

# New Dimension For

## Sculptress

**By Janet Ware**  
(News Staff Reporter)

New York sculptress Phyllis Mark didn't end up quite where she started for.

In college, she studied art — but mostly art history. In the late 1950s, she was into drawing and painting. She started showing and selling her work in New York.

Sculpture was the farthest thing from her mind. Even when she studied under sculptor Seymour Lipton, that form of art just didn't appeal.

"I took welding, I made models. And I hated it," she says remembering. "I didn't like the noise, the smell — anything about it."

But the more she painted, the more Phyllis became intrigued by light and shadow. She started adding strips of wood to her paintings. Later on, she cut out wooden forms and placed them on the canvas. She couldn't quite get the shadows and reflections she wanted on a flat surface.

There was nowhere to go but out into space. Phyllis took up sculpture.

But not sculpture like she had studied before. Mrs. Mark's interest was in reflection, light and motion. Her media became polished

aluminum and stainless steel; her art form "kinetic sculpture" — the kind that moves by air currents or motors.

Phyllis showed her last paintings in 1962. Since then, her work has evolved from reflective surfaces and experiments with lighting techniques to kinetic sculpture. It's on display in office buildings and city parks as well as for sale in galleries in Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, New York and Ann Arbor.

Recently, Mrs. Mark was in the Detroit area to hang one of her sculptures at an office building in Birmingham. She stopped in Ann Arbor for a visit to the Lantern Gallery. She came armed with an album of photographs showing her work.

"It's so hard to see the work in pictures," she admitted. "You can't sense the movement or the changing shapes."

And that's central.

"Getting that motion is what kinetic sculpture is all about. It's sculpture that moves and that movement adds the element of time — like another dimension. You can look at a piece once and the next time you look at it, it has moved. It won't be the same as it was before. That's time."

"It's interesting to see the space between the forms — the relationship as the forms move. Two different edges come together and sometimes you can't even realize you're looking at the same forms. As the sculpture turns, you get a whole different feeling."

For that reason, Phyllis' work can't be quite symmetrical. If both forms on one sculpture are exactly the same, she maintains, when the air or motor pushes them around, the sculpture will always look the same. There won't be that sense of time.

Phyllis works in stainless steel, sometimes combined with painted metal surfaces to achieve a color effect, but many more of her works are of polished aluminum.

"When you have reflection," Phyllis explains, "the sculpture becomes part of the environment in a special way."

There's a reflection of light up on the ceiling and down on the floor. The pieces around it are reflected on the sculpture's surface. It works back and forth. There's an interaction between surfaces."

Mrs. Mark works daily in a loft studio in a building she shares with two other New York artists. But if you're picturing her up to the elbows in dust and brandishing a welding torch, erase that image.

Phyllis is a practitioner of a new technique — called fabricating — and she doesn't have to contend with the smell or the noise of sculpture that she hated.

Instead, Phyllis works with styrofoam and graph paper. She creates the sculpture design, then takes her plans to a manufacturer who turns out the finished product.

"The belief used to be that the hand of the artist was what was important," she says of the concept of fabricating. "They would actually make their sculptures. Now the mind of the artist is what's concerned."

According to the concept, industrial factory owners who are interested in the work of particular artists agree to produce their work according to the artist's specifications. Some of the factories are purely in the business of art. Others, like the one where Phyllis takes her drawings, produce such varied products as industrial machinery and submarine parts, in addition to works of art.

The process is an expensive

Continued from page 10:



Phyllis Mark Is Reflected In Her Motorized Kinetic Sculpture 'Mandarin Forms'

one. Phyllis has to pay the costs of the materials and the man hours involved in production of her works.

But fabrication has its advantages. Each piece of a particular edition is the same as the last one.

"With a mold, certain weaknesses could develop," Phyllis explains. "When you got to the sixth, you wouldn't know if you were really getting the same piece. With fabricating, each piece is made over according to engineering specifications, so they will be the same."

"The size of the edition then becomes a philosophical thing. No matter how many pieces you make, the quality will always be the same."

Phyllis had at first wanted large editions of her work, but discovered that the process would entail too much time and expense. She settled on 12. A dozen copies of each piece she designs are turned out by the factory.

A further advantage to fabrication is that the artist is able to work out problems during the manufacturing process. Specifications can be changed as questions arise.

Because each piece is the same as the last, there's no built-in quality-price factor. All pieces in one edition can be priced the same. And that,

Mrs. Mark believes, is a point in favor of art.

"If you can come up with a more reasonable price, some sculpture is available to almost everyone. That encourages people to take the first step. Someone who has never collected art doesn't feel it's such a terrific commitment. They can begin a love affair with art."

In keeping with the idea of making art available to as many people as possible, Phyllis has branched out into what she calls, "sculpture to wear." It's jewelry done in the same shapes and polished aluminum as her kinetic sculpture.

"There's an intimate relationship there," Phyllis says, "because it's something you're wearing. Some people buy it to wear, others just enjoy having it around to look at. But it is another way people can start collecting art and it's an easier purchase. There's not that commitment. People are sort of fooled into buying art."

Phyllis hardly feels a day is complete if she hasn't dropped in at her studio at least for awhile. She works all day, nearly every day, Saturdays and Sundays included.

When she's not at the

studio, she's at the factory consulting with engineers, having a motor repaired, buying materials. She lives with art daily.

"In the beginning you do it just because you enjoy it," she maintains. "Then it becomes a habit. I work 24 hours. Someone once said, 'Oh, but you must sleep.' I said, 'No. I dream.'"

Phyllis gets ideas for designs from the shapes and spaces around her as well as from previous works. She keeps a journal of ideas.

"That's why an artist needs to keep working all the time. My ideas often come from my work. I find that ideas I thought about five years ago keep coming up again. Even driving, I'm working all the time."

Then, too, there's feedback from other artists.

"I have to talk to other artists. It's terribly important. I guess that's why I live in New York."

But New York, she insists, isn't the only center of art any more.

"It's not absolutely necessary that an artist live in New York. The dealers have changed things. They have available first-rate work. The same pieces that would be in

New York can now be seen around the country. Ten years ago that wouldn't have been so."

The evolution from painting to kinetic sculpture has meant that Phyllis had to learn a brand new set of skills — some not at all related to art in its pure form. She had to be taught how to wire her sculpture for movement. And she always carries a screwdriver in her purse so that when visiting galleries she can make last minute adjustments.

"I'm often asked what is important for artists to study. I'd say for them to get a general education. You never know what you're going to be doing or where you will end up."

"One thing is for sure," she concludes, "it won't be where you started up. If you're a talented artist, you'll travel. Growing and changing — that's just part of life."