

ART IN THE IUPUI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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The IUPUI University Library opened in the summer of 1992; the people visiting it were impressed with its limestone, dolomite and glass construction and with the towering three story atrium that soared above the central lobby. But after living with the building for a number of years, we felt that several things were lacking. First, we needed some artwork to match the scale of the building, and second the facility needed a few more places to sit in the lobby.

The following article describes how the library worked with the Herron School of Art and Design to develop a program to commission and display student work. We tell our story because we believe our experience might be helpful to others attempting similar programs.

Two Benches: The First Competition.

The library had received a steady string of requests from people asking for a place to sit in the lobby. Our review of the commercially available options left us unexcited, so we decided to try a different approach. With a world-class studio art school on campus, we decided to see if we could get something interesting for a reasonable price.

During the fall semester of 2001 we ran a design competition for junior and senior students in the Furniture Design and Sculpture Departments. The students were given the opportunity to design and build two benches, or as they called them — seating elements. One bench design would be selected from the Sculpture Department and one design would be selected from the Furniture Design Department. Each winner would receive a \$1,000 commission towards the completion and installation of the selected benches. The selection of materials was left to each student's discretion, but issues of permanence, utilization, low maintenance and safety had to be addressed in each design. The approximate size for the benches was specified in the competition guidelines, ensuring that the benches would seat 3-4 people comfortably. Students were also asked to address installation issues as well as protection from theft and vandalism. Herron

faculty worked closely with the students in the design phase in regard to material choice, planning, and budget. Each student was asked to submit drawings of their proposed designs, indicating dimensions and materials. Students were also required to produce a scale model of their designs.

The two winners were a Shaker-style bench with library catalog created by Tyler M. MacDonald and a graceful cast concrete and wood bench designed by Diane Tucker. The IUPUI University Library presented each artist with \$1,000 for the design, construction and installation of the benches; they were installed on the second level of University Library before the end of April 2002.

The benches were scarcely unveiled before they were accepted and started getting used. The public and staff reactions to these artistic creations was so positive that we started looking for a way to do something like

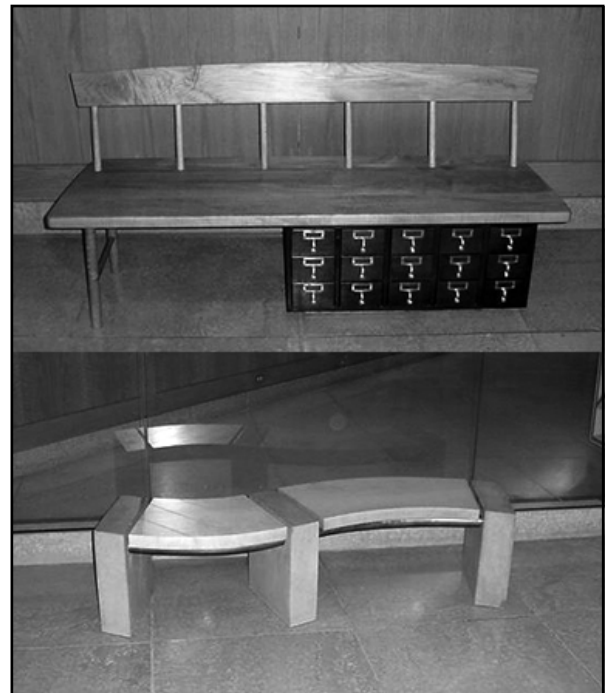


Figure 1: The winners of the first Design competition were a Shaker-style bench with library catalog created by Tyler M. MacDonald and a graceful cast concrete and wood bench designed by Diane Tucker.

this on an annual basis, but even a building of this size could only use so many benches. We quickly settled on the idea of a suspended sculpture for the atrium.

AN ANNUAL EVENT: SCULPTURE HANGING IN THE ATRIUM

In order to move forward with this plan, the first task was to install brackets for suspending the pieces of sculpture. This proved to be more complex than expected because the “as build” drawings for the building were not quite right (this is apparently not unusual). We really regretted that these brackets had not been installed as part of the construction of the building when it would have been a much simpler process.

For the sculpture competition, junior and senior students from the sculpture program were given the opportunity to generate proposals for a work of art to be suspended in the atrium. One proposal would be selected and installed for a period of one year. This is a great opportunity for the students to add a significant

piece of public art to their portfolios. In return, the library has a chance to get exciting new works at a reasonable price.

The selection of materials was left to each student’s discretion, but they were required to address issues of durability, application appropriateness, low maintenance and safety of the design. The sculpture faculty worked closely with each student throughout the design, fabrication, and installation process to ensure the work’s safety and stability.

