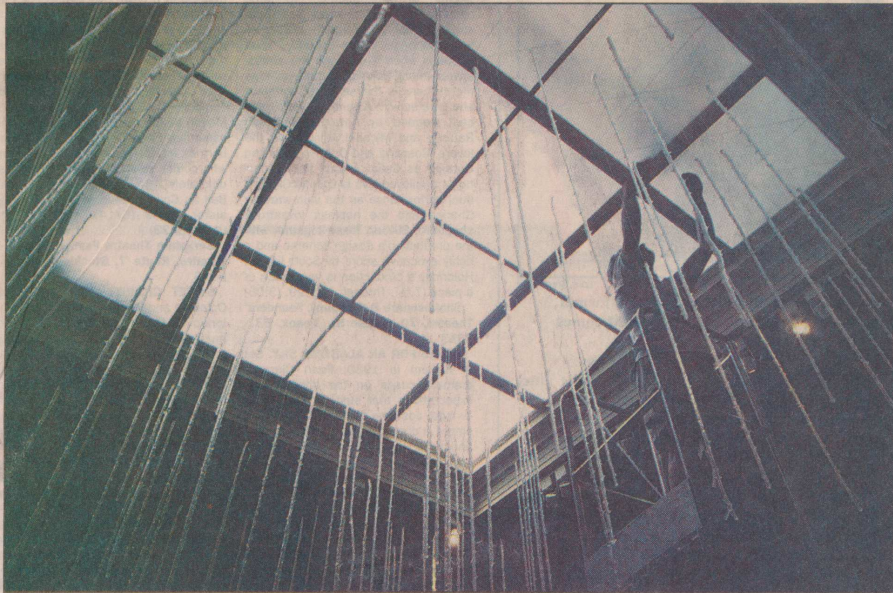


At the Berkshire Museum



Photos by Ben Garver / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Jerry Lerman installs 'Ice Forest,' a piece by his wife, Somerville artist Beth Galston, at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield as part of the 'Presence of Light' exhibition. The installation is made of clear resin rose stems.

Art shaped by light

By Charles Bonenti
Berkshire Eagle Staff

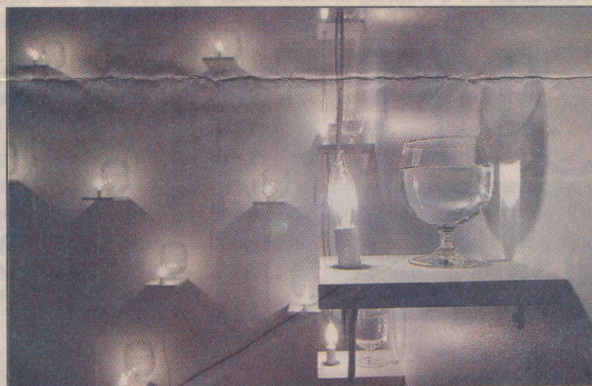
PITTSFIELD
It might, in other circumstances, have been a faded paint job, but the coat of blue given the title wall outside the Berkshire Museum's new exhibition, "Presence of Light," is a telling clue to what lies within. It shows how color alone can create an illusion of luminosity.

That is but one of principles at work in this ambitious show featuring the work of 20 contemporary artists. Guest-curated by Kathleen Gilrain, director of the Smack Mellon Studios in Brooklyn, N.Y., it opens today and will run through Oct. 31.

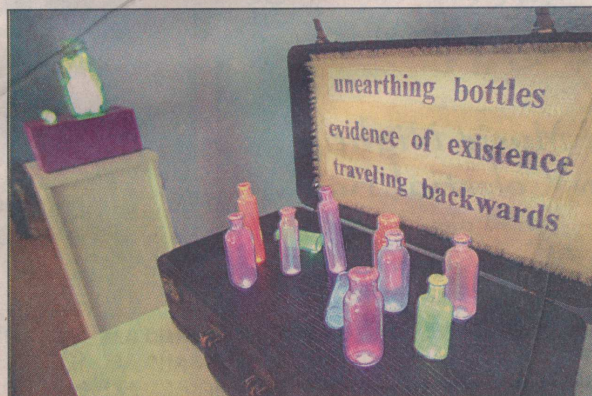
The artworks include ones that — like the entrance wall — create illusions of light through color or shadow; or that reflect or transmit light; or that glow or produce an image because of some chemical or physical action. There are photographs, wall paintings, sculptures, installations and videos.

