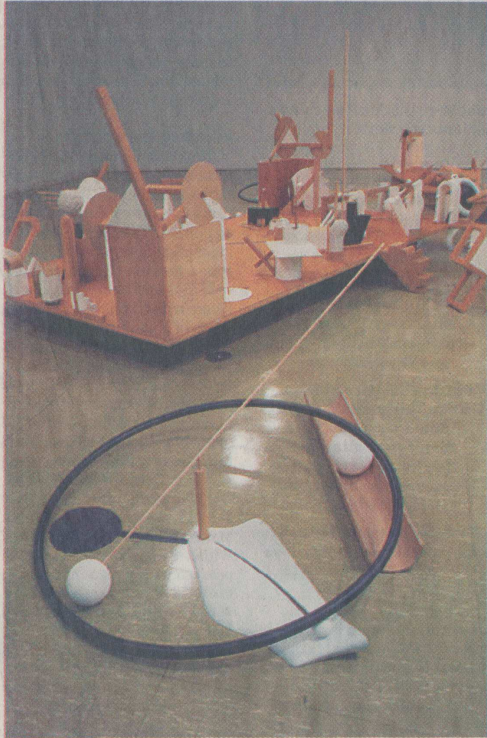
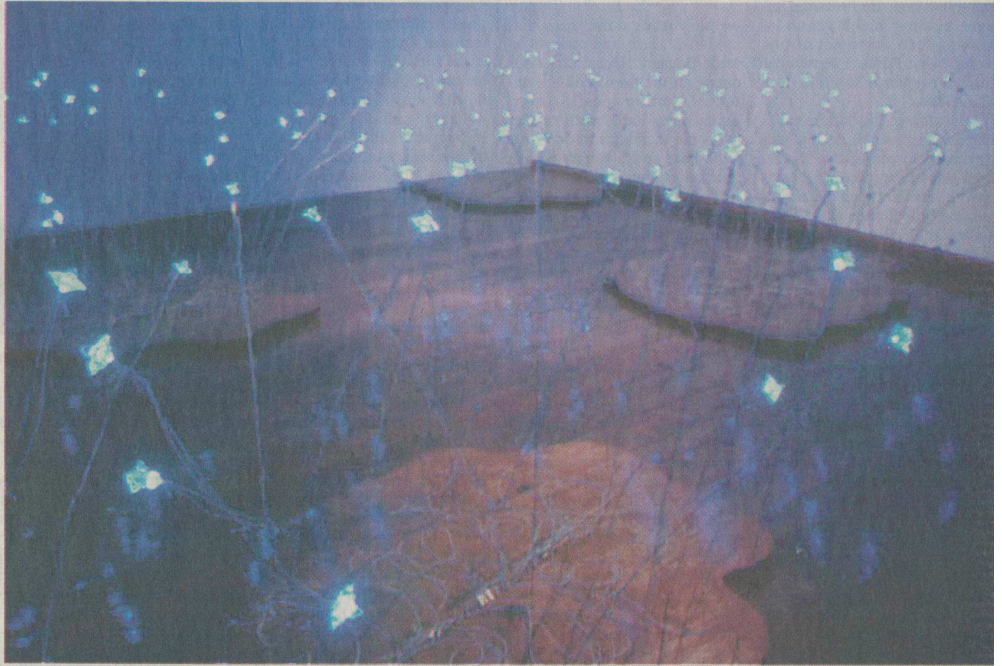


The LED flowers in Beth Galston's "Luminous Garden No. 2 (Night Meadow)" wave on wire stems.



William Hosie's construction "Siting: Strike Four" creates a perfect balance of playfulness and horror.

Toru Nakanishi turns noodles into poetry in computer-manipulated images like "Grand Western #1."



# 'Annual,' a la carte

From noodles to nature, the DeCordova serves up works from 12 area artists

By Christine Temin  
GLOBE STAFF

LINCOLN — The plethora of international biennials, from Sao Paulo to Istanbul, with their ambitious attempts to take the pulse of the entire art world, make me grateful for the scale and scope of the DeCordova "Annual." Since 1989, this exhibition has presented a small number of artists from New England without arguing that there's any current prevalent style in the region. This is *always* a something-for-everyone show.

Of the 12 artists in this year's batch, the majority were unknown to me — and that's a good thing. It means the team of curators who organized the show — Rachel Rosenfield Lafo, Nick Capasso, George Fifield, and Alexandra Novina — are doing their job, which is to scout out talent through endless studio visits, give each artist a decent amount of space, document his or her work in a handsome if slim catalog, and perhaps launch or boost careers.

