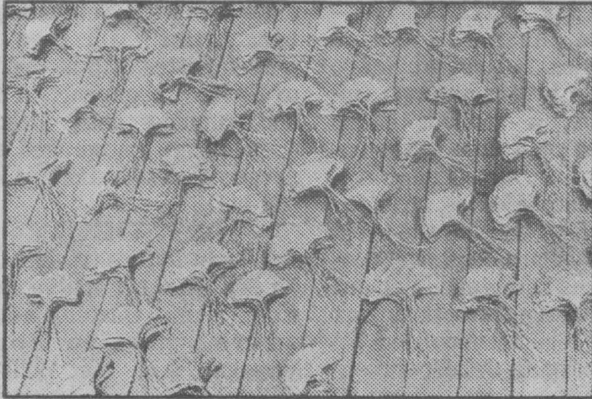


'Leaf Dreams' mingles science, philosophy and sculpture



AUTUMNAL: Beth Galston turns leaves into art in 'Leaf Dreams' at Boston Sculptors at Chapel Gallery.

The cucumber tree outside Boston Sculptors at Chapel Gallery stands bare and crisp against a wintry sky. Inside the gallery's vaulted, timbered space, Beth Galston has stacked, strewn and swirled leaves and seed pods from this tree as well as a beech, a sycamore, a ginkgo and several nearby maples in an installation called "Leaf Dreams." If the snowy West Newton landscape appears dead or at least dormant, the space within the former youth chapel is alive with leaves. Their colors, shapes and textures coalesce

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by Joanne Silver

in a dance at once random and exquisitely choreographed.

Galston's meditations on leaves extend far beyond the end of a tree's branches. In fact, although hundreds and perhaps thousands of leaves cover portions of the floor, walls and ceiling of the gallery, they serve as much to raise questions as to answer them: What creates the

myriad variations in the leaves of a single tree? What is random in the natural world and what ordered? What clues does the visible universe offer to what is left invisible?

"Leaf Dreams" presents a lyrical inquiry that mingles science, philosophy and sculpture. At the entrance to the exhibition, Galston has posted an enlarged reproduction of a page from a pamphlet given to her by her father, a plant physiologist. The sheet outlines — by form, shape, arrangement, lobe, and margin — 50 common trees of

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New York. Beneath this chart, the artist has deposited a pile of waxed photocopies of an illustration of the cucumber leaf, a cluster that effectively blurs the boundary separating art and life.

Running aislelike nearly the length of the former chapel, a series of platforms holds Galston's carefully constructed stacks of cucumber-tree leaves. Coated in beeswax and neatly arranged in a grid nearest the front door, these stacks disintegrate by the far end into a pile of unwaxed, dried leaves. To one side, autumnal piles of maple leaves form deep red circles on the gallery floor. A messier, seemingly windblown mound of sycamore leaves clings knee-deep along the opposite wall, then rises upward, flinging individual leaves — some waxed, some unwaxed and

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some painted a ghostly white — upward into the room's vaulted heights. Golden, fan-shaped ginkgo leaves create two contrasting collections: one, a random clump perched on a shelf close to the entrance; the other, a meticulous mosaic of the delicate leaves, arranged on the floor just beneath the shelf.

Behind Galston's obsessively organized ingredients, "Leaf Dreams" investigates notions that cannot be so easily manipulated. By focusing on minute details, she encourages viewers to reflect on something beyond the minutiae. Eternity lurks within this gathering of frozen fleeting moments, poetry within nature's infinite but almost imperceptible variety, new

life within the crumbling fragility of decay. Galston has spent her career as an artist channeling light and viewers' perceptions through environments she has found or created.

In "Leaf Dreams," her first effort as a member of the Boston Sculptors, the artist has explored her newest surroundings and found them rich in meaning and mystery.

"Leaf Dreams" is at Boston Sculptors at Chapel Gallery, 60 Highland St., West Newton, through Feb. 2.

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