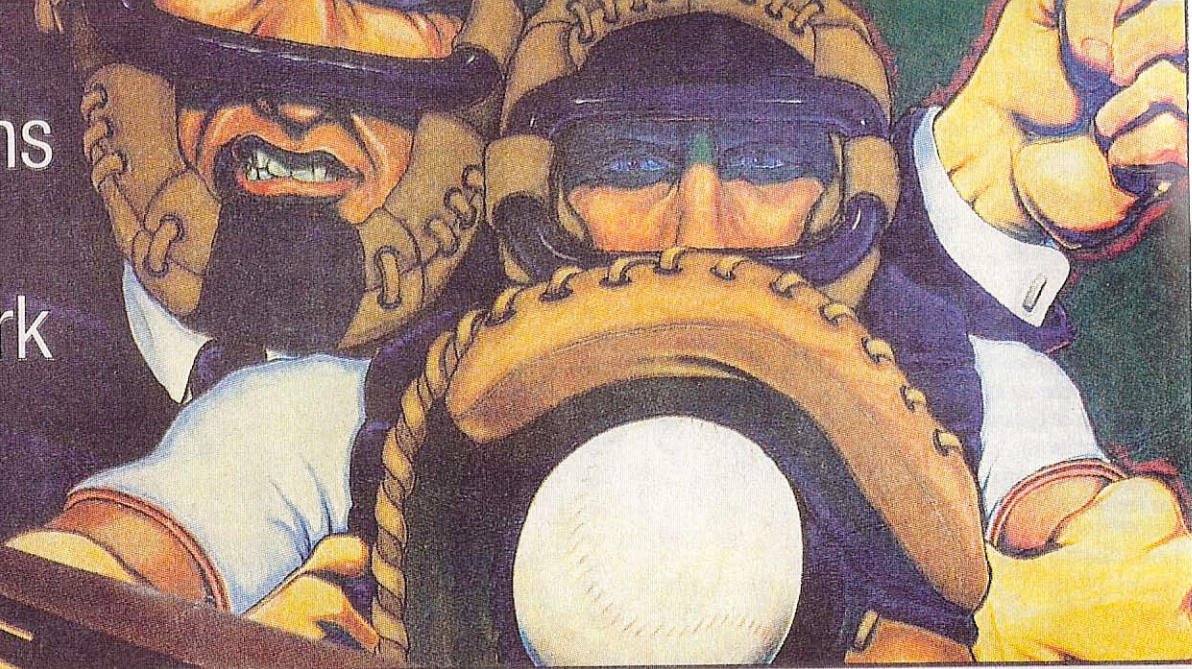


Art lovers,  
baseball fans  
mingle at  
Pac Bell Park



# TAKE ME ART TO THE BALL GAME

By Leslie Harlib  
*IJ reporter*

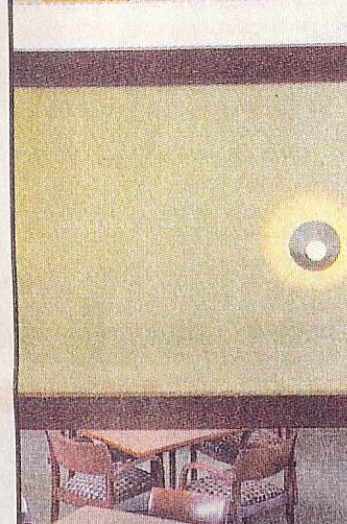
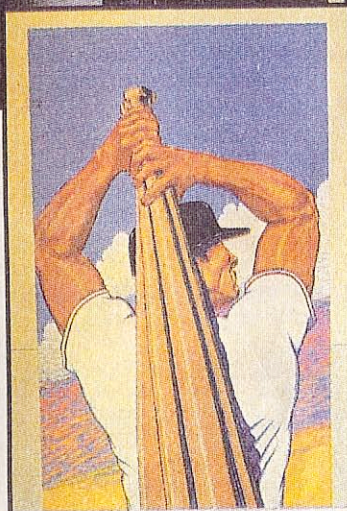
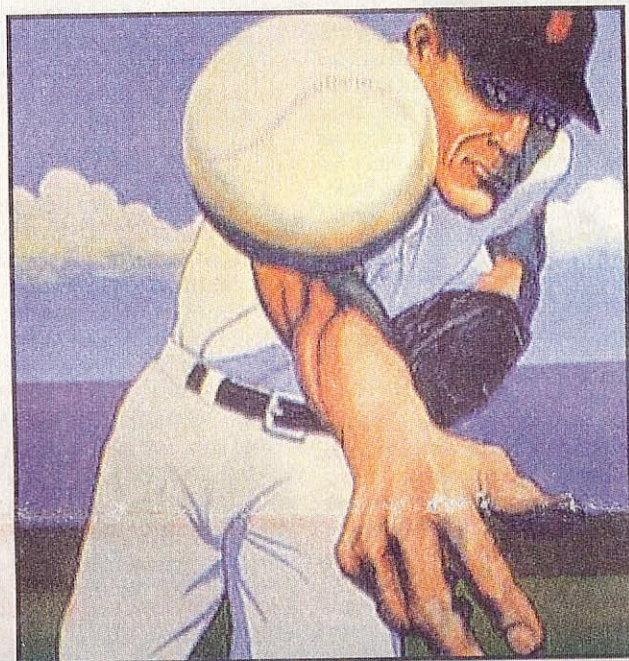
**T**ITAN on the wall. Muscles bunched, huge body all thrust and bulge as he slides for home plate in an explosion of frozen power that pounds into your vision 20 feet across.

Blue eyeballs bigger than softballs glare down from a height of 14 feet, the massive face around them contorted in an eternal rictus of competition for the ultimate pitch — a world-sized baseball hurtling out from the wall. Behind him, the sky blares blue, black and orange in a scene that's part storytelling, part comic book panel.

Baseball as art form, as cultural metaphor, and as the most time-honored, beloved game in America, comes to life through the dynamic art program launched into play on April 11 at Pacific Bell Park in San Francisco.

Everyone who goes to the park will see the huge sculpture of Willie Mays by William Behrends, and the Seal sculpture by Alfredo Osorio. But there's a rich dimension of art that enriches the walls on Pac Bell Park's club and suite levels, as well.

Murals such as the ones described above, by Tom Mogensen and Jeffrey Skyles, plus photographers Daniel and Bill Clark's series of antique catchers' masks, a collection of blown-up panels of



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Willard Mullins' 1940s cartoons, Charles Meier's photographed collages of Giants memorabilia from 1888 to 1997; all are integral to the new ballpark's ambience of culture and money married to baseball.

"I think we captured the love of the game," says Nancy Donati, director of publications for the San Francisco Giants for 8½ years.

Donati spent two years working with Jan Casey, a Fairfax resident who is an art consultant for businesses and corporations, finding and commissioning Bay Area artists to bring their vision to Pac Bell Park. It was, Donati says, a daunting challenge.

"We didn't want kitschy or Norman Rockwell. We wanted the art to have a sort of edge to it, capture the drama, the strategy of the game."

"Art at its best has a visceral effect, with images that tie into people's deep emotions and experiences," says Casey. "We wanted this artwork to do that for baseball fans."