There were some specific criteria for this artwork: The artwork was to hang between the third and fourth floors of the library. The total weight of the work could not exceed 400 pounds, and it could not generate sound. Electricity was not available (though we have added power for later installations). Students were asked to create a model of their proposed artwork, along with drawings of the final work, details of the connection systems to be used, and a working budget. The first selection took place during the first week of December of 2002.

The first winning piece was “Isthmus,” by James Darr. According to the artist’s concept statement, the creation of steel, wood, and rope “spans, but is not connected to, the second level of the University Library ... and represents the connection between worlds of knowledge.” It was dedicated in July 2003, and was on exhibit until summer of 2004.

In the two succeeding years we have had two other sculptures in the atrium and we have selected another for installation in the summer of 2006. Each has been very different and each artist has used the space in very different ways.

The piece selected as the 2005 winner was the complex “The Dream, the Dreamer and the Usher” by

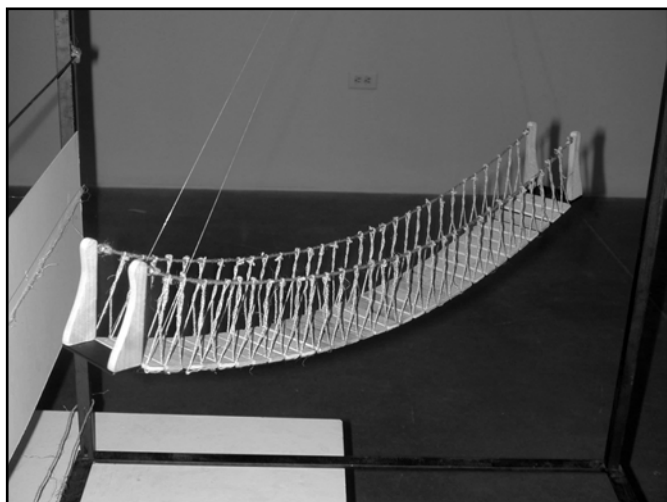


Figure 2: James Darr’s concept model for “Isthmus,” and the finished version at the dedication in July 2003, just in time for the start of University Library’s tenth anniversary.



Figure 3: “The Dream, the Dreamer and the Usher” by Patrick Gillespie featured two suspended pieces plus the “Usher” who looked down upon them from the forth level.

Patrick Gillespie. This piece required the installation of a complex grid which supported the two suspended pieces plus the “Usher” who looked down upon them from the forth level.

In the summer of 2006, Sculptor William Lopeman installed his multimedia sculpture entitled “Between Us and Them” featuring a continuous video loop of Starlings gathering on a wire as seen from inside a gigantic birdcage.

The sculpture to be installed in the summer of 2007 is again very different. The artist, Carrie Rebecca Armellino, will use thick yarn to create a web of connections that will span and fill the atrium space.

LESSONS LEARNED

Our experience has taught us a few things about how to manage large art installations.

1. As David Russick, the director of the Herron Gallery, likes to say, “Don’t buy art, display it on a temporary basis, then when your boss says she hates it on the first day the piece goes on exhibit, you can tell her that the good news is that it will be gone in a year.” We have found this to be very good advice, especially with student work. Having a different piece of sculpture in our atrium each year has lead to an ever changing experience and has provided the space a different feel for each work. We think this change is good, even though sometimes we have been sad to see a piece leave. We are glad though that we bought the benches.
2. Work with experts. Greg Hull and Eric Nordgulen, of the Herron sculpture faculty, have been invaluable in assisting us. They have been able to judge a students ability to actually deliver the pieces we have selected. They have managed the installations, which for pieces that fill a large atrium and hang from brackets three stories up, is no small feat. David Russick from the Herron Gallery has helped us with his artistic judgment and Jerry Stuff from the IUPUI Architects Office has given us sound advice about the construction of pieces.
3. If you are building or remodeling a building think about how art might be displayed in the space. Doing things like installing brackets at the top of an atrium is much easier and cheaper during construction than after the fact. Hanging systems and lighting for displaying two-dimensional art can give you lots of flexibility, but installing them in existing spaces is often difficult.

4. Have a contract or memo of understanding. Make sure everyone is on the same page about when the artwork gets installed and de-installed, who has liability for what, when will payments be made and what if anything are they contingent on? There are standard agreements you can draw upon. Any art gallery should be able to help you with this. If you are running a competition, again have clear and explicit guidelines, and involve people with knowledge and experience as part of the selection group.
5. Don’t be afraid to take chances. Especially if you follow the advice in #1, the risks are not great and the rewards can be significant.



Figure 4: Sculptor William Lopeman installed his multimedia sculpture entitled “Between Us and Them”.