"It's about the ways light can transform a thing so we have no idea what it is," said Gilrain during a tour of the partially installed exhibition last Friday.

She pointed to Mary Temple's "Southwest Corner," a wall painting that appeared to be the shadow cast by a skylight; Gregory Barsamian's "No Never Alone," a hooded figure made to appear animated by strobe lights; and Sheila Moss' "Night Fisher," an array of cotton swabs dipped in phosphorescent paint and suspended to look like curtains of stars.



'In Between' by Juana Valdes is constructed of water, glass, light and wood.



LIGHT, continued on D4

'Furasato' by Kim Koga is blown glass displayed in a found suitcase.

Art shaped by light

LIGHT from D1

There was Alejandro and Moira Siña's "Touch Plane," a square of neon bars that flash with color when touched by the viewer, and Joe McKay's "The Color Game," a computer installation that allows viewers to mix colors with light.

Gilrain said the artists were ones she knew already and others she sought out, making choices by what aroused her interest. Her aim was more to show the many ways contemporary artists use light in making art, rather than offering a historical context for the medium.

Pioneers like the minimalist Dan Flavin (1933-1997), who made sculptures with neon tubes; conceptualist Walter De Maria (1935-), famous for his 1977 "Lightning Field" photos on a grid in New Mexico; and James Turrell (1943-), who created chambers in an Arizona desert crater to observe the light effects from the sun, moon and stars, would have been too difficult and costly to obtain, she said.

And, she added, "I don't do historical shows."

There will be text blocks, but no catalog.

The exhibition sprawls over four galleries in the museum with no particular order other than the illumination requirements of the artworks. Pieces that glow or must be seen in bright light are in the first gallery, to beckon viewers. Others that need lower illumination, even darkness, are shown in subsequent galleries and even out-

side. Gilrain said she planned no additional theatrical lighting or special effects.

The curator said this is her first show on the subject of light and her first in a museum as well, although she has organized exhibitions previously for university galleries.

She said the Berkshire Museum gave her considerable latitude in making the selections, within the framework of its family-oriented viewing audience.

Maria Mingalone, the museum's director of education and public programs, said she knew Gilrain, an adjunct professor at Brooklyn College, in the 1990s when both worked for the Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, N.Y. Gilrain became director of that organization in 1995 before taking her present job at Smack Mellon in 2000.

"We wanted someone with good contacts and knowledge of the contemporary field," Mingalone said.

She said the museum ended last summer with strong attendance and good notices for its Robert Morris and contemporary glass exhibitions and wanted to continue that momentum.

She said the senior staff started brainstorming last fall and that Development Director Mary Jo Murphy suggested the topic of light.

"We thought it would be something really new for us," she said. "We've not done anything like this in the past."

They asked Gilrain up for an interview and "we all brought

The exhibition sprawls over four galleries in the museum.

ideas to the table."

Mingalone said the museum, mindful of its family audience, decided not "to get too conceptual" with the topic, seeking instead a diversity of work that would not require constant attention or maintenance.

She said she thought the process worked well and was "enchanted" with the results. The next step, she hoped, would be to circulate it as a loan exhibition.

Later this summer, the museum will offer two "Conversations on Light" in connection with the exhibition.

On Saturday, July 17 at 1, three artists in the show — Mary Beth Temple, Simon Lee and Beth Galston — will talk about the issues they face creating "noncollectible" works of art and will lead a walk through the exhibition, followed by a discussion at 4 by contemporary collectors of nontraditional art objects.

On Saturday, Aug. 14 at 2, exhibition artists Juana Valdez, Sonja Blomdal and Dick Weiss will discuss the influence of stained glass on their work. There will also be talks by stained-glass historian Virginia Raguin and by architect Partick Quinn, former dean of architecture at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, on the topic of light in architecture.