

James Florschutz *Requiem* 1997

## VERDANT EYES

The relationship between humans and the natural environment has, always and everywhere, been an enduring source of imagery. Prehistoric cave drawings depicting the hunt and stone circles describing the movements of the seasons are among the early representations of this relationship. Later, landscape painting portrayed the forces of nature with great beauty and power.

Today, this fundamental relationship is explored and expressed by artists using a wide variety of means and materials. Many allude obliquely to our complicated history with, or responsibilities to, the natural world we inhabit. Others offer more direct or personalized visions of the power and poetry of nature. Some artists use traditional

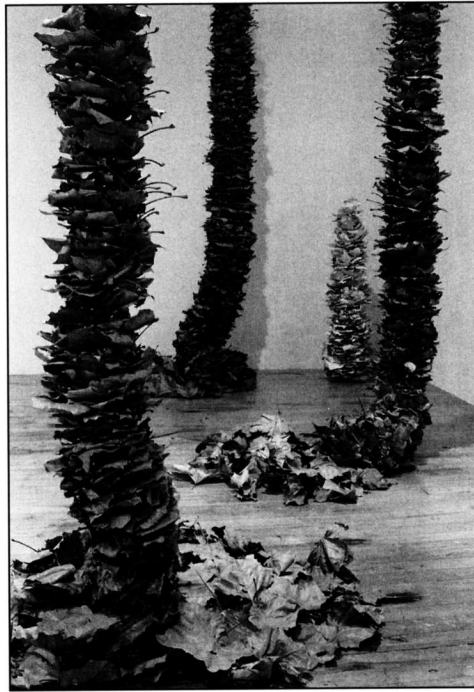
materials, such as paint and canvas, while others employ industrial products, such as metals and plate glass. Some have even transformed moss, leaves, and turf into the materials of art.

All the artists represented in **Verdant Eyes** have, in very different forms, created imagery meant to reconnect us with nature. They compel us to examine some powerful dual-natured concepts: growth and decay, order and chaos, sensitivity and arrogance, celebration and mourning, natural and crafted, ideal and real. Following are some of my thoughts and reactions in response to a few of the works in the exhibit. As you visit each piece, notice how your own relationship to nature is reflected or expanded.

**James Florschutz's** *Requiem* reminds me of a massive temple gate. Both the piece and its title impart a sense of solemnity and ritual. Note the beautiful contours of the wood and the varied colors and textures of the stones, basic elements of nature that we often overlook. Although anyone can enjoy its mass, materials, and rhythms as abstract sculpture, those of us living in southern Vermont can bring extra knowledge to the experience of viewing *Requiem*. The piece is an elegy for a field, a hill, and a stand of trees that were destroyed when a one-mile segment of Route 30 in Newfane was straightened.

Prior to construction, the road had meandered down a hill and followed the contour of the land along the riverbank. To create more efficiency for traffic, the highway department rerouted the road through a hillside agricultural field and an old stand of trees. But because the road no longer followed the contours of the land, they built huge retaining walls to support the hillside and put a protective chain-link fence high on the hill. The rural character of the road has been forever changed. The central portion of *Requiem* is a segment of the century-old pine tree from the former grove that was left on the roadside to rot.

**Frank Vasello's** piece is clearly a shrine, but to what? What ritual has, or will, take place in this open structure?



**Beth Galston** *Leaf Dreams* 1997

The ambiguity of the piece intrigues me. The moist soil, the rocks, and the wooden planks suggest a simple place of worship. By contrast, the rock enthroned on a red velvet cushion and the two hanging vessels that flank it create a more formal atmosphere. The vessels, one containing seeds, the other bones, evoke for me cycles of life and death, growth and decay.

**Beth Galston's** *Leaf Dreams* brings to mind the contrast between stasis and movement, indoors and outdoors, reality and fantasy. In each *Dream* a collection of leaves is anchored to an architectural feature of the building, then takes off in a free-flowing improvisation. I find the pieces enchanting and very musical, visually suggesting gentle lyricism, strong sustained lines, and syncopated rhythms. The building's solidity counterpointed by the leaves' animation create for me a viewing experience analogous to a dream state where reality and fancy meet.

**Andrea Wasserman** also brings the outdoors inside. Her *Feet*, seamlessly incorporated into slender tree trunks, strike me as marvelously imaginative and just plain funny. But where humor drew