

# Massachusarts a timely triumph

## Grant winners showcased

By Charles Giuliano  
For The Patriot Ledger

**I**n the past couple years, the arts in the commonwealth have taken a beating. Devastating cuts in state funding for arts, a declining economy and shrinking private sector support have delivered a triple whammy to many artists and arts organizations.

As an effort to show the breadth of what's in jeopardy, the Boston Center for the Arts is showcasing the work of 150 artists, composers, dancers, writers and performers from among the 500 state arts fellowship winners of the past six years. This festival, titled "Massachusarts: Salute to Our Award Winning Artists," offers something for everyone — and certainly more than can be absorbed in a single visit. (For a full schedule of performances and symposia, call 426-5000.)

All public areas of the sprawling BCA are involved in this galvanic event, which is dominated by a breathtaking exhibition in the

### Art

**MASSACHUSARTS: Salute to Our Award Winning Artists.** At the Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont St., Boston, through June 10.

the vast Cyclorama building. While there have been many special exhibitions in the Cyclorama in recent years, trust me — you ain't seen nothing like this before. The old building's enormous open space, which often seems to dominate works of art, has been cleverly transformed by a multilevel structure designed especially for this exhibition by architects Sheila Kennedy and Franco Violich. Artists were invited to use this freestanding complex to create separate rooms and platforms for their installation works. The architectural structure is itself a work of art, which in turn houses works by 15 individual artists.

Other areas, as well as the adjoining Mills Gallery, have been used to accommodate more conventional exhibits of painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, artists' books and crafts. But it is the special, one-time-only installations that make this an unprecedented event.

The most poignant and surprising use of space is the "Lack of Compassion Series" by Doug and Mike Starn. The two artists chose a space behind a wall to install a clutter of lumber with photographs of Holocaust victims pasted to the beams. Their use of this "throwaway space" seems to act as a metaphor for the

# Exhibit showcases an endangered species: Mass. artists

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wasted lives and forgotten victims represented in their photographs. This ongoing series is earmarked for a museum in Israel.

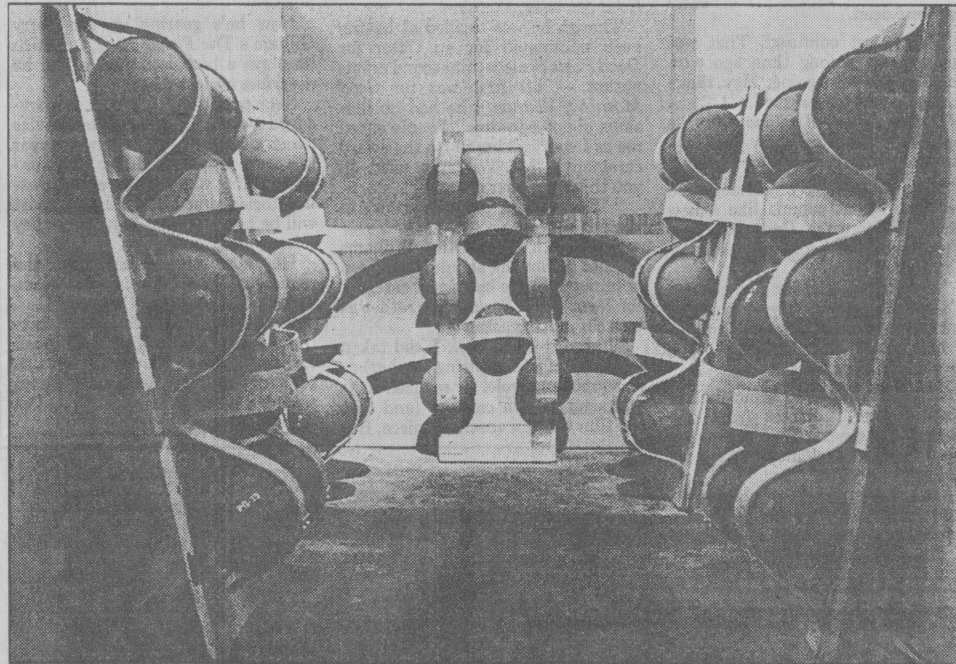
Other installations run the gamut from pristine to funky.

Jo Sandman has created a pure white box with squares of light beamed in through openings in the outer walls. The use of light offers interesting comparisons to her minimalist abstract paintings and drawings. This is a new and welcome direction for the artist. Denise Marika has set three television monitors side by side in a sliding copper drawer to reveal a horizontal nude woman who constantly enacts, "Turn Away." It is a remarkable and compelling image.

Jerry Beck has created a boxing ring, "Sparring Partners," a reference to the late John L. Sullivan, who once used the Cyclorama building to train for a bout. Beck's "ring" is filled with such gonzo pugilistic paraphernalia as a punching bag suspended from the horns of a bull.

Another well-known installation artist, Beth Gallston, uses light along with window screening to create a compelling maze titled "Dark Field." Gallston continues to impress as one of the area's strongest artists.

Shows such as this make you wonder why some artists win fellowships and others don't. Jill Slosburg-Ackerman's "Sighting" is a boring, mummy-like sculpture leaning against a wall. A mechanized room of mannequins and other objects by



Mary Lee/The Patriot Ledger

**Geraldine Erman's "Information" is an arrangement of several grids of large balls and laminated strapping leaning against three walls. It is included in "Massachusarts" at the Boston Center for the Arts.**

Ralph Paquin and Ann Stoddard is little more than an art student experiment. And Ellen Rothenberg has scrawled her pointless slogans all over the exhibition. Somebody should tell her to sit down and shut

up. We've seen this all before, done better, in the work of such artists as Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger.

Rather than using one of the spaces in the main structure, Jeffrey Schiff cleverly has created a large box

of his own. The room, which is mounted on wheels and has gondola-like oars to move it around, has a piped-in sound track of "O Sole Mio." How droll. This work belongs in the Venice Biennale.

While I admired Schiff's wit, I just didn't get Geraldine Erman's room with several grids of large balls and laminated strapping leaning against three walls. The title is "Information." Was this supposed to be amusing? Confusing?

The areas of the exhibition devoted to more conventional media, for the most part, suffer by comparison. An exception is a dramatic work by Michael Hatchey, who painted a wall black and then drew on it in cross-hatching with white chalk. The resulting panorama oddly recalls the 1930s style of Grant Wood.

The photography show is particularly disappointing. The predominance of conventional still lifes and socially self-conscious, documentary photo essays seem reactionary in comparison to the work in other media. Exceptions are the compelling images of burials in South America by Dana Salvo and Jim Stone's chronicles of wacko Americana, which seem like outtakes from "America's Funniest Home Videos."

In the painting section, there are outstanding subjective abstractions by Domingo Barreres and Elizabeth Rosenblum, gestural abstract paintings by Natalie Alper and a superb recent canvas by Gerry Bergstein. But beyond that, the selection of paintings looked surprisingly weak and derivative.

As in any effort to showcase this large a number of artists, there are inevitably high and low points. Taken as a whole, however, this is a stunning and timely effort that calls attention to an endangered species: the artists of Massachusetts.