

## NEW JERUSALEM

Sister Mary Charles earned a BA in Art and English from The College of St. Scholastica and an MA in Education from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. She was an elementary teacher, taught education courses at The College of St. Scholastica, and served as Assistant Professor and Chair of the Art Department. She was at Notre Dame during the summers of 1956-58 and 1960-64, and at Chicago's School of the Art Institute in the summers, 1950 and 1959. In 1964 Notre Dame awarded her a MFA in Art.

Notre Dame distinguished itself as a leader in art when Fred S. Beckman (Art Department 1946-95) developed cooperative relationships with the auto industry. Beckman advocated for design education and for finding more common ground between fine and applied art. In general, the 1960s saw more permeability in the barriers between fine and applied art, graphics, advertising, fashion, architecture, and interior and industrial design.

Sister Mary Charles was no doubt aware of the comingling of the functional and the aesthetic in her graduate department as it had direct application to the increasing number of decorative commissions she was asked to create for private and church clients. She carried the look and spirit of abstracted, modernistic, and streamlined form through several artistic pursuits—graphics for publications, church banners, public

sculpture, and woodcut prints. More than any other art form, the traditional icons of her late career depend on the power of carefully abstracted form.

Notre Dame had a relatively liberal environment, and Sister Mary Charles was influenced by new tendencies toward abstract art, which allowed her freedom to build on a strong foundation of figure drawing she already had. In addition to Fred Beckman, her greatest influences at Notre Dame were the modernist sculptors Virgil Cantini, Rev. Anthony Lauk, and Ivan Mestrovic—and Jean Charlot, Irving Amen, Stanley Sessler, and Robert Leader in two-dimensional media.

The influence of modernist design is powerfully evident in one of Duluth's largest outdoor sculptures: Sister Mary Charles's ten- by thirty-foot granite relief, near the original entrance to the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center. Titled *Water, Tree, Rock* (1966) the sculpture is comprised of twenty-four variously textured



*Sister Mary Charles and DECC officials with clay model of Water, Tree, Rock relief sculpture, ca. 1965*