

Plaza suite: Is it art or junk?

By Ken Manson

quoted from the *Berwyn/Cicero LIFE* Friday, November 21, 1980

A partly finished sculpture consisting of cement and old appliances which is being built in Cermak Plaza has elicited a wide range of views and controversy from persons viewing it.

Its artist calls the sculpture, titled "Big Billbored," [sic] a "visual statement" and a new context for presenting the appliances.

The president of the chain which owns Cermak Plaza wants to display art in his shopping centers.

A group of Plaza merchants sees it as bringing people into the shopping center to look at the sculpture.

But some store employees and residents are calling it a pile of junk that doesn't resemble art to them.

Art enthusiast

David Bermant, president of National Shopping Centers Management Corp. and an art enthusiast, is putting works of art in shopping centers throughout the country. A similar sculpture is reportedly in a Mt. Prospect shopping center.

Mary Kalfas, executive director of the Cermak Plaza Merchants Association, said this is Bermant's project. "He financed it, he picked it (the sculpture) and knows the people who did it," Mrs. Kalfas said, adding she did not know how much he paid for it.

Mrs. Kalfas also said the Merchants' Association wasn't asked. "It's his shopping center, of his doing and not for the stores to ask about or express their views."

As she has walked in the center parking lot, Mrs. Kalfas said she saw people stop and make comments, most uncomplimentary, about the structure, but other than that only two telephone calls came in commenting on it.

One phone call came from the Walgreen's Drug Store manager, the other from a shopper. Mrs. Kalfas told them to write to the chain's New York headquarters if they didn't like it. She noted the sculpture was already up, and it was too late to stop its construction.

Two Walgreen's employees agreed with their manager that the sculpture has received a lot of comments from shoppers.

People talking

"It's different. Everybody's talking about it," said Dee Dee Trolani, restaurant waitress. "A lot of them don't like it at all. I don't know what it is."

Another waitress, who didn't want to give her name, said she couldn't make out what it is. "I can't say I dislike it or like it."

The second waitress said she will have a better opinion about the sculpture when it is finished. Part of

the top consisting of beams is waiting to be covered with cement and appliances.

Evelyn Ramos, Troy Store manager, said people associate a pile of junk with a "junky plaza." She added, "It doesn't seem elegant enough."

Mrs. Ramos said she has heard comments in the parking lot from persons who couldn't believe it. "The sculpture will probably grow on people like the Chicago Picasso did," she added.

Berwyn City Hall has received at least 15 telephone calls from persons criticizing the sculpture. The LIFE has also received some comments, including a letter from Elizabeth Musik of Berwyn who calls the sculpture a "monstrosity" and "a pile of junk wired and cemented together." She asked if Berwyn aldermen considered the sculpture a beautiful addition to the city.

When the request was presented at the Oct. 6 City Council meeting, the six aldermen present were deadlocked at 3-3. Mayor Thomas Hett broke the tie, saying he didn't like the sculpture but didn't know how the city could legally stop it.

Alderman Raymond Fron (d., 6th), who voted against approving the sculpture request, said he thought the structure was a monument to the garbage collection "fiasco" several years ago during which the city's trash went uncollected for several days.

Lois Huth, a Cicero sculptress, said, "It's a pile of junk. It doesn't take much imagination to put it together. It takes imagination for art. It isn't my style, so I don't appreciate it."

Ms. Huth said the sculpture is "abstract, without specific representation." But even though she says the design doesn't look good, Ms. Huth notes the sculpture is incomplete. "It may turn out to be a good design and may redeem itself."

Nancy Rubins, the New York artist who designed the sculpture, said the criticism doesn't bother her.

"People have a right to their opinion. My job is to help inform people, show them sculptures. Anything new is bound to bring reaction," said the artist who is working at the Plaza in constructing the sculpture.

May take a while

"Art takes a while to look at and think about," she continued. "Most people have a pretty good sense of art."

The artist said she is taking some of the thousands of appliances she and others have collected from the Salvation Army and Goodwill by the truckload, putting them in concrete and "saying something else with them." Those appliances include blenders, vacuum cleaners, toasters and adding machines.

Ms. Rubins said the work is like a collage, adding it says a lot of things. The artist said she has been making such sculptures for about 10 years, and that this piece is a development of a lot of work being done.

Ms. Rubins teaches at Princeton University and has created sculptures in Tallahassee, Fla., Richmond, Va., San Francisco and New York. One piece is at the University of Illinois.

The local structure is taking three weeks to complete and is expected to be finished in about seven days. A contractor put in the concrete base: Ms. Rubins and others are finishing the top. A protective spray will coat the work, and in the spring the work will be enclosed and lighted.

Ms. Rubins praised Bermant for bringing sculptures to shopping centers, "considering not many people

get to go to art galleries."

Mrs. Kalfas said the sculpture is doing exactly what it set out to do -- bring people to the shopping center.