators stronger roles in the selection of project artists. These procedural changes, as well as others that have continued to be introduced and refined, have helped the Art in Architecture program's commissions to become more responsive to the uses and histories of project sites, more inclusive of community needs and interests, and more open to experimental media.



RICHARD SERRA, *TILTED ARC*, 1981



JACOB LAWRENCE, *COMMUNITY*, 1989



ROMARE BEARDEN, *FAMILY*, 1989

Such changes were abetted by the fact that American art was itself undergoing a transformation during this period. Throughout the 1980s, the formalist and abstract formats favored by influential curators, collectors, and critics in the previous decade were giving way to an interest in art that was more narrative, more figurative, and more tied to artists' ethnic, racial, and gender identities. Even the notion of site specificity was changing, as artists began to expand the term's definition to include more intangible aspects of the site, such as its history and the backgrounds of the people who frequented it, as well as the competing and sometimes conflicting uses of the site. As a result, the Art in Architecture program that emerged from the *Tilted Arc* controversy found itself aligned with an art scene dominated by styles and concerns much more amenable to the program's increased focus on community identity and history.

Commissions from this period reveal the shift. For instance, Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden were two of eight artists commissioned to create works for the Joseph P. Addabbo Federal Building in Jamaica, Queens, New York, in 1989. Lawrence and Bearden created a pair of brightly colored mosaic and ceramic tile murals that flank the interior entrance to the building. Lawrence's *Community* mosaic depicts a cross section of people carrying hammers, ladders, planks of wood, and architectural plans to build their community. Bearden's glazed ceramic tile *Family* presents an African-American family in Sunday best, as if posing for a family portrait, and is based on the artist's memories of childhood visits to his grandparents' house in Charlotte, North Carolina.



JOHN AHEARN AND RIGOBERTO TORRES, *LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY—EAST 100TH STREET (DETAIL)*, 1997

John Ahearn and Rigoberto Torres represented the community even more directly with their *Life in the Community—East 100th Street* and *Homage to Medicare and Medicaid* (1997) for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in Woodlawn, Maryland, by creating life-casts of their neighbors in New York City's East Harlem who are beneficiaries of CMS's programs. Inside the building, ten life-sized portrait busts—including a man and his son, a woman playing a violin, giggling teenage girls, and a pair of graduates with mortar boards—are affixed above the lobby's columns. Outside on a curving plinth is an array of full-size figures, also cast from life. They depict an equally diverse group of people, like a cluster of running school children, a man in a wheelchair with a little dog in his lap,



JOHN AHEARN AND RIGOBERTO TORRES,
HOMAGE TO MEDICARE AND MEDICAID (DETAIL), 1997

and an older woman carrying a hose and watering can. They have the appearances of being caught in action, and serve as reminders of the real people who benefit from the CMS's services.

In a similar spirit, John Valadez's *A Day in El Paso del Norte* (1993) presents a view of daily life in the city where his work is installed. His mural, commissioned for the Richard C. White Federal Building in El Paso, Texas, is crowded with activity and populated by diverse figures ranging from politicians and cowboys to children and even—in a nod to history—a Spanish conquistador. These people are gathered before bits of local landscape and architecture, telescoping the vibrant past and present of El Paso into a single scene.



