



**SPEED-REDUCING ART**

The artist calls this work "FLOW —  
medium: traffic."

**Speed-Reducing Art** Public art projects are usually intended to beautify. But artwork commissioned this summer by the city of Cambridge, Mass., has a more utilitarian goal: reducing traffic speeds at a busy intersection.

The junction in question is in residential West Cambridge (at Walden Street and Vassal Lane); 6,000 cars pass through it every weekday. "People were asking, 'Isn't there something you can do?'" says Susanne Rasmussen of the Cambridge community-development department. Rasmussen and her colleagues were aware that neighborhood street murals in Portland, Ore., had had the unintended consequence of slowing drivers down, and they decided to experiment. Soon the city was taking proposals for a circular mural, 20 feet in diameter, to be painted on the asphalt in the center of the intersection — a kind of artwork rotary. The objective, to reduce average speeds from 30 miles per hour to 25, seems relatively modest, but Rasmussen, citing statistics, says it's significant: "The chance that a pedestrian would survive an accident is vastly greater at that speed."

Residents selected the semiabstract composition of the local artist Wen-ti Tsen. Tsen says that he initially thought of proposing a giant trompe l'oeil pothole, but ended up with "something like a blue pond with geometric vegetation in it." The city paid him \$10,000, a fraction of what it would spend on a more conventional speeding deterrent like a raised crosswalk.

A formal speed study is under way. Meanwhile, many residents and city officials say the mural is working. "I know I slow down," says Lillian Hsu of the Cambridge Arts Council, which ran the mural-selection process. "There's something in the road, so there's a moment of confusion and you slow down. Then you see it's flat, and you drive over it." JOHN GLASSIE