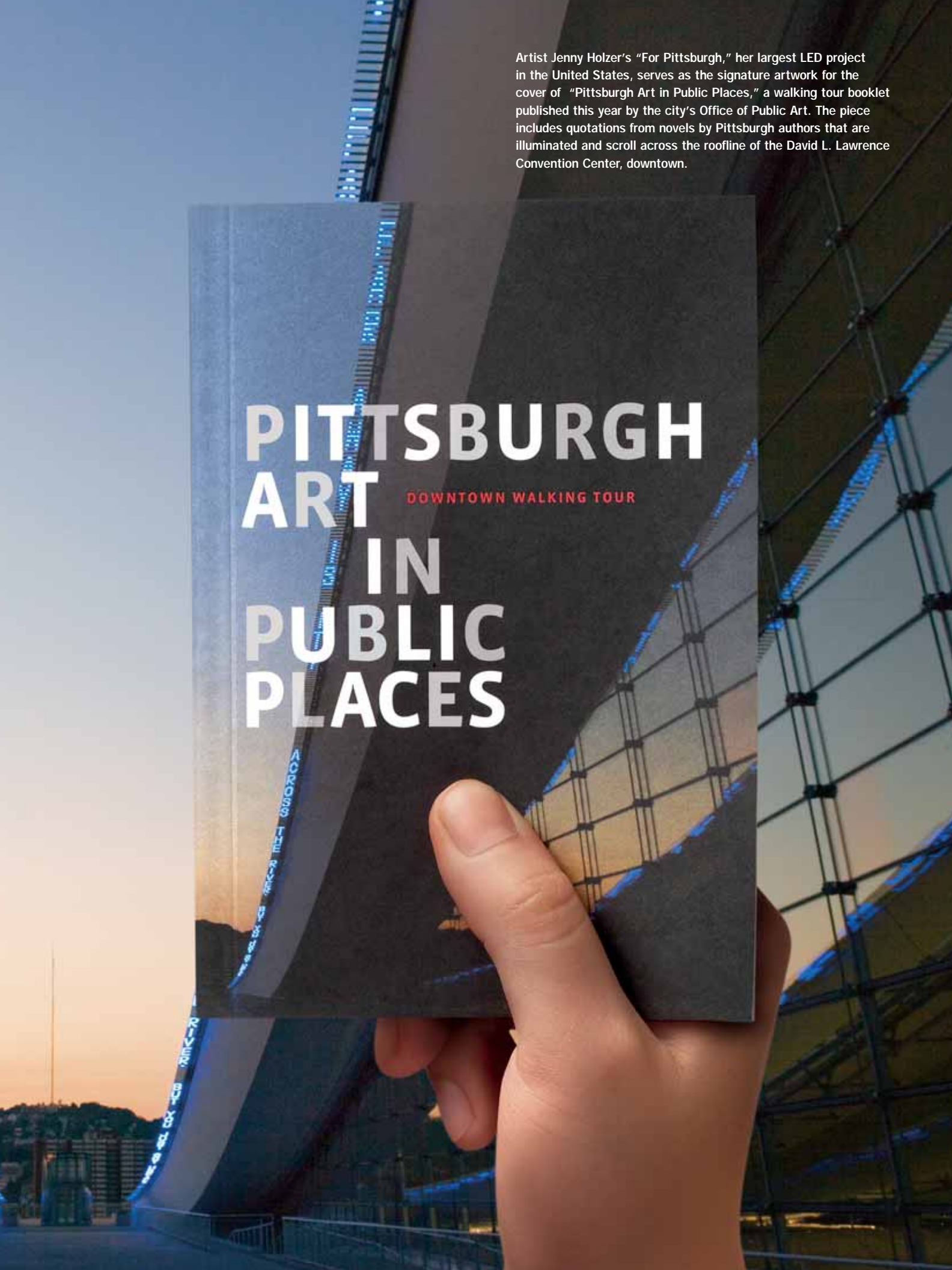


Artist Jenny Holzer's "For Pittsburgh," her largest LED project in the United States, serves as the signature artwork for the cover of "Pittsburgh Art in Public Places," a walking tour booklet published this year by the city's Office of Public Art. The piece includes quotations from novels by Pittsburgh authors that are illuminated and scroll across the roofline of the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, downtown.



