

# DISTRICT

## WEEKLY

# Art Invades Life on 7th Street

## Commission to Install 50 Works Downtown

By Julie Makinen  
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**B**ounded on two sides by vacant buildings, the bleak pedestrian mall at Seventh and F streets NW is hardly interesting, let alone arty. So when a battered sedan drove up with what looked like a silver-painted mannequin tied to its roof, it was cause for gawking.

"What is that?" asked a passerby, stopped in his tracks by the space-age figure with the red-flame boots. "Is that supposed to be art?"

Indeed it is. It is "Mosca," a fiberglass figure made by D.C. artist Alfredo Hjar and one of more than 50 pieces being installed in public places downtown by the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities as part of the 7th Street Arts Walk.

The exhibit, the first of its kind sponsored by the commission, is designed to provide a forum for local artists and take art beyond the confines of museums and galleries into everyday life.

"I've been looking at it as a big experiment," said Matt Radford, who is the commission's coordinator for art in public places and put the show together on a budget of about \$12,000. "It's interesting how much of an impact a work will have in a space that before had nothing of great interest there. All of a sudden, it brings the space alive. . . . There's something to notice."

Take, for instance, "Mosca," which means fly in Spanish. It's being affixed to the face of the old LeDroit Building that faces the National Portrait Gallery. For decades, the building housed artists' studios, but it had deteriorated in recent years, and the artists were forced to move, leaving the structure vacant and lifeless.

Now, in addition to "Mosca" scaling the facade, the building's windows are being filled with colorful paintings and photographs. "Running Man," a life-size cast of a man illuminated by neon light, has been bolted onto the second story of the building's front.

Nearby, at Seventh and F streets NW across from the MCI Center site, two stainless steel sculptures by Robert T. Cole



"Running Man," a life-size cast of a man illuminated by neon light, is the creation of Craig Kraft. It has been bolted onto the second story of the old LeDroit Building.

from the Shakespeare Theatre. Other pieces—architectural models, paintings and sculptures—are being displayed in storefronts all the way to Pennsylvania Avenue.

In all, 32 artists' works will be on display. Installation should be complete by this weekend, Radford said, and the pieces will be on view at least through the end of May.

The commission, which has had a drop in local funding from \$4.2 million in 1993 to \$1.7 million this year, is the city's sole

grants annually, works to provide art programs to students in the city's public schools and sponsors cultural events such as the Washington International Film Festival.

Many of the works in the Arts Walk have a local connection, such as Judy Byron's "We Are Your Sons and Daughters" woodcut series. One of the woodcuts focuses on a group of teenagers from the nearby Chinatown area.

"I have a strong belief in art that reaches out to a broad population," said Byron, 50,

Whether you're coming from a law office or your department store job, to experience this every day, as you pass it, is a good thing."

Other pieces highlighting local subjects include paintings by Joey Manlapaz, which depict scenes along Seventh and 11th streets downtown; Allen Caredio Jackson's photographs of a local dance class; and a Val Lewton mural depicting the arena construction.