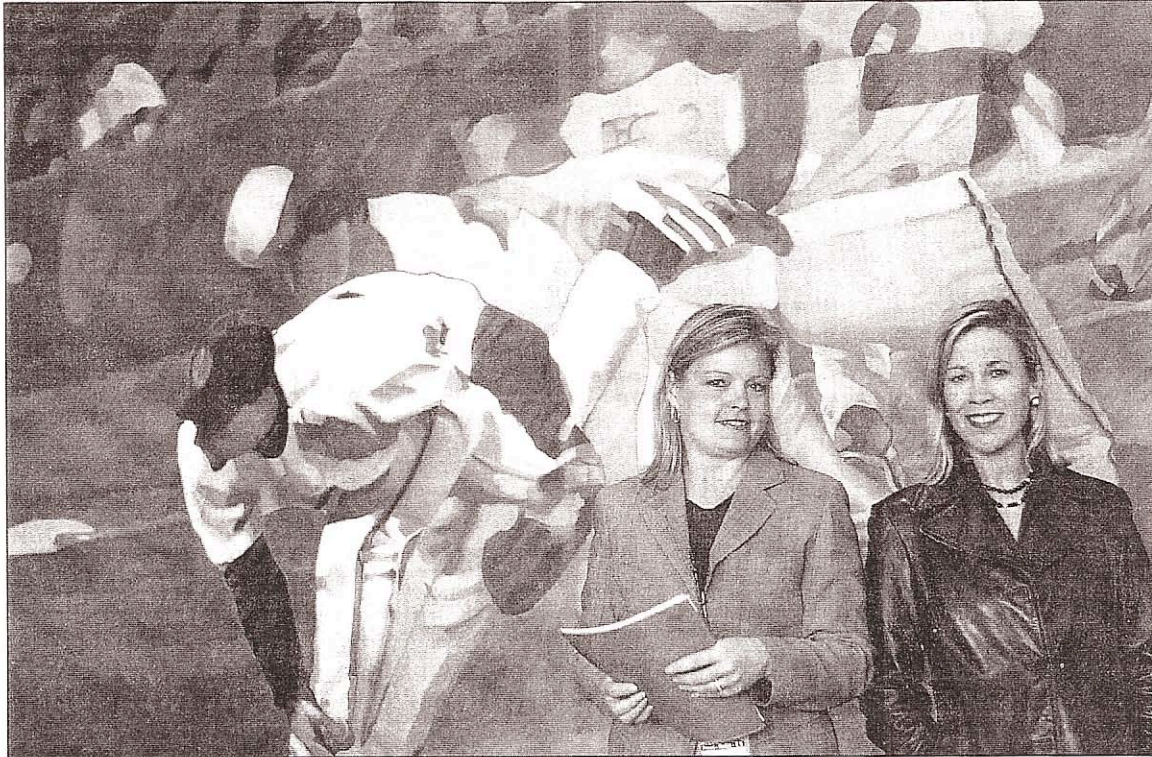
In their search for artists, Donati and Casey discovered that, as Donati put it, "Sports art is sort of an oxymoron. There really isn't a field for this."

"We went through boxes of scary portfolios," adds Casey.

To paint the key murals that emblazon the walls in the private club areas of Pac Bell Park's two lower floors, the duo and their committee chose San Francisco artists Tom Mogensen and Jeffrey Skyles.

Mogensen, a protégé of the late John Langley Howard (famous for his murals in Coit Tower), has been a muralist for 30 years. For Pac Bell Park's Field Club level, on the ground floor, he painted six enormous, highly stylized images of the action around — or from the perspective of — home plate: a player sliding into home, a view from the dugout out across home plate, a runner heading home. All Mogensen's murals create a feeling that these players, as well as these moments, are familiar, even though they're all generic moments in baseball, with figures merely symbolic of Giants.

"I love their energy," says Casey



U photo/Marian Little Utley

**SETTING THE SCENES:** Nancy Donati (left), director of Giants publications, and art consultant Jan Casey of Fairfax worked together to bring much of the artwork to the walls of Pac Bell Park. Behind them is a mural by Tom Mogensen, one of three in the Field Club Restaurant.

who points out that the audience behind the players in the murals is a collection of faceless blobs, as if a pointillist went crazy, working in extra-large dots. "The players don't see the faces. Mogensen's murals create for the viewer the sense of what the players themselves are feeling or seeing."

