



Sculpture

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Pittsfield, Massachusetts

"Presence of Light"

by Jill Conne

In the early 1960s sculpture went electric. Dan Flavin's assemblages of linear fluorescent light tubes, arranged as pillars or box constructions, transformed the medium of sculpture from mass into luminescence, competing with painting's ability to model light with color. Flavin's work made technology and science part of the creative aesthetic. The contemporary work on view in "Presence of Light," curated by Kathleen Gilrain, revealed how several sculptors have developed a more elastic use of light within three-dimensional form. These artists take the relationship of sculpture and light to a different level, conveying a number of ways that light manifests itself within three-dimensional works of art.



Beth Galston, *Ice Forest*, 2000-2003.
 Urethane resin and monofilament, 8 x 8 x 4 ft.

The show opened with a large folded-paper construction by Kirsten Hassenfeld, whose work was initially introduced in a solo show at Bellwether Gallery in New York. *Parure* (2003), an intricately large charm resting on a light box, emitted radiance into the dimly lit space. Transforming luxurious objects like jewelry into gigantic sculptures, Hassenfeld's work uses light to capture the glow of material wealth while teasing the viewer with what cannot be owned.

Simon Lee, whose work appeared in "Open" at the Brooklyn Museum, used the light-box form as a mechanism to transmit visual information. Lee assembled a six-foot-square structure, *Unflooded* (2003), that contained water tanks filled with floating objects. The two lights shining into the water from above projected the silhouettes of the tanks' contents onto a wall directly opposite. Altering the amount of water in each tank caused the silhouettes to move ever so slightly.

Synthetic illumination appeared in the work of four artists. *Furusato* (1998) by Kim Koga was an open suitcase that contained several glass-blown bottles filled with different colors of phosphorescence. Behind the bright pink, green, orange, and blue, Koga attached a text to the lid that read, "Unearthing Bottles, Evidence of Existence Travelling Backwards." The installation *Airlines* (2004), by Alejandro and Moira Sina, consisted of several thin, orange rods of electrode-less neon. Suspended from the ceiling and allowed to oscillate, the piece drew attention to the visibility of distant objects—in this case, to the linear form of an airplane as it approaches a destination. Sheila Moss's *Night Fishers* (2000) had the most sublime effect. In a separate room, Moss hung strands of white string throughout the small space and wound several groups of cotton swabs across each length. Once the room was darkened by a timer, the installation consisted of tiny firefly glows arranged in the form a long winding helix.



Kirsten Hassenfeld, *Parure*, 2003. Paper with mixed media, 3 x 4 x 3 ft.

Natural light was central to Beth Galston's *Ice Forest* (2000-03). Several rods of clear urethane resin hung in the form of a square beneath a skylight. Cast in the form of long icicles, Galston's work mimicked nature in material form, but her work depended on the presence of natural light during the day. The process of refraction, as it intersects with surfaces to form a visual object, appeared in *Imprint Window* (2002) by Julia Shepley. The work consisted of two frames of glass that had been punched in, before the material was able to completely solidify.

Together these artists prove that sculpture no longer needs light to be seen; instead, it can itself become a shelter for light. But since light is ephemeral, these

pieces remain similar to the light-based work of 40 years ago. Light-based work always needs a particular environment to function properly.

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