

In Groton, a garden of haunting, hypnotic luminance

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Fairy dust appears to float through the air in the Christopher Carey Brodigan Gallery at the Groton School, or maybe it's the fairies themselves. "Luminous Garden" is another spritely and haunting piece by installation artist Beth Galston, who makes a practice of transforming spaces with delicate materials and light. In recent years, she has experimented with such materials as seedpods, leaves, and acorns, prodding her viewers to see the natural world anew.

"Luminous Garden," inspired by Galston's childhood forays through fields of wildflowers, follows this theme. She has taken seedpods and cast their form in a periwinkle blue resin. Each contains a tiny LED light and perches on a wire stem set in a polished wood amoeba-shaped platform. There are four such platforms, each with many illuminated seedpods bobbing and circling on their slender stalks. A fan up in a corner blows at these brilliant blue pods, which might be blossoms or butterflies, or something even more

**Beth Galston:
Luminous Garden**
At: Christopher Carey Brodigan Gallery, Groton School, Farmers Row, Route 111, Groton, through April 29. 978-448-7637; www.groton.org.

**Dawn Southworth:
Burnt Offerings and Bruce Barry: New Journal Entries**
At: Clark Gallery, 145 Lincoln Road, Lincoln, through April 24. 781-259-8303; www.clarkgallery.com.

**Amy Ragus: Talk of
Mysteries!**
At: Tsongas Gallery at Walden Pond State Reservation, 915 Walden St., Concord. 978-369-3254.

ethereal. Their haunting, delicate movement slows you down. It's slower than a moth feeding on pollen, and wonderfully hypnotic.

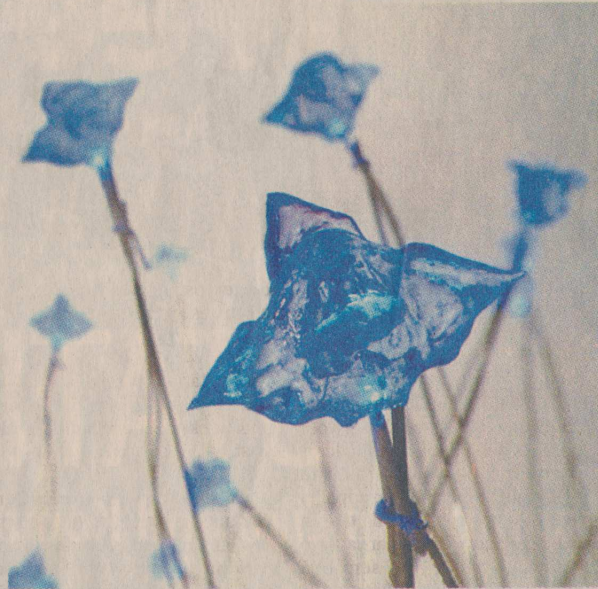
Galston strings each pod with thin electrical cord, which drops down the wire stem to a kind of root system splayed over the wooden platform and plugged into a source that looks like a spine running down the center of each piece. She makes no effort to hide the technology that powers her magic. "Luminous Garden" straddles and joins the elusive world of fairies with the concrete world of technology. It's mounted in conjunction with this month's Boston Cyberarts Festival.

The Brodigan Gallery is below the dining hall at the Groton School, and the clatter of plates and hum of conversation can intrude on the mystical experience that "Luminous Garden" offers. I wanted to close the doors of the gallery, turn off the lights, and sit on the floor for an hour. If Galston takes this installation elsewhere, I hope she finds a quieter, more enclosed space for it and lowers the already dimmed lights even more.

Seared symbols

For years, Dawn Southworth has been making art that pricks at the universal unconscious. She uses simple drawings, hieroglyphs, and geometrical patterns as symbols, which she hopes will resonate with some deep, preverbal part of the viewer. In her new show at the Clark Gallery, Southworth tries a technique that takes her work to a level of eerie fragility.

