

ART

# Building blocks

## Architecture meets art at the Fitchburg Art Museum

by Leon Nigrosh

**INFLUENCED BY ARCHITECTURE** at the Fitchburg Art Museum, 185 Elm Street, Fitchburg, through November 6.

**A**s soon as you walk into the Fitchburg Art Museum, you can tell that you are going to enjoy the new show, "Influenced by Architecture."

The first clue is that the moment you open the door a bell tinkles and a large structure to your right begins to jiggle and sway.

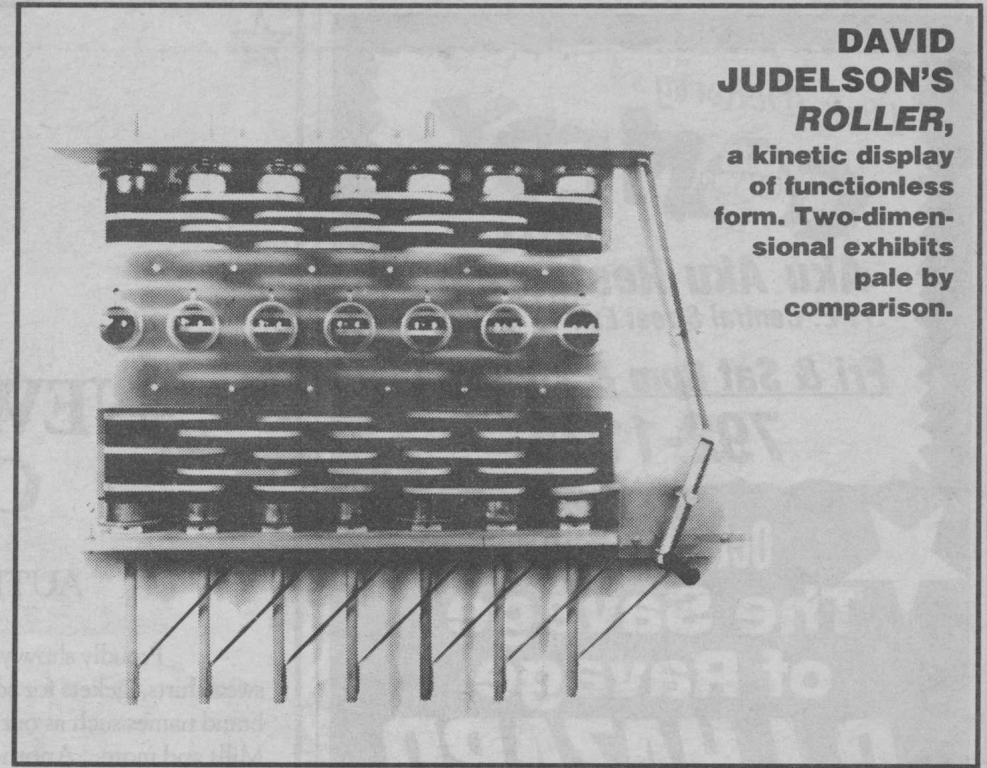
Turns out that this curvilinear construction hanging tenuously from the ceiling is the indoor part of a large wood-and-wire sculpture by guest curator David Judelson. Move the door and a hidden wire tugs on the sculpture, sounding the bell and causing a brush to try in vain to wash chalk marks off the museum window. The outdoor portion of the work is about 18 feet of wind-powered wood and wire that swipes at the squiggles of chalk on the other side of the glass. Each half appears to be working with the other, but because they never actually get anything erased, the work is appropriately titled *Frustrated Relationships*.

What's this got to do with architecture?

Well, aside from the fact that Judelson has several degrees in architecture and city planning from MIT, his artworks, and their structural principles, have a distinctly architectural look and feel to them. His *Cantilever* is a minor feat of architectural engineering in which trussed-up slats of wood support a group of naturally rounded stones way beyond the point where they should fall over. Judelson's *Harp* is an S-shaped conglomeration of wood, paper, and strings that might actually produce architectonic music.

Judelson has also asked some of his architect and artist friends to join the party, all of whom, as FAM curator of contemporary art Linda Poras explains, have "managed to blur the finite distinction between art and architecture." New York artist David Provan brings our peregrination to a halt with his *Something from Nothing*. The tension created between the work's massive gold-leafed pyramid inverted directly above a tall open-work steel girder is almost palpable. Provan's painted steel construction *It's Like Falling Inside Yourself* creates an illusion of inverted perspective when you peek into a little hole on its side.

If the examples of his work are any indication, Tim Prentice must have a ball in his Connecticut studio. Prentice calls upon his architectural and engineering skills to create



**DAVID JUDELSON'S ROLLER,** a kinetic display of functionless form. Two-dimensional exhibits pale by comparison.

whimsical and fanciful kinetic sculptures in aluminum sheet and steel wire. When the counterbalance is set free, the little red disks in *Yo Yo Clock* create an eccentric orbit around a spinning lattice wheel. Other plates, disks, and rods create overlapping patterns with other sculptures when you push them. Ask the museum guards to show you.

The slightest movement of air causes Prentice's five-foot diameter *Feather Wheel* of wire and bright red feathers to revolve slowly overhead while myriad aluminum plates in the nearby *Vertical Plate* give off a sprightly tinkling sound.

Rob Fisher's *Tokonoma* series, comprising colorful steel triangles suspended within shimmering ceiling-to-floor chains, gives the impression of flocks of birds flying in formation through a light rainfall. By contrast, New York sculptor Gunnar Theel's ponderous chunks of blackened wood and rusted steel hang like stilled pendulums under their steel supports.

The FAM has given the entire Connector Gallery space to environmental artist Beth Galston, who spent two weeks there constructing a series of window-screen walls and doorways through which every visitor

must pass. Stuck wistfully in random places along this mesh corridor are the first of the fall leaves, dry and curling.

Architect Wellington "Duke" Reiter offers several powerful pen-and-ink drawings, which are riveting examples of how he relaxes after a hard day at the boards. His swirling pen strokes create a fantasy world of imaginary fortresses and cities in stark monochrome.

The show's other two-dimensional offerings pale in comparison with the aforementioned 3-D works. In another context, photographer Janice Mehlman's hand-painted photo abstractions of architectural spaces might hold our attention longer. Printmaker Ilana Manolson and painter Jack Bolen seem to enjoy producing their masterfully created *trompe l'oeil* collages and oil-on-canvas representations of archways and other spaces. But when we can actually walk around and through the other works on display, why play "fool-the-eye"? □

*The Fitchburg Art Museum is open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Call 345-4207.*