



## Living Walls

In a hallway of the National Aquarium in Baltimore, a boy stares, entranced by a long glass mural that shows sea lions diving in the waves. He's discovered that as he walks, the creatures swim along with him.

The animated mural is the work of **Rufus Butler Seder**, an inventor, filmmaker, and artist whose interactive panels or Lifetiles can be found in museums and public spaces across the United States — from the Smithsonian, where he's brought Duke Ellington to life at the keyboard, to Zoo Miami, where he's set toucans and anacondas gliding through an Amazonian jungle.

Seder constructs his pieces like mosaics, assembling anywhere from a handful to hundreds of tiles, which he casts in his Boston foundry.

The process is meticulous and time-consuming — a mural can take up to six months — but the underlying principle draws on the same low-tech techniques used in lenticular art (e.g. those animated cards in Cracker Jack boxes) or flipbooks.

"Anything that creates the illusion of motion without electricity or motors has always fascinated

me," Seder explains, and he cites his collection of antique zoetropes and optical toys as inspiration.

Seder starts by breaking a motion sequence into several digital images. On the computer, he slices each image into super-thin vertical stripes, then merges all the images into one frame that he then sandblasts onto the back of a glass tile.

The front of each tile has a ribbed pattern that acts as a lens, magnifying and revealing the sliced images underneath, one at a time. When viewed rapidly in succession, the images appear to move.

For his next project, Seder brings his optical magic to San Francisco with an animated mural of the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge — just in time for the 75th anniversary of the legendary span.

—Jeanne Storck

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