

MIT List Center

Richard Fleischner

Artist Richard Fleischner's work blurs the lines between art and landscape design, between the natural and man-made environment. His design for Upper Courtyard was part of the groundbreaking collaboration between architect I.M. Pei and artist Kenneth Noland and Scott Burton for the design of the Wiesner building in 1985. Upper Courtyard was to define the space between Wiesner and the soon-to-be-built health services building across the way.

Richard Fleischner: "Very early on, I became focused on having to deal with these relationships that existed between the buildings. I don't start with models or drawings. I start in the actual space and will string lines that represent important axes, will establish planes with plywood."

To direct movement through the courtyard, Fleischner laid out a checkerboard pattern of paving stones that echoed the geometry of Pei's building. Many of his design implementations were subtle enhancements to the landscape, including adjusting the grade of the landscape and adding carefully selected plantings. Benches and other seating placed strategically throughout the space provide opportunities for rest and contemplation.

"My primary concern remains providing a destination. And that means that it's a place at which one does not necessarily have to continue through."

In 2010, MIT completed a new building, the Media Lab and SA+P extension that had necessitated the redesign of Fleischner's Lower Courtyard. So Fleischner was asked to readdress the space as part of the MIT Percent-For-Art for the new building. His solution? A pair of cast concrete arcs that provide seating while framing the pedestrian access through the space.

"Several people have commented to me that when they have spent time there, there really is like a vibration at the point of stasis.

Working at a place like MIT is what I like. I don't like the preciousness of art. I don't like prescriptive works that tell you to stand here to experience the experience. I like to do something that is very unauthored, that's sort of taken for granted. It's accepted as part of a larger context."

To learn more about I.M. Pei's Wiesner building as well as Scott Burton's and Kenneth Nolan's artwork for the building's atrium, please look for the identifying signage.