

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

Chiefs tackle a new project: Art at Arrowhead Stadium

Team will look for artwork that “celebrates Midwestern culture.” The art will adorn the stadium.

By ALICE THORSON
The Kansas City Star

Kansas City in the 21st century has a split personality.

It’s an arts town!

No, it’s a sports town!

Now that duality of identity is being reinforced by the Hunt family’s latest idea: a “world class” collection of art to be installed at Arrowhead Stadium.

A broad call for artists has been issued. Letters went out last month to several local gallery owners, inviting participation in the Kansas City Chiefs Art Program. Top executives of the Nelson-Atkins Museum, the Kemper Museum and the Kansas City Art Institute are on board.

Dallas-based Sharron Hunt Munson, daughter of Chiefs founder Lamar Hunt, is directing the program with input from her brothers: team chairman and CEO Clark Hunt, Lamar Hunt Jr. and Daniel Hunt. She envisions artwork at Arrowhead that “celebrates Midwestern culture.”

In a recent email, Munson said that the idea for an art collection was inspired in part by the many new public spaces created by recent renovations to Arrowhead Stadium.

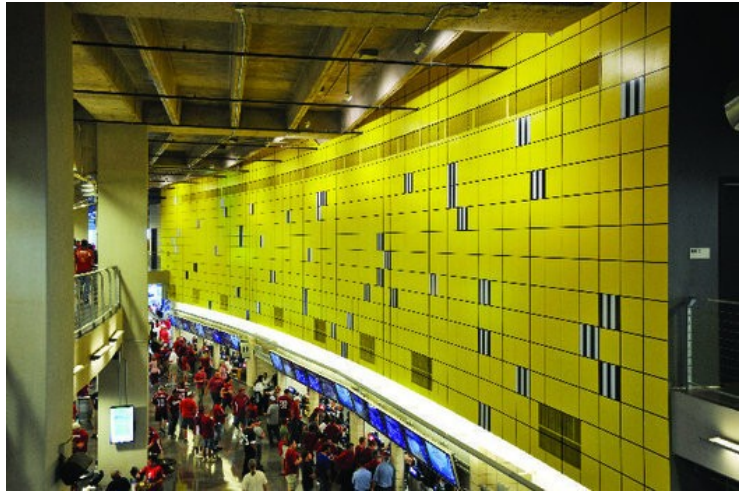
“Rather than simply decorate or beautify these spaces,” she said, “we wanted to celebrate our region and all of the art and artists that make it so special and, in doing so, bring art to entirely new audiences. Our hope is that we will build on the wonderful community asset that Arrowhead Stadium already is.

“We’ve given quite a bit of thought to this — contemplating, discussing and researching the program since 2010. This year, as we mark 50 years in Kansas City for the Chiefs, we felt it the perfect time to formally launch the process.”

Chiefs fan Jourdan Holmes approves.

“I think it’s a cool fusion of sports and the arts,” said the 24-year-old English and theater teacher at Belton High School. She, with a few hundred other football fans, tackled the heat at Missouri Western University in St. Joseph to watch the Chiefs practice Wednesday.

“It can be there or it can’t be there,” shrugged Brian B. Shynin, 26, who works at radio station KPRS. “I’m more interested in them bringing ‘Ws’ on the field. I don’t care about that other stuff.”



The Dallas Cowboys Art Program places art around Cowboys Stadium. Daniel Buren's "Unexpected Variable Configurations: A Work in Situ" (1998) is located in the main concourse southeast concession at the Dallas Cowboys Stadium. The Chiefs plan a similar program for Arrowhead Stadium.

Most of the more weather-durable art apparently will be seen by the general fans. Other pieces will be displayed on the climate-controlled Scout Investments Club Level.

“The entire collection will be included in all Arrowhead Stadium tours, which are open to the public on a year-round basis,” said Chiefs communications consultant Pam Kramer.

Julian Zugazagoitia, director and CEO of the Nelson who will serve on the Hunts’ art selection committee, said he and the other experts “will strive for a certain level of artistic quality.” He cited the “stellar impact” of the Dallas Cowboys Art Program as a model. It features 17 national and international artists who are represented in prestigious museum collections.

“This process will have to put very clearly the objectives,” Zugazagoitia added, “so that it showcases the best of the artists in the region. I think it should be something that engages the local community and also artists that might have been from here and then gone on to international recognition.”

The news release promises a world-class collection. Prospects for meeting such high goals are difficult to gauge. The qualifications set out in the call for artists are not stringent: Submitting artists “must have participated in at least one juried show, and have exhibited with at least one gallery,” according to the press release. “No restrictions regarding size, theme or method.”

Artists throughout the Midwest are eligible, although the collection will emphasize artists from Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Oklahoma and Arkansas. And they are encouraged to submit “pieces surrounding regional and cultural themes beyond the scope of sports and entertainment.”

As in Dallas, the collection will include commissions for works to be placed at specific spots around the stadium. This may end up being as many as half the works, said longtime art dealer Paul Dorrell, the owner of Leopold Gallery in Brookside who was engaged by the Hunts to organize the collection.

“Some artists will be given the challenge of interpreting aspects of the game without it being literal,” Dorrell said. “It could be the gridiron, it could be the uprights, it could be a play pattern. Some artists are going to tell us what they want to do.”

Besides Zugazagoitia, Dorrell will work with Barbara O’Brien, director of the Kemper Museum, Kansas City Art Institute President Jacqueline Chanda and Mary Cohen, executive director of the Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Charitable Trust.

The experts will go on the committee with a few Chiefs executives and members of the Hunt family, Dorrell said.

While not on the committee, Dorrell said he and his gallery staff will do some initial sifting.

“It’s strictly up to the committee to acquire works,” he said. Munson declined to say how much the Chiefs may spend on art, but predicted a substantial investment toward a “diverse, robust collection.”

Artists’ submissions are due Sept. 8. After that, the selection process begins. Dorrell will release an update of selected artists and semifinalists for the commissioned works.

Next month is a visit to the Dallas Cowboys collection, which runs toward large sculptural installations and mural-scaled wall works.

“It’s important to see what they did,” Dorrell said, noting his surprise at that collection’s scant representation of Texas artists.

The Chiefs have a different idea.

“This is all about showing the NFL and the country what the artists from our region can do,” Dorrell said. “It’s not going to revolve around my taste or my staff’s taste.”

Installation of the collection will begin in late spring 2013, and Dorrell said he aims to complete it by the end of next year.

Bob Green, 51, retired golf pro from Kansas City, will be happy to look for it when it arrives, but he had one practical concern:

“There’s going to have to be security glass around it, just in case, for when the Raiders come to town.”