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BOSTON

Beth Galston

Boston Sculptors Gallery

Luminous Garden (Aerial) is the sixth version of Beth Galston's strange and engaging plants whose nuclei are LED light bulbs. Her first version, a blue-lit garden, sprang up on piano-wire stalks; viewers could walk among them and even sit on the floor amid their calm blue haze. This aerial version is like snarled vines, forbidding entry but blossoming into clusters of golden inflorescences. Here, the wires play an in-your-face technological role but add a touch of the aesthetic, glinting copper-red in the ambient light. One can, in fact, trace the various tangles back to their tiny transistors and thence to larger wires, which coalesce and vanish discreetly into the floor.

As a fellow at MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies early in her career, Galston played with light in other forms, at first screened through scrim, later through edgier whimsies like a floor-to-ceiling corri-

dor of rose-thorn icicles cast in translucent resin. Her work has always combined a close and loving attention to nature in its infinite variations with a mastery of certain contemporary technologies. At one time or another, she has cast urethane resin blocks containing oak leaves, ginkgo leaves, magnolia and sweet gum seed pods, rose petals, leaves, and thorns.

Although Galston has experimented with various forms and media, the common thread running through her work has been a Zen-like focus on the here and now at the expense of any agenda. If there's a message in her pieces, it would be a look-at-this challenge to the senses, an

insistence on the visual. Galston's early installations often beckoned viewers to move among the parts. Her screen *House* on stilts at Socrates Sculpture Park was best appreciated by visitors intrepid enough to climb a ladder and walk around the birch trees trapped inside.

Galston's first experiments with light, filtered or indirect, have morphed into a frank and direct use of LEDs, while her resin casting here produces flowers that on close inspection prove to be white-oak acorn caps. Earlier LED gardens sprouted seed pods cast from resin, a somewhat freer and more engaging form.

Below: Beth Galston, *Luminous Garden (Aerial)*, 2009. LEDs, cast resin, and electrical wire, installation view.

Visitors entering the aerial garden's dimly lit room confront what look like batches of unblinking fireflies. As vision adjusts, we see flower clusters and are eventually able to appreciate subtleties: the unequal numbers of blooms in a given cluster, the varied brightness of the flowers, the insouciance of acorn caps mimicking blossoms. Although they appear to spring from their viney wires, the clumps of blooms hang invisibly from the ceiling. What I took for ambient light glowing on the wires is actually artfully contrived with a spot from above.

Galston has said that the work does not play quite as well in total darkness. It's unfortunate that it has to compete with too-visible industrial ducts and pipes on the ceiling of the Boston Sculptors gallery. I would like to see it in a space all its own.

—Marty Carlock