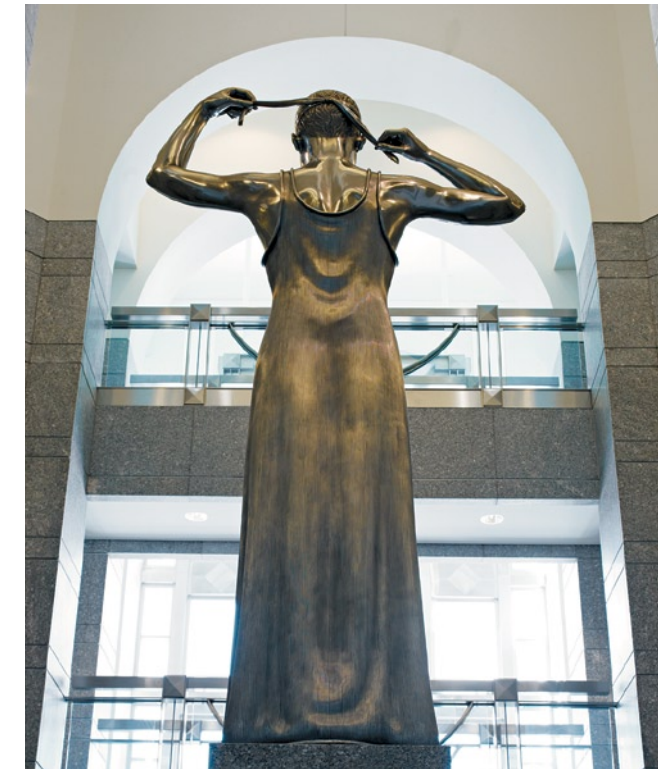
JOHN VALADEZ, *A DAY IN EL PASO DEL NORTE (DETAIL)*, 1993



ROGER BROWN, UNTITLED, 1995

Roger Brown's 1995 glass mosaic mural for the Ted Weiss Federal Building in New York City responds to its site in a different way. This untitled artwork, in Brown's trademark symbolic style, features a tight grid of faces that give way, at the lower reaches of the composition, to skulls. A small band at the top of the mosaic offers glimpses of three well-known landmarks of the Manhattan skyline: the Brooklyn Bridge, the twin towers of the World Trade Center, and the Empire State Building. Brown's somber mural is a combined memorial to the lives claimed by the AIDS epidemic and to the fifteen thousand free and enslaved Africans buried in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cemetery that was rediscovered on the site in 1991, when the area was excavated for construction of the federal building. Today, a part of the site is also devoted to the African Burial Ground National Monument and is administered by the U.S. National Park Service.

Diana Moore took her cues from the function and architectural materials of the building where her sculpture resides. Her *Justice* (1997) for the Warren B. Rudman U.S. Courthouse in Concord, New Hampshire, is a stainless steel sculpture of a contemporary female figure that stands atop a tall granite pedestal in the building's atrium. She is the offspring of traditional allegorical depictions of Justice as a blindfolded woman, but Moore has given her *Justice* a more active role in ensuring the impartiality of the court system by tying her own blindfold.



DIANA MOORE, JUSTICE, 1997

A commission completed by Jenny Holzer in 1999 for the Robert T. Matsui U.S. Courthouse in Sacramento, California, offers a different take on justice. This work consists of paving stones engraved with sometimes contradictory sayings that impart a variety of commentaries on law, truth, and justice. Drawn from sources as diverse as the Bible, traditional legal maxims, and various court decisions, they include assertions like:

WICKEDNESS IS NOT PRESUMED.

IT IS A FAIR SUMMARY OF HISTORY TO SAY THAT THE SAFEGUARDS OF LIBERTY HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN FORGED IN CONTROVERSIES INVOLVING NOT VERY NICE PEOPLE.

THERE IS NO BETTER TEST OF A SOCIETY THAN HOW IT TREATS THOSE ACCUSED OF TRANSGRESSING AGAINST IT.

These paving stones form a staging ground for *Gold Rush* (1999), a separate commission by Tom Otterness. His set of comical bronze sculptures plays with icons of California history. Prospectors pan for gold in the plaza's fountain while a Native American couple snaps tourist photos of themselves and a miner. Another figure in a feathered headdress spears a plump salmon that jumps out of the fountain wearing a little derby.



In the United States, the late 1990s saw the return of less figurative approaches to art generally and for GSA commissions, too. But even as artists began to explore non-traditional materials and more conceptual approaches to art, Art in Architecture commissions continued to display sensitivity to audience and site. Further changes in the GSA's commissioning process brought artists into the planning at an earlier stage, allowing for a more integral relationship between federal art and architecture.

The period from the late 1990s to the present has been remarkable for the diversity of works created under the aegis of the Art in Architecture program. These projects have ranged from the elegantly minimal to the materially spectacular. Examples of the former include Ellsworth Kelly's *The Boston Panels* (1998), an installation of twenty-one large, monochrome panels of various colors for the John Joseph Moakley U.S. Courthouse in Boston, and Sol LeWitt's swooping, black and white *Wall Drawing #1259: Loopy Doopy (Springfield)* completed in 2008 for the U.S. Courthouse in Springfield, Massachusetts. Among the latter is Alice Aycock's *Swing Over* (2004), a twisting aluminum structure affixed to the façade of the George H. Fallon Federal Building in Baltimore, Maryland. Aycock's immense sculpture is inspired by the flight paths of hummingbirds, the tracks of roller coasters, and cosmic wormholes, which theoretical physics describes as shortcuts through the fabric of

TOM OTTERNESS, *GOLD RUSH* (DETAIL), 1999
JENNY HOLZER, *INSTALLATION...* (DETAIL), 1999



ALICE AYCOCK, *SWING OVER*, 2004



IÑIGO MANGLANO-OVALLE, *LA TORMENTA/THE STORM*, 2006

space and time. Similarly dramatic in form and material is Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's *La Tormenta/The Storm* (2006), a pair of cast-fiberglass, titanium-foil-clad sculptures suspended in the atrium of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services building in Chicago. The artist collected high-tech data from an actual storm system to determine the fluid shapes of the sculptures and used this storm-cloud image as a metaphor of migration and transformation.

