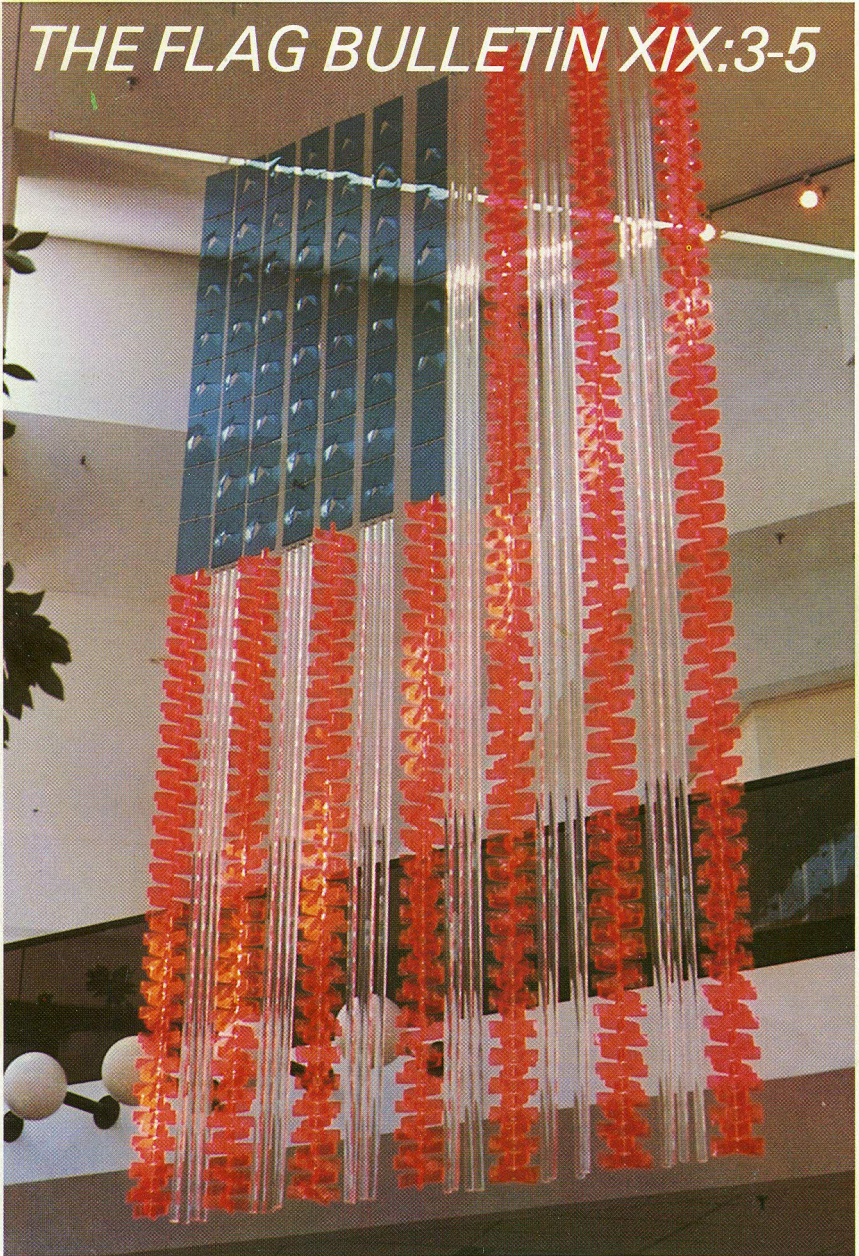


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CAPTURING THE MOTION OF A FLAG IN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

by Rita Blitt

I am a painter turned sculptor. When I painted, I took my subject matter from the world around me. As a sculptor, I allow forms to flow from within me. However, periodically I return to creating from two external subjects which I love. Those two inspirations are moving water and a flag flying in the wind.

Love for my country is part of my flag inspiration. For, even if my flags are not red, white and blue -- even if they lack stars -- to me, my flags are always American flags.

I cannot forget the image of the spotlighted flag flying in the night that first inspired me. My paint brush flew across the surface in excitement, red and white paint flowed together making pink -- red and blue combined for unplanned purple. Oh, if only I had not touched this painting after it was finished. If only I had had the maturity to know that you cannot touch a painting in only one spot. One spot leads to another and another and before you know it, the original painting disappears.

Several years later, in my eagerness to sculpt and paint too -- both at once -- I combined painting and sculpture into what I called "canvas in space." I took metal, cut it, sewed canvas around it, suspended it from the ceiling and -- assuming the position of an acrobat -- tried to paint my canvas sculpture as it moved in space.

You might think you're looking at three flags in one of my works. Well, to me it is one flag changing shape as it flies in the wind. When I used sombre colors in painting this "canvas in space" flag, viewers felt I was making a statement about the flag. If I was -- I was unaware. One three-part flag felt right to me without color -- I felt it had to be white.

One year before my scheduled "canvas in space" New York show, I began finding fault with my canvas sculpture. I determined to find a new sculpture material even if it meant giving up my paints. I created sculptures made of celastic. Celastic comes in a roll and when dipped in a chemical becomes soft and pliable. With the help of my chin, knees

and toes, I held the celastic in its sculptural form until it hardened.

To make one sculpture, I cut out the stars and added celastic pieces for stripes. A red, yellow, orange, blue, purple, green flag was made by adding small strips of torn celastic on a large piece of celastic. Shortly after John F. Kennedy was killed, I created another celastic flag which I stabbed, gouged and burned until it read, "Ask not what your country can do for you -- but what you can do for your country." This sculpture is in the permanent collection of the John F. Kennedy Library.

My search for new materials continued until I met "her highness" Plexiglas-- the answer to my problems, but abundant with new ones. My first Plexiglas sculpture was a flag. I put a piece of Plexiglas in my 350° oven, let it heat until pliable. I took it out and pushed and shoved, trying to make a beautiful flag shape. I will never forget my fright when that one piece became two. I did not know Plexiglas cooled and hardened so fast. I connected the two broken pieces with a rod in an attempt to save the pieces on which I had laboriously inscribed the "Ask not . . ." quotation.

One Plexiglas flag was created in anguish after I heard accusations against my country. I created another sculpture uniting the American and Israeli flag when I was asked to create a work of art with Jewish subject matter.

I must share with you some "aquablitts," my sculpture inspired by water. I have recently discovered -- much to my surprise -- the similarity between my flags and "aquablitts." The feeling behind them is one. This oneness made me doubly shocked to find that the flag museum in Montgomery, Alabama, is named Tumbling Waters.

I have deliberately taken the shape of my latest flag from my "aquablitts." The red stripes will be brass, the white stripes stainless. Each 8" x 17' (20 x 518 cm.) stripe will have a large curve in it, above or below the curve of its neighboring stripe. When these stainless and brass curved stripes are suspended side by side you will get a feeling of movement -- like a flag flying in the wind -- like tumbling waters. This flag will be installed in the summer of 1977 in a new shopping center in Rockaway, New Jersey. I took

the 100 8" (20 cm.) stainless steel stars (fifty for each side of the flag) into the Rockaway schools and invited the sixth and eighth grade students to engrave their names on them.

In 1975, in honor of the bicentennial of the American Revolution, I created a 10'6" x 20' (3.2 x 6.1 m.) 1,748-piece Plexiglas flag which now hangs in suburban Kansas City. As I was working on this flag, I had an inspiration to have a film made, contrasting the sewing of Betsy Ross's flag with the sawing and cooking of mine. [The film was then screened for the participants.]

The illustration on the front cover shows the large Plexiglas flag created by Rita Blitt now hanging in Kansas City.