She makes wood-burned drawings on parchment paper, which



Beth Galston's "Luminous Garden" was inspired by her childhood forays through fields of wildflowers.

she then bakes in the oven. The drawings remain; the paper sears up to the point right before it crumbles to ash. Then the artist affixes the drawing to vellum. If her symbols — geometric designs, a lizard, a bed — evoke a memory, or an emotional knowing, the technique drives home how transitory that moment is. We grasp at understanding. It strikes us, changes us, and we move on.

The artist has also made a series of larger works, doing her wood-burned drawings on old ironing-board covers and stitching them over paper like skin. The ironing-board covers bear the marks of burning: Hot irons leave scars. The awkward stitching that holds them in place looks like another kind of scar. The covers hold memories of domestic life, good and bad. Their shape suggests a coffin. Southworth drops us into layers upon layers of associations and memories; it's like walking through a haunted house. These fabric pieces are strong, but the simplicity of the drawings makes them stronger.

Also at Clark, ceramicist Bruce Barry shows another round of vessels inscribed with his journal entries. The not-quite-legible text circles around the outsides of the vases in a reassuring murmur. Barry experiments with form. His spherical pieces collapse in on

themselves like deflating balloons. Even their tiny mouths purse like those of balloons. They're funny and fascinating shapes that sweetly suggest crumpling figures — and still the text rings them, as steady as a pulse.

Barry also now makes larger works that could be installed outside. Fashioned from three or four spherical sections, one perched atop the next, they look vaguely human, almost iconic. The top of each peaks like a monk's hood. The text, then, could be mumbling prayers. In addition to the text, Barry makes dark gestures over the vessels that accentuate their figural qualities. They're humble and endearing works.

Recrafting Walden

"Live in each season as it passes," wrote Henry David Thoreau. "Drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of each." Amy Ragus pays tribute to Thoreau and Walden Pond State Reservation in her exhibition there. Ragus tromps through the reservation at all times of year with her camera. These are not simple landscape photos — although they might look like that from a distance. Look again and you'll see branches falling from empty skies and trunks veering off at odd angles. Ragus has recrafted the scene into

Critics' Picks

"PIEROGI PRESENTS! THE BEST OF BROOKLYN COMES TO BOSTON" inaugurates the Bernard Toale Gallery's new, expanded space. Pierogi Gallery's director, Joe Amrhein, brings 12 artists from his roster to Boston. Also on the docket: Hisham Bizri's "Vertices," a film projected on three screens following a day in Seoul, Dublin, and Beirut. At Bernard Toale Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through May 10. 617-482-2247. www.bernardtoalegallery.com

"INVENTING OURSELVES" features paintings by Radcliffe Institute fellow Beverly McIver. The works explore the complexities of her relationships with her mother, an African-American who worked as a maid and caretaker for white families, and her mentally disabled older sister. At Agassiz House, Radcliffe Yard, 14 Mason St., Cambridge, through April 25. 617-495-8212. www.radcliffe.edu.

"BLUE RAPUNZEL" is Elizabeth Marran's portfolio of digital prints. Marran energizes her abstract imagery with saturated color, cool arrangements of forms, and mechanically patterned backdrops. At OH+T Gallery, 450 Harrison Ave., through April 26. 617-423-1677. www.ohtgallery.com.

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something kaleidoscopic without robbing it of the reassuring simplicity of a wooded landscape.

"Secrets (Walden Pond)" shows a pristine autumn day, with the leaf-strewn ground, trees, and pond in the background. But here and there, the perfect scene jangles out of place. A sunlit branch changes color. A tree trunk replicates and springs into the sky. Orange and gold leaves fill the air where you wouldn't think leaves belonged. This one, which has been scanned on a computer and printed out, is nearly seamless. The original, unscanned photo collages are not, but they have a rhythm that pulls the ground out from beneath your feet. Thoreau would have approved. The Ragus landscapes envelop you and make you their own.