

Perspectives

Nature's forms are preserved in sculpture

By Christine Temin

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At first, they look like ordinary ropes, rising out of a pile on the floor like snakes charmed out of a basket. Turns out, though, that the "rope" is made of acorn caps, thousands of them fastidiously strung on monofilament.

The work, "Tangle," is part of Beth Galston's aptly titled show, "Recasting Nature," at Boston Sculptors at Chapel Gallery, 60 Highland St., West Newton, through Oct. 1. "Gather ye rose-buds while ye may" is one of this excellent exhibition's themes, literally and figuratively. Galston collects roses, leaves, seedpods, and other ephemeral bits of nature, and extends their life, often by embedding them in translucent resin. There's a wistful wish to thwart passing time here. There's also a qua-

PERSPECTIVES, Page D8



A detail from Beth Galston's "Thicket."

Sculptor Galston captures nature

► PERSPECTIVES

Continued from Page D1

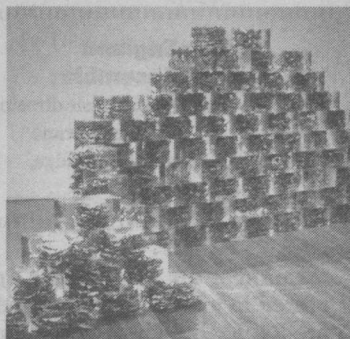
si-scientific approach, as if by dismantling roses into petals, stamens, leaves, and stems, encasing the pieces in little cubes of resin, and methodically stacking the cubes, she could study and ultimately understand the flowers while not allowing them to die. In this, some of her work is like a mellow and less-shocking version of Damien Hirst's animals preserved in formaldehyde-filled vitrines.

At other times, she allows the look of death but not disintegration. Her "Sycamore Columns" are an example, made of crinkly dried sycamore leaves stacked vertically, strung, like the acorn caps, on nearly invisible monofilament. The work suggests not only passing time, but Galston's time spent: You can't help but think of the labor of collecting all those leaves and then stringing them into stacks up to 14 feet tall. The piece is also an example of nature-as-architecture, a kind of real-life version of the classical column adorned with carved acanthus leaves.

One image that stuck with Galston from her childhood reading of fairy tales was the doorway through which to enter the world of the imagination. This is the root of her magical "Ice Garden," resined rose stems of varying lengths, suspended from the rafters as if holding their breath in midair, forming a corridor at once enticing and forbidding: Those stems do have thorns.

"Ice Garden" is orderly, straight up and down, another example of Galston's use of architectural forms. "Thicket" is its opposite. As twisted as the Laocoon, it's made of resined vines gone completely crazed, knotting themselves into a frenzied formation, writhing their way off the floor.

"Seed Log" is seven circular slices of resin lined up on the floor at intervals of about a foot. The shape, broken yet unified, pulls you from across the room to dis-



A detail from Beth Galston's "Sycamore Wall" (above), and a view of her installation (right) with "Sycamore Columns" in the foreground.

cover what's inside: different sorts of pods, all freed from gravity and floating in the resin rounds.

Of the wall's worth of tiny pieces, each on a little shelf, the most touching are those with resin hands in positions of offering or prayer, filled with roses, leaves or roots they seem to protect. Here the natural world has penetrated the human body, the porosity a reminder that the body is, after all, part of that world.

Galston's sense of form is as powerful as her ideas. And in the resin, the textures of which range from unobtrusive to effervescent, she seems to have found her ideal medium. Her art isn't limited to indoor sculpture. In the Chapel Gallery's small upstairs space is documentation of some of her other work, including set designs for a dance, and impressive public art commissions including several in Arizona, where good public art is as plentiful as it is scarce in Massachusetts.