PITTSBURGH ART DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR IN PUBLIC PLACES

**PITTSBURGH'S ARTISTIC
LEGACY IS GETTING
A MUCH-NEEDED BOOST
FROM ITS NEW OFFICE
OF PUBLIC ART. WITH
SUPPORT FROM THE
HEINZ ENDOWMENTS,
THE OFFICE IS PROVIDING
RESOURCES TO PRESERVE
AND EXPAND THE
CITY'S ARTWORK IN THE
PUBLIC REALM.
BY JEFFERY FRASER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JOSHUA FRANZOS**

he day begins with coffee and conversation on the South Side. Then, it's off to the studio—the cavernous shell of Bar Mill 9, one of the few surviving structures on the grounds of the former LTV Steel Hazelwood mill. Here Tim Kaulen and a band of fellow artists known as the Industrial Arts Co-op spend the rest of the day working I-beams, heavy scrap and other mill artifacts into a public art tribute to the steel industry, one rivet at a time.

They clearly enjoy the work. They just never imagined this Sunday ritual would last so long. Or involve so many setbacks.

The sculpture is imposing: a salvaged hot metal ladle weighing five tons and two 18-foot representations of steelworkers built from the steel trusses of the original Hot Metal Bridge that joined the Hazelwood mill with its sister plant across the Monongahela River. It should have been completed years ago. But on this June morning, Kaulen cannot pin down the finish line. Already seven years in the making, it might take another two, he says, depending on the hours the artists are able to donate. None of them are drawing a paycheck from the project.

The budget set in 1999 by the City of Pittsburgh, which had commissioned the work, was exhausted long ago. To make ends meet, Kaulen has elevated scavenging into an art form itself, securing additional funds, steep discounts, and donations of materials and equipment ranging from angle iron to a used forklift.

But even if they were to finish the sculpture today, it has no place to go. The city has yet to find a home for it.

“We didn’t know what we were doing,” says Jeremy Smith, the city Planning Department’s zoning administrator. “We funded a project at \$25,000 that realistically required about \$140,000 to implement. The artist was overly optimistic about what he could achieve, and we didn’t have the foresight to say, ‘You’re getting in over your head.’ We should’ve had a site for the piece before entering into an agreement. The result has been this cascade of additional funding requests, leases that expired, work progress being stopped and sites being lost.”

The consequences run even deeper. Not knowing where the sculpture would be placed altered the artists’ creative approach. “It’s hard to design something of this scale without knowing where it’s going to live,” says Kaulen, whose local work includes a series of inflatable creatures for the

Children's Museum of Pittsburgh.
"We finally had to let go of the notion that it needs to have a direct relationship with its surroundings."

Yet, as he works in the light-deprived Bar Mill 9, Kaulen sees a brighter future for public art in Pittsburgh. And Smith, in his paper-choked Ross Street office, concurs. "I'm confident we're on the right track."

Much of their confidence is grounded in the potential of the year-old Office of Public Art to help the city avoid the missteps of the past and enable Pittsburgh to build upon its long tradition of supporting public art.

The office, a partnership between the city Planning Department and the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council, was

started as a pilot project last year with a \$50,000 grant from The Heinz Endowments. It already has begun to bring stability to the field as both an advocate and a resource with the time and expertise to lend technical support to government officials, artists, developers, business owners and others interested in promoting art in the public realm.

Some early indications of its potential can be seen in the solar-powered music transmissions and incandescent images of human and animal eyes that for more than a year have enlivened a downtown pedestrian thoroughway known as Strawberry Way.