A number of recent GSA projects demonstrate public art's capacity for community interaction. Jean Shin's *Dress Code* (2008), also commissioned for the Fallon Building in Baltimore, is a huge fabric mural made from deconstructed clothing gathered from recently naturalized American citizens and members of the U.S. Armed Forces. For the Federal Building and U.S. Post Office in Fargo, North Dakota, Tim Rollins + K.O.S. (Kids of Survival) worked with local young people and educators to create a mural titled *EVERYONE IS WELCOME! FOR THE PEOPLE OF FARGO (after Franz Kafka)* (2007) based on the last chapter of Kafka's *Amerika*.

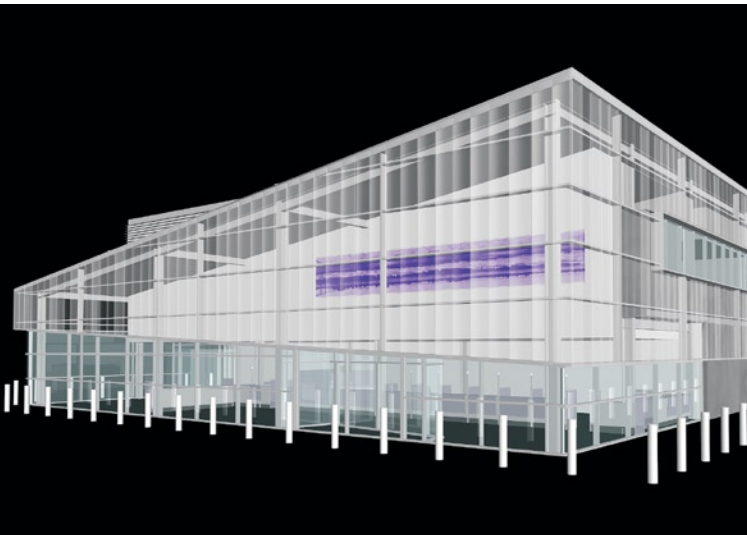
Several other recent commissions are landscape oriented. Valerie Jaudon translated the geometric patterns of her paintings—which are inspired partly by designs found in Celtic and Islamic art—into a series of interlocking pathways for her *Filippine Garden* (2004) at the Thomas F. Eagleton U.S. Courthouse in St. Louis, Missouri. Maya Lin's *Flutter* (2005) for the Wilkie D. Ferguson U.S. Courthouse in Miami, Florida, is a more



MAYA LIN, *FLUTTER (DETAIL)*, 2005

sculptural earthwork of rippling, grass-covered berms that are reminiscent of Indian mounds, sand dunes, and ocean wave patterns.

Meanwhile, technology has created opportunities for novel uses of light as an art medium. Commissions by Leo Villareal and Jim Campbell that use LEDs have already been described. Mikyoung Kim used fiber-optic cables in *River of Light* (2004) to evoke the Ohio River with bands of ever-changing colored light set beneath two platforms of stacked glass panels that are part of the atrium stairway in the U.S. Courthouse in Wheeling, West Virginia. For the San Francisco Federal Building, James Turrell, a master of light installations about spatial perception, used colored neon to create *Sky Garden* (2007), an enigmatic hybrid of outside and inside space within a three-story void in the building's south façade.



