



“WORLD ENGINE” – Atrium Artwork

Artist Gary Justis was selected to create the artwork for the Atrium space of the Illinois State University College of Business Building as part the Illinois Capital Development Board’s “Art in Architecture” program. Justis named the artwork “World Engine.” Detailed below is the artist’s description of his work.

Business is one of the “Engines” that drive the world. Its theories and applications have permeated human relations since the beginning of communication. The large sculpture, World Engine, uses the idea of a fictional machine to show the importance of business is universal.

Over much of the 20th Century, the relationship between art and life has become fertile ground for many artists. In the early to mid-20th Century such artists as Pablo Picasso, Kurt Schwitters, and Joseph Cornell introduced everyday reality into the rarified realm of the visual arts. Much of the language of World Engine can be attributed to the work and writings of the 20th Century French artist, Marcel Duchamp, who recognized a large part of our reality is made up of objects and materials we produce, and these objects are used as carriers of meaning.



The individual parts of this sculpture are derived from representations of functional, mechanical components, yet they possess no function beyond one that is symbolic. The look of the sculpture’s parts suggests products of mechanical manufacturing stretching from the early 19th Century to the present. With its close associations to the Industrial Revolution, the individual components of the work are an amalgam of various historical and mechanical forms. The composition of the individual components in this work are inspired by instructional design, a technique used in mechanical drawings showing exploded views of machine parts, attempting to explain their workings to the viewer. This kind of explanatory drawing served as a metaphorical device to use in depicting the complex workings of business. There are complex visual relationships occurring in the work, yet the tension between these similar, but irreconcilable forms is mediated by the space dividing them, which seems both to frustrate and abet their longing for connection. The forms are suspended in a constant state of tension between finished product and metamorphosis.

In choosing the color for the sculpture it was important to find hues that drew associations from the various manufactured metals that have been utilized from the Industrial Revolution through the Space Age. The smooth side of the sculpture faces in toward the building and is pigmented to resemble a wide range of industrial metals.

The reverse side, illuminated by the morning light from the courtyard, is textured and coated with a finish that resembles molten gold. The ultimate perfection of all matter in ancient alchemy, gold represents the universal medium of exchange. The relationship between the smooth (finality, concreteness) and rough (fluidity, change towards the perfection of matter) alludes to human invention.

The actual material of the sculpture is polyurethane, cast from plaster waste molds and encased in three shades of high tech metallic coating. The large forms are deceptively light in weight yet pigmented in a way that makes them appear heavy. Each form is held rigid by an aluminum skeletal framework system, resembling a spinal column, bonded to the open side and designed specifically for each component.