

## Flag is among sculptor's works

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The giant American flag that hangs in Oak Park Mall holds a special place for one area woman.

The Plexiglas sculpture hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the mall is made up of 1,748 pieces of colored Plexiglas on wires and was done as a bicentennial project for the state of Kansas in 1976, one of the first sculptures done by Leawood artist Rita Blitt.

Two more sculptures by Blitt will soon be on display in the metropolitan area for viewing by the public – one in Loose Park in Kansas City, Mo., and the second in Overland Park.

"The one to be installed at the southwest corner of the lake in Loose Park I call 'Spirit's Delight.' It is a 12-foot stainless steel sculpture," she said. "The other sculpture is an 8-foot wood piece to be installed at Oak Park Mall."

Both sculptures exhibit the fluidity of lines and interrelationship of shapes that distinguish the artist's work. Some of the sculptures appear to be made of ribbons of steel or aluminum, while others are massive pieces of metal with varying shapes that meld together in an aesthetically pleasing piece.

Blitt talks excitedly about the different phases of her art career, which she says began when she was 3 years old and used to exchange drawings by mail with her grandfather.

"A first-grade art supervisor encouraged me, and when I was 9 years old, I won scholarships to the Kansas City Art Institute.

"I consider artwork my life, but caring for my husband and family came first. Being an artist is a total state of being for me," Blitt said.

"I was originally a painter and didn't get into sculpture until the early 1960s. My husband (Irwin Blitt) was just getting into the shopping center business and I was painting some murals in a mall in St. Joseph, Mo.

"The architect, Chris Ramos, asked me to create a sculpture to go around a post at the mall. I told him I wasn't a sculptor, but I did want to get into sculpture, so agreed to try something," she said.

She went to a drugstore and purchased metal clothesline wire and began practicing, shaping it with her hands. Experimenting with every material she could find, she found some lightweight metal and cut it into abstract forms, shaped them and hung them from the ceiling.

"The moved with the air currents, and that was very exciting to me. I just couldn't go back to

painting on a flat surface," she said. "But, I didn't want to leave my paints, so I covered the metal with canvas and painted it. Every time I touched them they moved, and it became very exciting to me."

She got a New York City show for the canvas-covered metal sculptures, but said she got frustrated because she didn't think they were good enough. Soon after, Blitt shifted to Plexiglas and created the giant flag.

A prolific "doodler," she has created thousands of spontaneous line drawings, some of which she has transformed into metal sculpture.

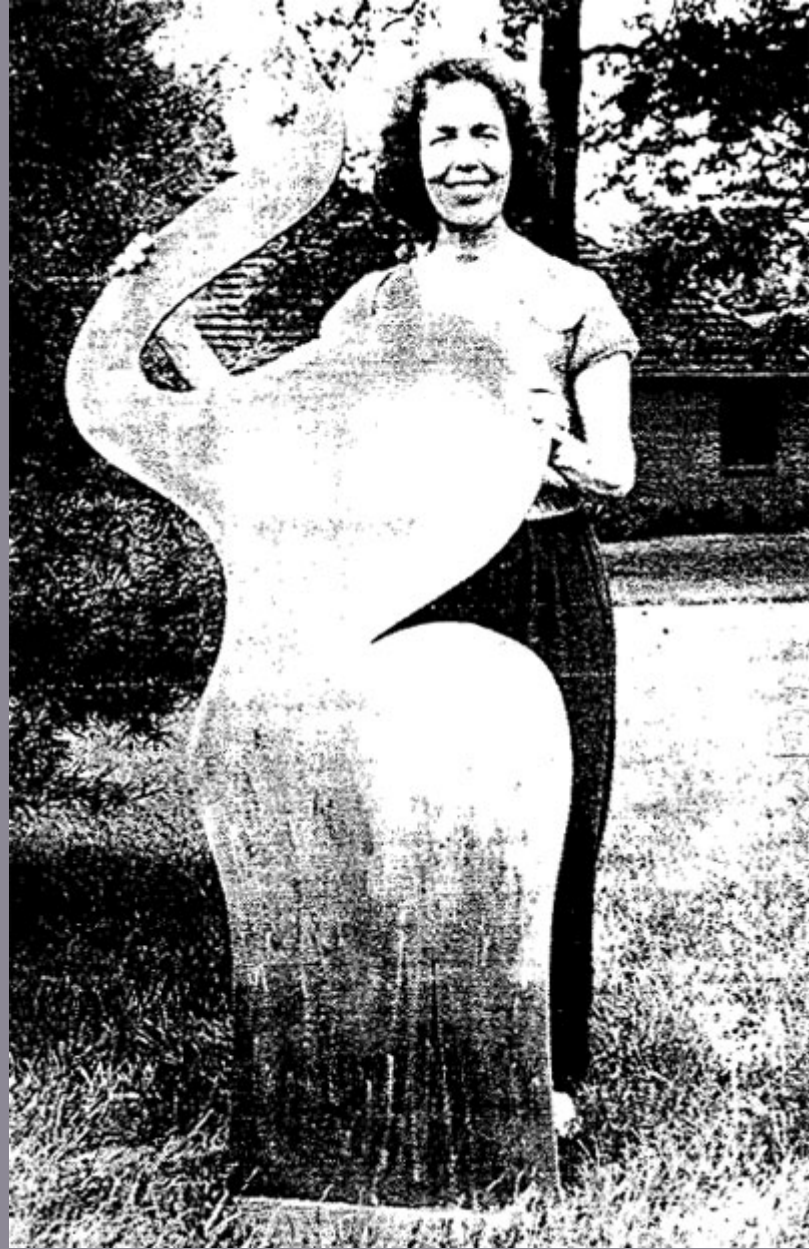
In 1977, she began drawing simultaneously with two hands. Starting at the edge of a pad of paper with crayons in each hand she lets her hands go to form straight or wavy lines, circles, or whatever shape comes forth. Often she listens to music while drawing in the spacious studio in her home that overlooks a placid lake shared by neighbor residents.

"I love music and dance. This is my way of dancing, to allow my hands to create the shapes of my sculpture," she said. Her technique is the subject of a documentary film "Dancing Hands" produced by an area film studio.

Exhibitions of Blitt's work have been held in the United States, Israel and the National Museum of Singapore. One of her sculptures is outside a museum in Singapore. Her works also are in private collections in the United States and abroad.

Locally, her sculptures can be seen also at Bannister Mall in Kansas City, Mo., and the AT&T building in downtown Kansas City.

Never one to rest on her past works, Blitt recently returned from a cruise with a briefcase full of sketches, some of which may be executed in metal or wood sculptures for the enjoyment of others.



**Fluid Lines** - Leawood sculptor Rita Blitt stands beside one of her pieces.  
*Sun Photo by Jack Root*