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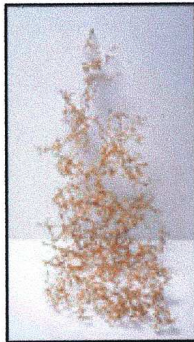
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Attitude - WBUR's Arts Blog :: Item

Fragile Art

Posted by **Adrienne LaFrance**, Wednesday, May 10th, 2006



Artist **Beth Galston** created dozens of intricate structures made of toothpicks for "**Fragilities**," a multidimensional installation that explores the delicate balance between nature's creations and those that are man-made.

Galston's inspiration for the show, on display at the **Boston Sculptor's Gallery** until May 20, came from a delicate and wiry-looking plant she saw in Arizona.

"It had a fragile web of thin branches, creating an airy, filigree structure," Galston wrote in a statement about the show. "Although it was a plant, the right-angled branching pattern gave it the look of a man-made object."

Nature is present in **most of Galston's work**. She has found inspiration in **acorns**, tree branches, **icicles** and the firefly-spotted landscape of a **meadow at dusk**. Similarly, the sculptures in "Fragilities" exude an undeniable element of life. Some structures look like **tumbleweeds**, others like spindly-legged **critters** crawling up and down the walls, or fragile but persistently growing patches of **bramble**.

The installation is a physical reflection of the meticulous diligence it must have taken Galston to create such a unique display, echoed again in the fine-lined shadows of pieces that appear in different lighting.

Each sculpture has a unique character, so the sculptures are powerful both individually and as entities of the installation, as was Galston's intent, she said. **One bundle of toothpicks** is perched in a nook above the display wall, giving the impression that it mischievously crawled off the exhibit wall by itself.

This vibe may be due to the fact that most of the forms came into their own almost naturally.

“For the most part, the forms were not preconceived,” explained Galston, who used the following set of rules in creating her sculptures.

- Drill either one or two holes in the wide end of the toothpicks
- Whittle the narrow ends so they fit in the holes
- Add a drop of glue
- Attach them together on alternating sides

“Much like DNA, whose simple building blocks recombine to create a variety of organisms,” Galston wrote. “Allowing the rules to govern my explorations, I just let the forms grow. I wanted them to appear as if they had grown themselves in the space. As the piece evolved, I gave thought to the space between things — leaving open space, letting the forms breathe.”

Interestingly, the material used to create these sculptures merges the natural and man-made worlds; wood being from nature, but toothpicks being carved by man.

This balance echoes in the gallery space, which has a glass front, as sunlight affects the appearance of “Fragilities,” and the shadows it creates.

“I knew about (the glass front) and kind of embraced it to use the existing light and have it change,” Galston said in an interview. “It is different throughout the day. Most people see it in the late afternoon because of the gallery hours, but after about five, the sun comes really blasting in and changes the energy.”

But in any light, “Fragilities,” packs a distinct energetic punch, forcing viewers to reconsider the veritable strength of those things— whether constructed by man or by nature— that are too often dismissed as fleeting and individually weak, rather than acknowledged for their potential as smaller parts of a rather incredible whole.