Moody, even haunting, is the feeling evoked by the five-piece "Catchers' Mask" series, also on the Field Club level. San Francisco photographers and brothers Daniel and Bill Clark ("rabid baseball fanatics," says Casey) used lighting to give a dramatic, even sinister gloss to the masks, which span a time period from the turn of the century to the '40s. There's anthropology in the way the photographs highlight the masks' texture, structure and hearts of darkness, as if they were occult relics rather than sports

equipment.

Jeffrey Skyles, the artist who won acclaim in Marin County last year for his mural restorations in the Rafael Film Center, painted the graphically muscular, almost cartoon-like panels displayed near the bar areas on the second-floor AAA Club Level. Skyles' work is also viewable from the Promenade level.

What was unusual about this assignment, said Skyles, is that he painted the murals in his studio. Then they were transferred to the ballpark and permanently affixed to the walls.

"It was also unique in that I got to work with non-characters, as it were. I wanted to create baseball players, but wanted them to be ambiguous. I didn't want people to say, 'That's Willie Mays,' 'That's Willie McCovey.'"

Skyles enjoyed his freedom to "tinker with different styles that appealed to me. I gave my preferences and, for the most part, the committee selected the ones I liked. I started with the WPA style in mind. From a distance, they're very graphic. As you get closer, you see a fair amount of detail, whereas the WPA stuff tended to be really blocky."

Working with intense, saturated colors, including a lot of black and orange (the official Giants colors), Skyles concentrated on creating massive, menacing figures so superhero-like that they look as if they were painted with an undercoat of testosterone. In clothing, in hue, they evoke the feeling of baseball around 1960, paying homage to the fact that the Giants moved to San Francisco in 1958.

"For me as a boy, baseball players were larger than life — these huge, tough men," Skyles recounts. "That's what I wanted to convey. All the scenes I painted are very intense moments. As the ball is making impact, as the pitcher has just thrown the pitch, I put the viewer inside the diamond, inside the foul lines. The art takes you close."

In the charming, nostalgic collages of photographer Charles Maier, co-owner of Sandbox Studio in San Francisco (also on the AAA level), the mood lightens considerably. Meier assembled memorabilia chronicling the history of the game of baseball as well as the history of the Giants, and photographed the collections in a series that spans 100 years. His gentle, newsy images speak to the child, and the collector, in all of us.

on wry — the blown-up cartoons of Willard Mullins, a mainstay of the New York Times sports pages in the 1940s. Mullins is famous for his characters "Dodger Bum" and "Pin-head Giant."

Giants' president and managing general partner Peter Magowan has donated his own collection of lithographs depicting America's great ballparks in their heyday. Donati and Casey selected the framing and designed their placement. These hang on the fourth floor, where the jazziest seats in the place — the 67 luxury suites — are located.

Suite holders will also get to see a series of delicate yet vibrant watercolors by Stanley Silver, featuring players from the San Francisco Giants' all-decade teams of the 1960s, '70s, '80s and '90s.

Silver, who grew up in Los Angeles playing competitive sports, combined his love of art and sports by specializing in watercolor paintings of professional athletes. He was also the official artist for the 49ers' 50th-anniversary celebration.

Donati and Casey explain that all the artwork, even the most impressionistic murals of Mogensen and Skyles, were based on real pictures of real action. It's why they feel the artwork will be so successful.

"Baseball fans are particularly challenging art critics, because they know immediately if anything is out of line," says Donati. "They're very statistics-oriented as well as passionate. They will call out things that are inaccurate. For instance, in one of Mogensen's murals, someone pointed out that second base was too far to the right, which I wouldn't have noticed. We had to be very careful about many fine points like that."

While the paintings and photographs are, at present, available only on Pac Bell Park's private levels, Donati says that a series of ballpark tours — which can be booked in advance — take in the artwork, and should make the pieces accessible to everyone, at least anyone who's interested. Even if they enjoy their ball games in the cheap seats.

"Most ballparks have art programs these days," says Donati. "Here, the art had to be positioned this way because the park was privately funded."