

Exhibit carves out a niche for leather

■ Promega show blurs the line between arts and crafts with interesting medium.

By John Aehl
Arts reporter

The interest by businesses in displaying art in offices is not a new phenomenon, but a suburban Madison high-tech company has gone a bit beyond simple display in the past few years.

The Promega BioPharmaceutical Technology Center in Fitchburg has arranged a gallery of sorts in its lobby, along corridors and on mezzanine walls, and has arranged a regular schedule of unique and generally fascinating shows.

Earlier this year, for example, Promega had an exhibit of eight Wisconsin women artists who worked in a variety of media. Promega followed that up with a show of religious photography and icons. Last year, one show featured work by Artbite, what might be called an avant-garde Madison collective of artists.

And right now, through Dec. 10, it's leather art.

"This is way beyond shoes and belts," said Ann Waters, an artist from Oregon who works in leather. "This is fine art."

Some 60 works by 10 artists from the United States, Europe and Australia are on display and for sale.

Waters is president of the International Internet Leathercrafters

Guild, which has more than 300 members in 26 countries.

"This is the first time in the United States that all of these artists have been shown together in one place," she said.

"In the last 10 or 15 years, artists all over the world, separately, have fashioned leather as an art form and have developed their own techniques, without interacting with each other. This is bringing some of it together.

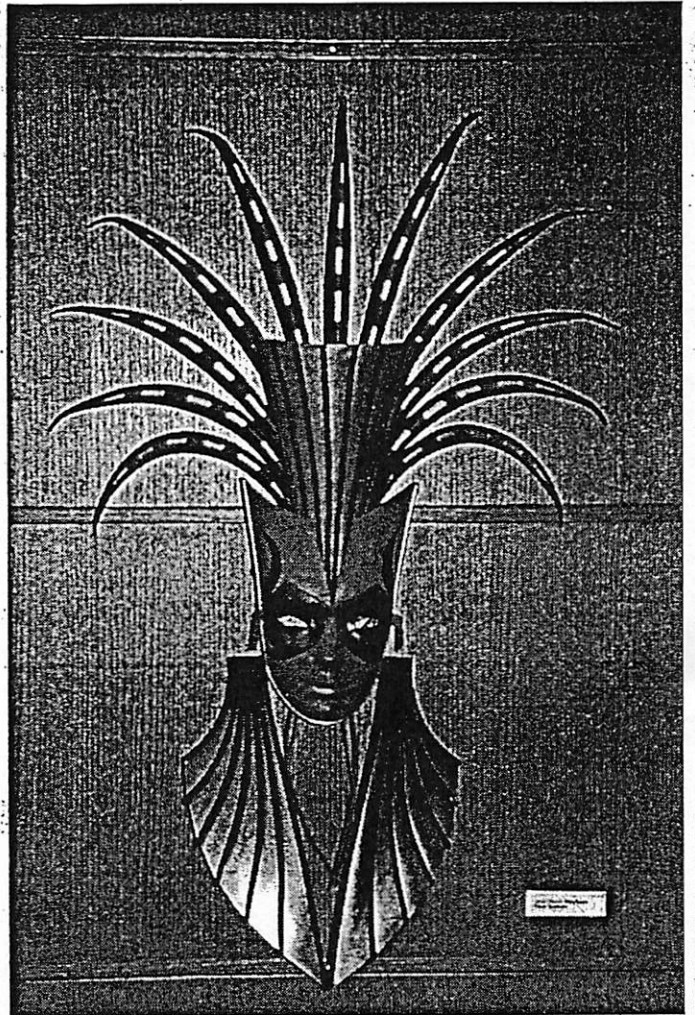
"Why I'm passionate about this art is that it brings together design, drawing, sculpting, and painting — and you have to know the physical properties of the medium you are working with, leather. You have to have the ability to work in three dimensions."

The show blurs even further the fuzzy line between art and craft. Several highly colorful mask wall pieces by Mike Taylor (one of them is shown) contrast with cartoonish free-standing sculptural images of dragons and contorted faces by Roz Kaohn's prize-winning grotesque and phantasmagorical images, which in turn compare with traditional landscape and wildlife art by several others. Whatever the artistic quality, the technical quality is high.

Daniel Swadener, who schedules the art exhibits at Promega (while based in his own studio in Akron, Ohio), sees a wide range in style in the leather art.

"Some of the artists are ready now for recognition from the art world and others have a long way to go," he said in a recent article.

Waters specializes in commissioned leather portraits of peo-



Among the most colorful works in the leather art show at Promega is this elaborate mask made by Mike Taylor, an Australian.

ple's horses, although she also does Native American portraits. She worked in gold and silver before turning to leather about five years ago.

"The Fine Art of Leather" runs through Dec. 10 at the Promega

BioPharmaceutical Technology Center, 5445 E. Cheryl Parkway, off of Fish Hagtchery Road, about 2 miles south of the Beltline. The exhibit is open to the public free. Gallery hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday.