

Norway's peace efforts were an 'inspiration' to local artist

By Barbara Bayer
Associate Editor

When Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed an historic peace accord on Sept. 13, many people said a little prayer of thanks.

Rita Blitt wanted to do more than that. She wanted to send a thank-you note to Norway for its efforts in bringing the two arch-enemies together.

Blitt, a local artist who has sculptures, paintings and drawings on display in the United States and seven foreign countries, decided in her case a thank-you sculpture would be more appropriate. Last week she presented a sculpture titled "Inspiration," to Johan Jorgen Holst, Norway's minister of foreign affairs at the Mission of Norway in New York.

"The title seems so appropriate because I feel Norway is an inspiration not only to all countries in the world, but to all people to reach out and help one another," Blitt said.

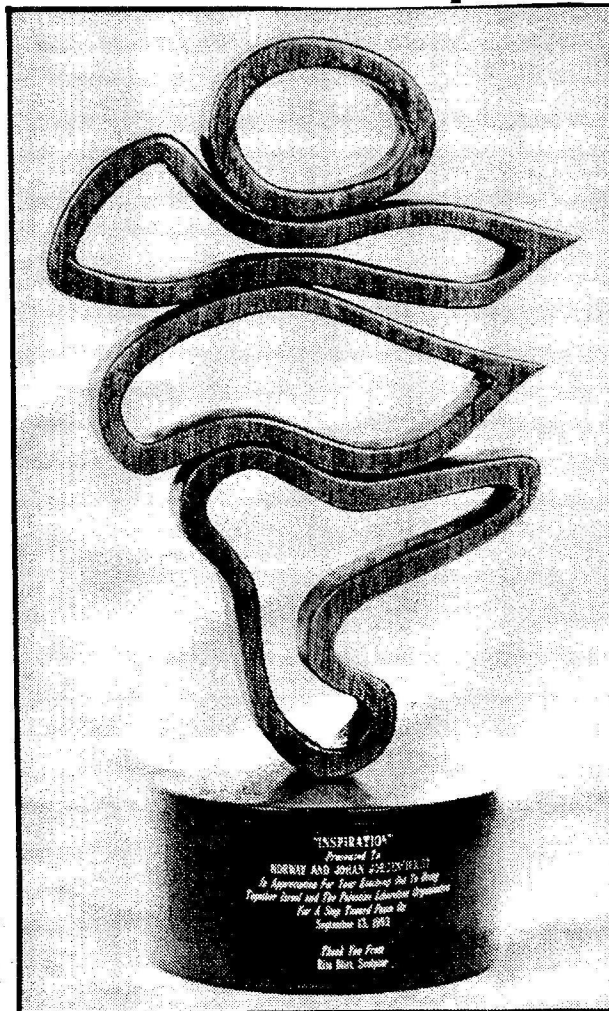
In addition to the sculpture, Norway and the other members of the United Nations, the PLO and President Clinton will receive a print made by Blitt in honor of Norway, "and as a reminder of what a country can do," Blitt said.

The process of giving a sculpture to Norway and prints to 183 nations became a reality in just over a month. To get the process rolling, Blitt contacted Olara Otunnu, president of the International Peace Academy (an arm of the U.N.). She and Otunnu had become friends a few years ago after he gave a speech in Aspen, Colo., where Blitt and her husband, Irwin, spend summers. Otunnu was able to connect Blitt with the proper Norwegian authorities and helped make arrangement for the presentation last week.

Blitt needed assistance getting the project accomplished in such a short time. For instance, the print needed to be produced by a lithographer. Mike Sims of The Lithography Workshop in Lawrence, Kan., was booked up until January, but when he heard about Blitt's project, she said, "he stopped what he was doing to print the lithograph."

Leslie Mark also assisted Blitt in "getting the print from me to the world."

The "Inspiration" sculpture Blitt presented to Norway is 15-by-9-by-6 and made of mahogany. The drawing was created in 1986 and the sculpture followed in 1987. "Inspiration" won a national competition conducted by the Midwest Women's Center in Chicago and was awarded by the center to 11 outstanding women in Chicago in 1987. A 26-foot version of "Inspiration" is permanently installed in Kansas City in front of the Hillcrest Bank Building. In addition, a photo of the sculpture has been chosen to appear in the premiere issue of *Art in Architecture* magazine in January 1994.



This mahogany sculpture, "Inspiration," was presented by artist Rita Blitt to Norway "in appreciation for your reaching out to bring together Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization for a step toward peace on September 13, 1993."



This lithograph is being presented to all the member nations of the U.N. It bears the same message as the sculpture.

ture magazine in January 1994.

Blitt said the sculpture has always conveyed a "feeling of joy" to her.

"To be an inspiration is to be a positive influence upon human beings, so it seemed very appropriate to me," said Blitt about both the original purpose of the sculpture and as a gift to Norway. "Both Norway and the women in Chicago were a positive influence," she continued.

Blitt presented a copy of the print to Binyamin

Ben-Eliezer, Israel's minister of construction and housing, at a luncheon this week in Washington, D.C., sponsored by Project Nishma. She will present Madeleine Albright, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, with a copy of the print at a reception preceding the U.N. Day Dinner in Kansas City on Sunday night. The dinner is sponsored by the Mayor's U.N. Day Committee and the United Nations Association in honor of U.N. Day. Sunday is the 48th anniversary of the U.N.