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## On our cover: BLITT PAINTING 'KIDDUSH' HONORS HER FATHER

By Jerry LaMartina

Rita Blitt loves to paint.

Simple as that is, it's her motivation to continue painting after many years of practicing her art.

"I started creating art when I was a toddler," Blitt said. "I did it all through school, and moving from drawing into painting was a natural progression. I won scholarships to the Kansas City Art Institute at ages 10 and 11 for Saturday classes."

In 1958, she created an oil painting she called "Kiddush," and it still hangs in her home.

"I wish I had changed the name to 'L'chaim' because not long after I painted it, I realized that the face looked like that of my father, who had died about four years earlier," she said. "His name was Herman Copaken, and his Hebrew name was Chaim. He died in 1954."

After painting "Kiddush," Blitt painted a few very free and impressionistic portraits. However, most often, her early paintings were inspired by the relationship of shapes or movement as in nature and dance.

In the mid-1960s, Blitt said, "I found that I was no longer challenged by painting. It had become too easy for me to paint works that I loved and I wondered about the mystery of their creation."

Around that time, when she began yearning for a new challenge, Blitt was asked to make sculpture, and this led to a change in her painting style for which she became famous.

Blitt had been commissioned to paint murals for a shopping mall in St. Joseph, Missouri. Chris Ramos, the architect who asked her to paint the murals, next asked her to create a sculpture, in multiple pieces, to hang from the ceiling around a post.

After a bit of experimentation, Blitt took hardware store sheets of metal and bent them into abstract

forms, which were hung in space from the ceiling of the mall.

She found creating those suspended metal forms that moved in space so exciting that afterward she could not return to painting on a flat surface. Not wanting to leave her paints, Blitt then stretched canvas over the metal, shaped and suspended the resulting canvas-covered forms from the ceiling of her studio and painted them as they twirled in space. Thus, a long career in acrylic, found object and metal abstract, non-objective sculpture began, and when Blitt returned to painting, she was naturally freed from subject matter.

Sharing how she later became the painter that she is today, Blitt said she had felt inspired and fascinated in the '50s when she first saw abstract expressionist, non-objective paintings.

"But I wouldn't allow myself to omit subject matter from my paintings until it was an honest progression in my work," she said. "It was creating sculpture that had begun with the mall commission in the '60s that released me from subject matter and allowed me to become a non-objective painter."

Thinking back to the abstract expressionist painters that inspired her in the '50s and to the architect who had so much faith in her that he invited her to make sculpture, Blitt said, "If I influence others as they did me, that would be my honor."

Blitt's sculptures, up to 60 feet tall, and paintings, drawings and films, have been installed and seen in museums and public places in many countries. Her archive collection will be permanently seen in the Rita Blitt Gallery and Sculpture Garden of the Mulvane Museum at Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, opening in 2017. Blitt's art, including films, can be viewed at [www.ritablitt.com](http://www.ritablitt.com).