

## **Making the Leap: The Fabrication of Clifford Ross's Glass Wall**

To commission any work of art is to take a leap of faith. To commission what would be the defining glass entry to the new federal courthouse in Austin, it took many.

And if it's a leap of faith that's required, it's best to have Michael Mayer on your side. Along with his father, Gabriel Mayer, Michael is managing partner of the world-famous architectural glass and mosaic studio, Franz Mayer of Munich, Inc. (Michael's great-great-great-grandfather started the family business in 1847.) Dedicated to restoring and reconstructing historic stained glass and mosaic, the company also works with contemporary artists and architects worldwide, creating and fabricating work for new installations.



So when Mayer was contacted by multimedia artist Clifford Ross to realize his design for the entry of the federal courthouse—an expansive 28'x 28' glass wall depicting Ross's photo negative of the Texas landscape on the bottom, topped by a colorful panel of abstract, floating



elements—he knew he would have to rely on deep experience, meticulous collaboration, and collective ingenuity to bring the monumental project to life.

Beyond the sheer scale of the work, the piece had to incorporate door panels on the bottom, connecting the lobby to the large jury room, and accounting the ever-changing natural light that flooded the courthouse during the day. The top portion required Mayer to develop complex technical combinations to

capture the color, texture, and depth of Ross's design.



To achieve the needed detailing and the vibrancy in color and texture, we worked on two separate layers of glass,” said Mayer. “A specially developed digital print with transparent, melding colors provided the basic design information on the back panel. Two layers of hand painting added to the richness, saturation of color, and detailing. On the front side of the laminated glass panes, we added photographic etchings and

airbrushing applications to get additional depth and volume.”

After years of planning, collaboration, trial and error, and months of fabrication in Mayer's studio in Munich, the result is an entry to new federal courthouse that is not simply a space with art, but a space of art.



I think we all feel that we achieved the art being part of the building—and visa versa—rather than it being a piece that was applied at a later stage,” Mayer noted. “This has a lot to do with the fact that the architects were so open to the whole process. They allowed this joint development to happen at such an early stage that it really became an integrative part of the building.”

“It took months, and even years, to do so,” concluded Mayer, “but due to the

openness, continuity, and commitment of all involved parties, I believe we managed to fine-tune and finally get the jigsaw puzzle in place.

( *Original post on CodaWorx is [here](#)* )