

LOCAL

'Gravity of Color' draws attention to city

By SCOTT WHIPPLE

HERALD STAFF

NEW BRITAIN — To most of us a plastic cup is something to use, then throw away.

Not to Lisa Hoke.

"One day I dropped a piece of paper into a plastic cup in my studio," says Hoke, a widely acclaimed artist. "It gave me a number of qualities: visual; space to see the colored paper, and I could pour paint into it. It became the perfect, three-dimensional vehicle for color away from the wall."

Still, it wasn't until gazing one day at the Hudson River and watching the currents go by that she realized cups could imitate that.

"If I could get a similar line going, that was what I wanted," she says.

The New Britain Museum of American Art knew Hoke was the artist they wanted for its new installation at the top of its LeWitt Staircase.

More than 50 artists from throughout the U.S. submitted proposals for the project, coordinated in conjunction with the museum's director, Douglas Hyland. A panel of six judges reviewed applications for the project, including three museum representatives: Hyland, museum Chairman Timothy McLaughlin and Trustee Linda Cheverton-Wick.

Hoke's work replaces "The Eye," an installation created by Stephen Hendee of Las Vegas in 2006 for the opening of the Chase Family Building. The installation leads from the first to second floor of the museum. Her creation of the colorful multimedia artwork began May 28 and will be completed by June 6. Like Hendee's work, "The Gravity of Color" is a temporary piece which will be replaced in two to five years by another commissioned work of art.



Djamila Grossman | The Herald

New York artist Lisa Hoke looks at the progress she made at building her new installation at the New Britain Museum of American Art. The piece is made from thousands of colored plastic cups and is two stories high. Richard Webber, the fabricator for the installation uses an electric drill to screw the cups into the wall.

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Art of plastic cups

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Hoke said her work was inspired by "Winter's Tales," a story by Mark Helprin. A character in the story is driven by the smell of paint indoors and can't get close enough to the color.

"Mark used 'Gravity of Color' in a sentence, and I loved it," says Hoke. "Color has a power."

"Lisa's work was spectacular and colorful on a monumental scale," Hyland says, explaining why she landed the project. "It was the most dynamic of all the submissions."

Hoke commissioned \$120,000 for the project.

A 2008 recipient of a fellowship sponsored by the Edwin Austin Abbey Endowment at the National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts, Hoke is known for her innovative use of "found" materials in her work.

Hoke's installation is being created with clear plastic cups coated with vibrantly colored paints, as well as new and vintage opaque paper cups found through a variety of sources. The installation begins at the top of the staircase, around the windows and up the inner wall next to the staircase as it extends to the second floor.

Thousands of cups are being attached to museum walls with a screw, or glue, creating a breathtaking, jewel-like visual impact with swirls of color and texture. Hoke

is working with four assistants: Richard Webber, Kati Villam, Alex Pacula and Brook Ripley. Webber is her pre-project problem-solver.

"After looking at the space he and I realized we needed industrial scaffolding," Hoke says. "Kati, Alex and Brook have a tremendous sense of color and are good at repetitive work. All four are easy to be with and are self-starters. Each has a masters degree in fine arts; each is composing in sections; so, you get the effect of a lot of energy. I don't tell them what to do."

Hoke says she hopes visitors to the museum "will sense an attraction and a discovery that something as mundane as a plastic cup can carry with it a visual memory. What we do every day can be elevated and can have more resonance than we imagine."

Museum visitors can view the work in progress as Hoke creates her project. She is available each day from noon to 1 p.m. to answer questions, and will also talk about her work on Friday, June 6 at 6 p.m. First Friday at the museum is an informal evening of live jazz and light refreshments.

Founded in 1903, the New Britain Museum of American Art is the oldest museum in the country devoted to collecting only American art.