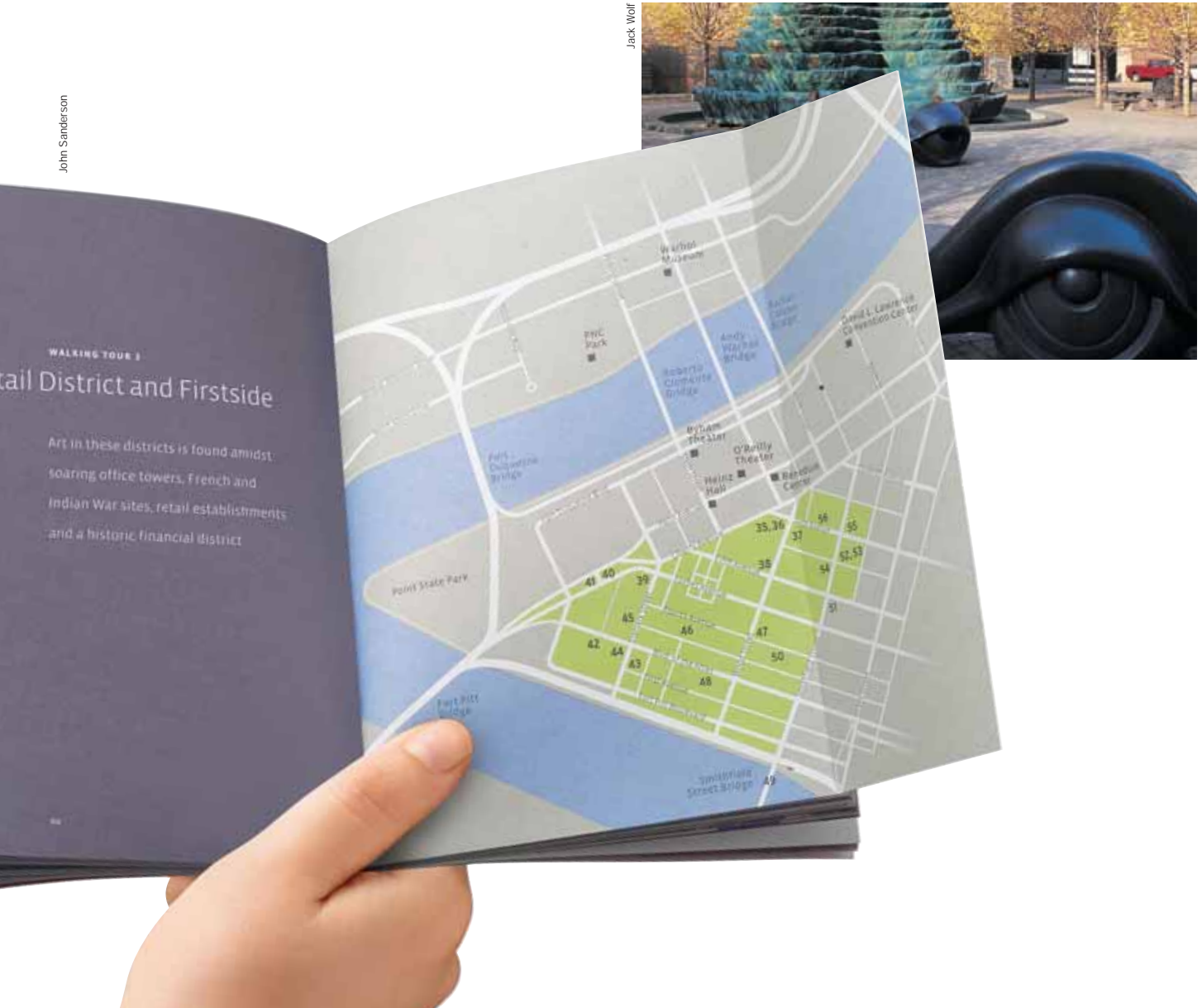
The multi-phase, \$250,000 public art project was conceived in 2002, and illuminated street signs and colored panels were set up in 2004. Last year, Renee Piechocki, director of the Office

of Public Art, was on hand to assist with the next phase of installations for the project, which received \$75,000 in support from the Endowments. She helped with writing the call for artists, selecting those who would participate and developing the contracts. She also sat on the review panel for the design development.

Jonathan Cox, vice president of operations for the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, which commissioned the Strawberry Way project, says Piechocki later pulled together panel discussions about the installation and about how architects and artists can work together to enhance Pittsburgh's image. "She has convened meetings of people interested in promoting public art in the city, providing an opportunity to share ideas."

John Sanderson

Jack Wolf



Noting Piechocki's guidance with the Strawberry Way installations, Cox predicts that "the Office of Public Art will contribute to the vitality of Pittsburgh, in general, and downtown, in particular."

Kaulen agrees, though the benefit may come a bit late for the steel industry tribute. "Ours suffered by not having direct contact with the city to keep it moving," he says. "I think that oversight will be really important and will be very instrumental for future projects by artists in the city."

Their expectations are fueled by Piechocki's long experience as a public art professional. An artist herself, she has spent more than a decade commissioning and implementing public art in several cities and served as the Public Art Network manager for Americans for the Arts from until 2004.

Under Piechocki's direction, the Office of Public Art is making its presence felt with projects such as the publication earlier this year of "Pittsburgh Art In Public Places," a self-guided walking tour of public art in downtown Pittsburgh. It is part of an effort to raise awareness of the breadth and quality of work commissioned by public and private benefactors as far back as 1865, when stone reliefs of Abraham Lincoln, George Washington and others were sculpted into the side of the Arbuttle Coffee Building off Sixth Avenue. In May, the office launched its Web site, www.publicartpittsburgh.org, to anchor news and services related to public art.

Several other initiatives are also in development. A successful lecture series

begun last year is being expanded. A public art component is being added to the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council online artists registry. Artists who work in the public realm will be able to upload images and information about their work to be included in the registry, which is intended to help developers and others looking to commission public art find local artists. An assessment of the condition of existing works of public art to identify those in need of maintenance also is planned.

Financial support for such projects increased significantly this year with the office receiving a \$33,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and an additional \$120,000 grant from the Endowments for second-year funding.

