



ARTWORK **UNTITLED**

ARTIST **AL HELD**

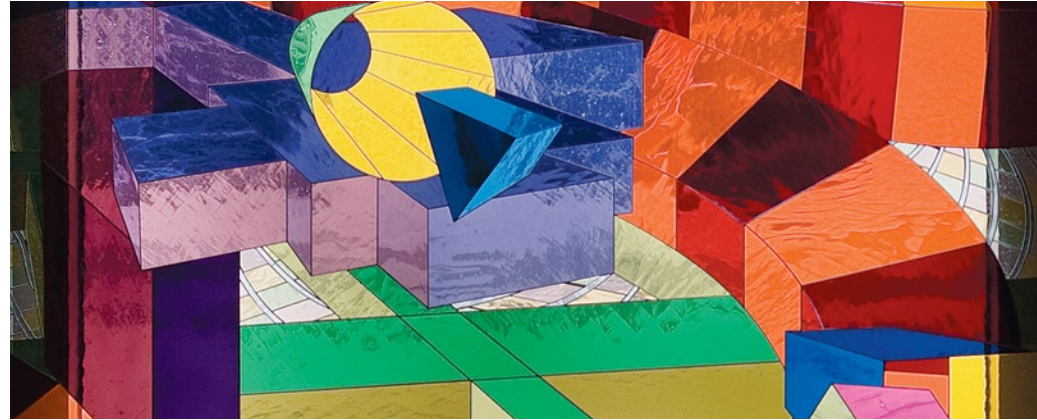
INSTALLED 2006
GEORGE C. YOUNG U.S. COURTHOUSE AND FEDERAL BUILDING
ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Challenging the bounds of his own art and traditional artworks often preferred by judicial clients, renowned artist Al Held eschewed his familiar medium of acrylic on canvas in favor of glass for his commission at the U.S. Courthouse in Orlando, Florida. Held created six works for the atrium lobby of the Andrea Leers-designed courthouse: a colossal 50-foot tall window and five 11-foot tall windows. The small windows are aligned in regular intervals along the south wall of the lobby leading to the large window at the top of the staircase on the east wall. Morning sunlight saturates the six-story space with intense color and energy, and throughout the day bright hues flicker over the pale surfaces of the atrium.

Held's paintings are usually sweeping horizontal compositions, but in these works he successfully addressed the vertical format of the windows. Brightly colored circular and curved shapes drift above grid-like structures and background patterns in a constant spiraling motion that leads the eye upward through the composition, imparting an overall feeling of ascent appropriate for a setting where justice is sought and administered. The compositions are crowded with geometric figures, cropped forms, and shifts in perspective. The transparency of the picture plane and the reflection of colored light within the atrium probe questions of surface, boundaries, and space that are inherent in two-dimensional art and that challenged the artist for decades. With these windows, Held broke through the illusionary space of the picture plane to fill real space with color.

Held began his exploration for the windows with small "warm up" sketches that he then translated into large, detailed watercolors that have a luminous effect much like the windows themselves. After the studies were approved, the painstaking process of selecting glass to match the colors began. Held died before he could choose the glass. The Al Held Foundation, led by Mara Held, and Eugene Benson, the artist's long-time studio manager, stepped in and selected the glass and closely monitored its cutting and assembly to ensure the accuracy of the transition from watercolor to glass. JG

AL
HELD



Al Held (1928–2005) was a second-generation Abstract Expressionist. Born in Brooklyn, New York, he studied at the Art Students League in New York and the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. With a distinguished career that spanned nearly five decades, Held was one of the first artists to move beyond the flat color plane of Minimalism to embrace bold color and geometric shapes, creating forms in illusionary space that recalled early Italian Renaissance painting. Over the years, his hard-edged, geometric abstractions grew increasingly more complex in detail and expansive in scale. At times, his paintings were so large that they could not fit into commercial galleries for exhibitions. In addition to being an internationally renowned painter, he was also an influential art professor at Yale University for nearly twenty years.

His work is in collections worldwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Nationalgalerie in Berlin. Held also completed a commission for GSA's Art in Architecture program in 1977: *Order/Disorder/Ascension/Descension*, two 91-foot-long paintings for the Social Security Administration's Mid-Atlantic Program Service Center in Philadelphia.



MEDIUM INLAID LAMINATED ART GLASS WITH MOUTH-BLOWN ART GLASS
DIMENSIONS ONE WINDOW, 50 FT X 20 FT
FIVE WINDOWS, EACH 11 FT X 4 FT