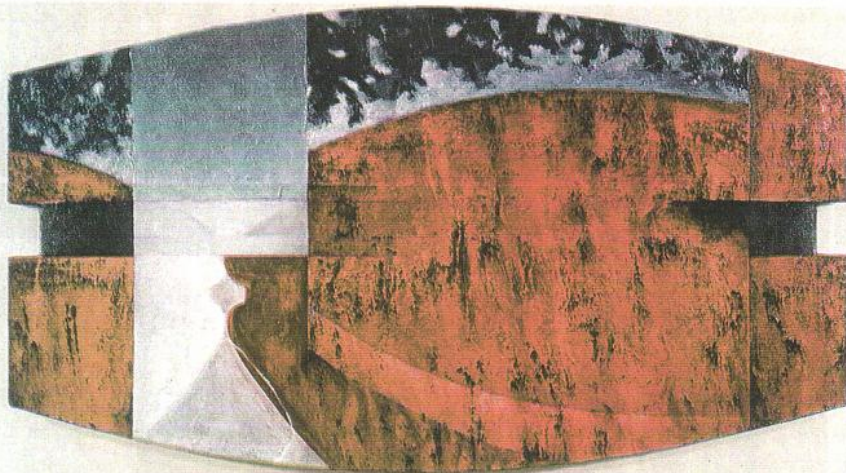


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Homegrown Art

A Company Turns to Westchester Artists to Decorate Its New Offices



By WILLIAM ZIMMER

METROMEDIA Fiber Network, a company that develops technology for sending information over the Internet, has recently occupied three floors of the office building at 360 Hamilton Avenue here. To crown its corporate headquarters, Metromedia turned to the Westchester Arts Council, also based in White Plains, to help it build an art collection — one consisting of contemporary art made in Westchester County.

Stephen Reitano, a vice president at Multimedia who is also on the board of the arts council, said that the decision to buy art was made first of all for the benefit of the company's employees. "They're a valuable asset and deserve to work in a cultured environment," he said. "It's good business

sense. We also like supporting artists."

Mr. Reitano asked two employees to select the art: Terri Summers, who is in charge of daily operations at Metromedia, and Adam Smargon, whose title is manager of new communications, a position that includes managing the company's Web site. To round up artwork for the pair to choose from, the council enlisted Rosemary Erpf, an art consultant and art history professor who lives in New York City.

The arts council has a real stake in the success of this venture. Two years ago it moved into new quarters itself, an imposing landmark building from the early 20th century. Janet T. Langsam, executive director of the arts council, sees the building, a former bank that is still undergoing renovation, as a sign of new life for her organization.

"The commission to build Multimedia's collection is the first opportunity the council

has had to actually support artists, not just promote them," Ms. Langsam said.

The group selecting the art didn't want a random body of work, so its initial task was to develop a theme for the collection. The one chosen reflected Metromedia's mission and philosophy: "Create, Connect, Converge."

The touchstone for inclusion in the collection would be a work's embodiment of the idea of bringing people together. Ms. Erpf began her search in mid-November, and by mid-January she was ready to have her clients select a painting for the most important location, the reception area on the building's seventh floor, which serves as the entrance to Metromedia.

Before coming face to face with the works Ms. Erpf had selected, Ms. Summers and Mr. Smargon had seen them on slides. Based on that introduction, paintings by several artists were taken to the arts coun-



George M. Gutierrez for The New York Times

Terri Summers, left, Rosemary Erpf, and Janet T. Langsam, trying out a work of art at Metromedia. "Gardens and Pools I," by Serdar Arat, one of the pieces chosen.

cil and hung on the walls of several unfinished rooms there.

One artist, Robert Goodnough, was given a prime spot in the boardroom, however. Mr. Goodnough, a Thornwood resident whose work has an international reputation, is identified with the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Color Field Painting, and the painting placed in the boardroom was a convergence of richly colored flame-like shapes.

Mr. Smargon thought that the color was too intense for the company's reception area — which is meant to put people at ease — but that the painting might be considered for another location.

Asked whether they would buy works by major artists just to have them in their collection, Mr. Smargon said, "No, our main criterion is quality."

The panel liked the paintings by a Dobbs Ferry artist, Gerda Roze, that hang on the wall at a jaunty angle. The imagery seemed to suggest deep space or the cosmos. Since the far reaches of space is territory that Metromedia works to bridge, the subject matter is appropriate. But Ms. Summers said that the painting was too small, at least for the reception area. Ms. Erpf said that she had considered commissioning work from an artist the representatives liked to avoid problems like an inappropriate size, but there was a risk. "What if they don't like it?" she said.

ON a bright but chilly Monday morning Ms. Summers and Mr. Smargon set off on a field trip led by Ms. Erpf. Ms. Langsam went along. Their destination was the studio of Serdar Arat, an artist from Tuckahoe, which is in a former factory building in Port Chester that is well populated by artists.

Ms. Summers and Mr. Smargon walked right up to "Gardens and Pools I," the painting they had chosen from Mr. Arat's slides. It curves gently at the top and bottom, and has a subdued but unexpected color scheme of purple and a deep rust brown. The brown defines a pool and invites contemplation. The group also admired a series of drawings by Mr. Arat called "White Trees" in which the bare, linear branches suggest cables.

Here, as well as throughout the selection process, Ms. Summers and Mr. Smargon were not looking for literal manifestations of their theme; the trees were always perceived as trees, but the notion of the trees' symbolizing a striving to connect was clearly on their minds.

Ms. Erpf steered her clients into a neighboring studio, that of Michael Torlen, a landscape painter from Mamaroneck, where the group admired a small painting of a rich orange sunset. "I know this isn't for the reception area, but I wanted you to see it

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Ms. Erpf, Ms. Summers and Mr. Smargon frequently injected, "I'm just playing devil's advocate," into their discussions about the merits and appropriateness of the work presented to them. But agreement was reached quickly. Within a couple of days of the studio visits, Metromedia brought works by Mr. Arat, Mr. Maggiotto and Mr. Kiberd to Metromedia's reception area for an on-site evaluation. Mr. Arat's painting "Gardens and Pools I" was selected and it will be seen first upon entering Metromedia's headquarters.

Metromedia also acquired Mr. Maggiotto's "Builders" for an adjacent wall. Works by Ms. Roze, Ms. Wright and Mr. Kieberd have been picked for the seventh floor, which includes the executive offices.

Ms. Erpf said that for the next step, "We will continue to select works for the seventh floor working with the installation — where things go and how they will relate to other pieces in the collection."

"We hope to finish the seventh floor within the next month," she said in late January. "Then we start the sixth floor, then the fifth . . ."