Photography and installation are the strongest media this year, and at the top of the list is the young Japanese-born Toru Nakanishi. He turns noodles into poetry — a process about as likely-sounding as turning dross into gold. Struck by the fact that the single ration of instant ramen noodles is as popular here as in its (and his) country of origin, he turned the fast food into a metaphor for uprooting himself from one culture and adjusting to another. He arranges the stuff on the bed of a computer scanner, manipulates the scans in various ways, and turns out inkjet prints of haunting beauty. Depending on how he's arranged them, they



Soft grays define sea and sky in Mary Lang's "Straight Wharf, Nantucket, MA."

# DeCordova's 'Annual' has a taste for variety

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look like elaborate knots, human hair (cascading, or in Medusa tangles), spiraling ribbons — anything but food. He floats the images against black grounds, making them seem not of this world. What Edward Weston did for bell peppers, Nakanishi does for noodles.

The glow-in-the-dark installation has become a cliché, but Beth Galston transcends it in "Luminous Garden No. 2 (Night Meadow)," a very dark room filled with glowing little flowers (LED lights embedded in cast resin seedpods) in a complementary palette of lavenders and oranges. They wave on tall wire stems, the motion making them seem alive. They're like a perennial border at its peak, but the peak for these nocturnal blooms will be perpetual.

The other artists working with technology are Henry Kaufman and Brian Knep. Knep's "Healing No. 1," brought to you courtesy of computers and videos, is a carpet of organic squiggles that move when you walk on them and heal the wounds you've left when you've gone. It looks like humanity's struggle to master biology. Kaufman's "The Lightness of Your Touch," also utilizing computers and videos, is related: You touch a large, pale, vulnerable-looking nude male torso on a screen and the image of your hand lingers after you've removed it. Your handprint gradually floats away, downsizes, and dissolves — a mesmerizing interaction that could keep you in the room all day.

Mesmerizing also describes the photography of Mary Lang at its best, when it's simplest. She's captivated by reflections in the water. While some of her work feels too much like a photo equivalent of Monet (and why bother, when he already perfected the subject?) and some gets too calendar-ish, when she presents only the simplicity of soft grays defining sea and sky, she produces images that encourage meditation. Ditto for the floating, organic, overlapping shapes of painter Sandy Litchfield, suggesting the elements of a landscape separated and spread out, defying gravity and meandering off on their own. Litchfield's work directly on the wall is the most successful because it lets the imagery breathe.

Nature of a more apocalyptic sort is the subject of Leslie Bostrom's huge paintings of noble birds threatened by war, oil slicks,

## The 2004 DeCordova Annual Exhibition

At: the DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, through Sept. 5.

people cutting down trees that hold their nests, and other man-made disasters. Her painting skills outweigh the over-familiar content. (Another local painter, Elaine Spatz-Rabinowitz, tackles the same theme far more subtly and slyly, and ultimately with much more impact.)

Sean Foley's paintings and Al Souza's giant collages of jigsaw puzzles are both exercises in visual overload, a subject that has lost its clout because we're all overloaded anyway. Gil Scullion's work also seems complex for the sake of complexity. In the DeCordova's grand staircase he's installed black enamel paintings on clear vinyl, framed in perforated steel. He borrows images from sources including Velasquez and "Alice in Wonderland," all to do with war. The means outweigh the meanings.

Sandy Winters and William Hosie create huge installations. Winters's "Pretexts and Subtexts" sprawls over two large walls and the floor. Wall drawings blurt into reliefs or sculpture; the tubes, lozenges, and lumps seem a cross between nonsense machines and Philip Guston drawings, and the mechanical feel makes the pink satin gown trapped in a wooden cage seem all the more wistful.

Hosie's world of connected little constructions made of cardboard, wood, styrofoam, and other ordinary materials, in a carefully controlled palette of black, white, and brown, seems like the ultimate in children's building kits until you study it piece by piece and notice what looks like a shark's tooth, a scaffold with noose, a dunce cap, a cemetery-worthy cross. He's created a perfect balance of playfulness and horror, all within a perfectly balanced construction.

The DeCordova attracts more families than most museums, in part because of its stellar sculpture park, and children will enjoy this "Annual," too — especially the installations and interactive works. Predicting that they'll have "how did they do that?" questions their elders won't be able to answer, the museum steps in with a "process room" that demonstrates the "hows" in exhibits arranged at child height. I'll bet there will also be lots of curious grown-ups bending over to see.