From the Endowments' perspective, a finely tuned mechanism for promoting



A group from the Grantmakers of Western Pennsylvania gets a lesson on downtown public art as it follows the map in the "Pittsburgh Art in Public Places" guide on the opposite page. Included in the booklet are photographs and descriptions of artwork such as Louise Bourgeois' bronze fountain and eyeball-shaped benches at the Agnes R. Katz Plaza, opposite page. Another stop during the June 6 walking tour: artist Penelope Jencks' "Pittsburgh People," above left, a series of figures in the Dominion Tower plaza designed to reflect the city's relationship with business and the arts. In the Strawberry Way pedestrian thoroughway, above right, Renee Piechocki, director of the Office of Public Art, explains the art installed along the four-block alley.

and supporting public art would help advance Pittsburgh as a cultural center, which is one of the goals of its Arts & Culture Program. Public art also is part of the foundation's cross-disciplinary focus on civic design.

"Although there had been a lot of public art activity and money spent in Pittsburgh, we hadn't created a body of knowledge that could be accessed and that we could grow and learn from as projects were done," says Mary Navarro, Arts & Culture senior program officer. "Without a system or a repository of knowledge, every time someone wanted to undertake a project we had to start anew. How do you issue a contract? How do you issue an RFP [request for proposals]? Who are the advisors?"

"These can be very tricky projects and people tend to underestimate the technical skill you need to do them."

In 1998, the Endowments joined several other local foundations to lend private support to one of the largest public projects in the region involving public art and civic design principles—the wholesale renovation of the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. The Endowments was among the sponsors of the competition that led to the selection of architect Rafael Viñoly's design with its distinctive swooping, cable-suspended roof inspired by the city's bridges.

The foundation also contributed to a public-private fund used to commission art for inside and outside the convention center. Some two dozen works were commissioned, including Jenny Holzer's "For Pittsburgh," an LED—light-emitting

diodes—display that streams text from the works of Pittsburgh literary luminaries along the edge of the center's cantilevered roof and across the night sky.

"Public art is a way to express the unique character of our community," says Piechocki. "We aren't buying art from a catalog. We're asking people to make something specifically for us."

Kenneth Snelson's "Forest Devil" in Mellon Square, for example, was the result of the Three Rivers Arts Festival's 1977 Sculpturescape project, which paired local companies with artists to create works for the city. Snelson created the freestanding structure of 16 cable-linked stainless steel tubes that reflects his interest in the patterns of physical



forces with materials and labor donated by Allegheny Ludlum Steel and two local fabrication plants.

Pittsburgh has acquired a broad collection of public art, much of it commissioned by the arts festival, corporations, developers and other private interests. The breadth and quality of the work detailed in the Office of Public Art's downtown walking tour booklet has even surprised city arts professionals. For example, Christine Taylor, former director of arts services at the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council, discovered "Fortune On Her Wheel," John La Farge's 1902 opalescent glass illustration of the Roman goddess in the Frick Building on

Grant Street. "It's a wonderful piece, and I had no idea it existed," says Taylor, who is now program director for national initiatives at Arts Midwest in Minneapolis, Minn.

Piechocki says she has seen enough encouraging developments in her short tenure as director of the Office of Public Art to believe the region will be able to sustain its tradition of enriching public spaces with quality artwork. She testified as an advocate of public art during hearings last year that resulted in Allegheny County adopting its first public art ordinance. The legislation creates a funding mechanism for public art by setting aside 2 percent of the cost of county-financed building and park projects—up to \$100,000. The new law also establishes an appointed art board

to advise officials on the acquisition and placement of public artwork.

In the city, the Planning Department is now encouraging developers to include art in their Pittsburgh projects as a matter of policy. And officials are poised to begin overhauling the city's century-old ordinance that sets guidelines for art on public property.

"If it does nothing else," says Smith, "the Office of Public Art has been a great forum for us to engage the issues, think about what we want to achieve and the best ways to achieve it. And that's important. It's hard to sell the value of public art—to make that pitch—when you are fumbling." *h*



In the Wood Street T station, opposite page, the Grantmakers tour group passes Sol LeWitt's "Thirteen Geometric Figures," a series of simple, abstract shapes along the transit station's wall. Above left, the aluminum bird sculptures in Mary Callery's "Three Birds in Flight" appear to soar overhead within the Sixth Avenue entrance to the Regional Enterprise Tower. People enjoying a sunny afternoon in the One Oliver Plaza courtyard, above right, are reflected in a window of the building's rear lobby where the tour group examines the colorful shapes and patterns of Virgil Cantini's "Aerial Scape, Skyscape."

Jack Wolf, a freelance photographer for 26 years, used his expertise in capturing Pittsburgh images to photograph public art for "Pittsburgh Art in Public Places." Examples from the booklet helped illustrate this story.