ALAN MICHELSON, *THIRD BANK OF THE RIVER* (RENDERING), SCHEDULED FOR COMPLETION IN 2009

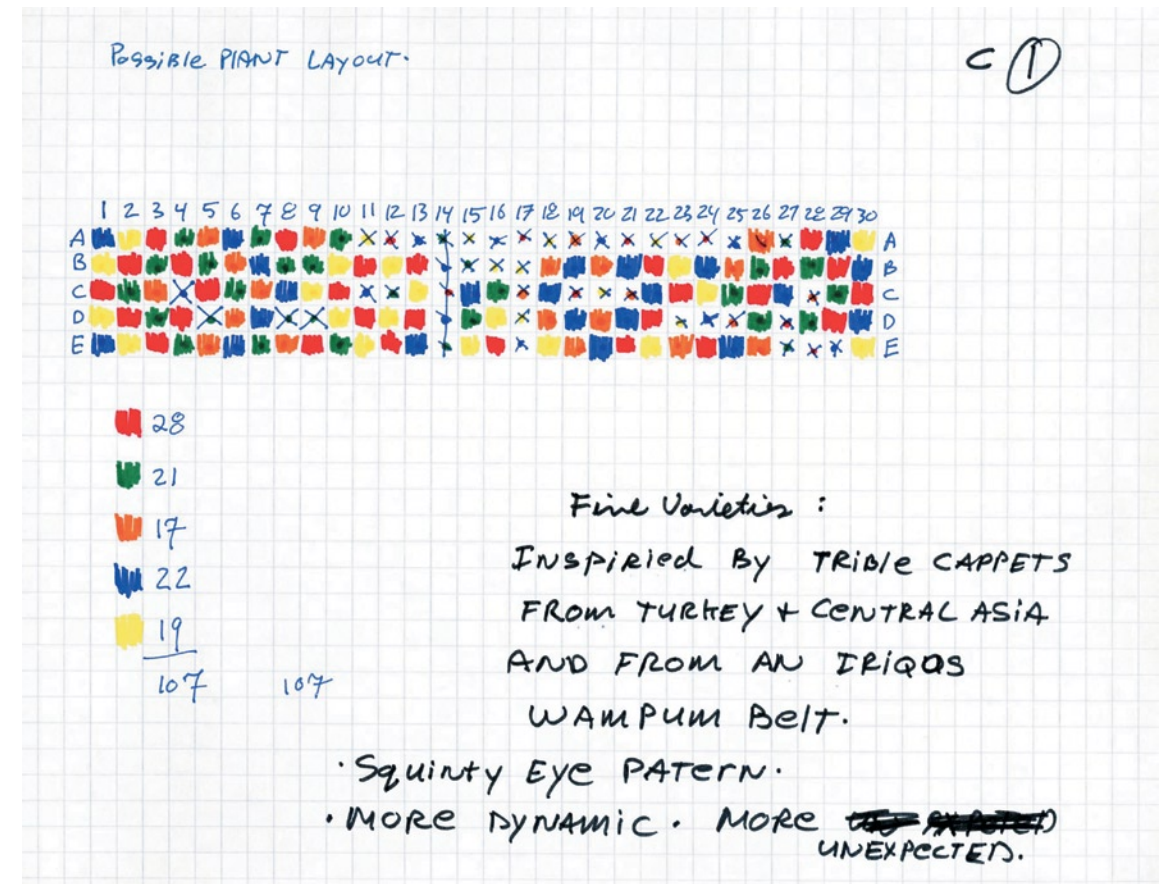
Works still in progress at the time of this writing are equally adventurous in concept and material. Alan Michelson's *Third Bank of the River* for the U.S. Land Port of Entry in Massena, New York, blends local history and landscape. His monumental art-glass window will be printed with high-resolution panoramas of the local shorelines that divide Canada from the United States. These parallel bands of photographic imagery invoke the historical wampum belt proffered as a gesture of friendship between native Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and immigrant Europeans in the early seventeenth century.

Tony Feher's concept for the new U.S. Courthouse in Rockford, Illinois, creates a site for community interaction. It is planned as an orchard of pink- and white-flowering crabapple trees that is threaded with pathways and seating areas. Pae White's exuberant *Bugscreen* for the

plaza of the Anthony J. Celebrezze Federal Building in Cleveland, Ohio, is also designed to encourage viewer interaction. White's vivid red aluminum screen will incorporate the lacy patterns of spider webs and dragonfly wings. Set among the plaza's trees, the sculpture will create a fanciful destination where visitors may gather and glimpse each other through the filigree openings.

The rich diversity of recent GSA commissions is one gauge of how far the Art in Architecture program has progressed since its early days. The marriage of federally sponsored art and architecture, which at times in the past could be something of a forced arrangement, now seems based on mutual respect and compatibility. The same also might be said for the relationships between these artworks and their audiences, who increasingly recognize that a well-received work of public art can help bring a community together, instill a sense of civic pride, and create a place for productive social interaction.

GSA's Art in Architecture program—which has so far spanned seven presidential administrations, endured seismic shifts in public policy, and kept pace with American art's transition from high-modernist abstraction to postmodern heterogeneity—has faced its share of inevitable challenges. But the program's history reveals how flexibility and a willingness to adapt have allowed it to emerge as a model for the integration of meaningful art into important civic spaces.



TONY FEHER, UNTITLED (LAYOUT SKETCH, TOP, AND RENDERING, BOTTOM), SCHEDULED FOR COMPLETION IN 2011