

STRANGE TERRAIN



"Tangle" by Beth Galston, part of "Terrain: Sculpture Today," opening at the Institute of Contemporary Art on March 9.

Modern sculpture gets its due

When most people think of sculpture, images such as Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker" usually come to mind. A rope made from acorn caps, less so.

But that's the idea behind "Terrain: Sculpture Today," an exhibit of modern, unconventional sculpture by 17 New England artists opening at the Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art on March 9.

"The show tries to get viewers beyond traditional sculpture," said Mark Bessire, curator of the ICA. "Sculpture doesn't get shown enough."

Bessire chalks this lack of exhibits up to the often high cost of installing such pieces and the space constraints they pose. Since the nonprofit ICA is essentially a museum, Bessire said it "has a responsibility to show modern sculpture."

Taken individually, the sculptures in "Terrain" are both engaging and enigmatic. The work of Falmouth resident Jeff Kellar "explores the way space affects emotion," he writes in his artist's statement. Kellar's "Vertical Structure #5," made from wood, clay, resin and steel, is a rectangular structure that plays with positive and negative space. At first glance, and from certain angles, the work looks like a plane of color, similar to a Mark Rothko painting. On closer inspection, one can see the spaces the artist has carved into the plane, giving the piece its third dimension.

Doug Bosch's "Apparati," a glass case containing shapes molded from beeswax, looks like a disturbing collection of prosthetic organs and limbs. The flesh-colored creations bulge in some places, taper in others, like the lumps and folds of the human body. The collection creates conflicting impressions — alternately clinically repellent and attractively organic.

Beth Galston's "Tangle" and "Sycamore Wall, 2000" play on both the strength and fragility of nature. "Tangle" is a long, meandering string made of acorn caps that resembles a strong rope from a distance, but up close, the medium belies that strength. "Sycamore" is a series of translucent, resin blocks, stacked like a brick wall. Sycamore leaves have been partially encased in each block, their brittle stems and edges protruding.

No single theme unites the work in this show — and that's the point. The exhibit's purpose is to "say how open the definition of sculpture is today, and to not define sculpture," Bessire said. Consequently, "Terrain" may be rough going for viewers unfamiliar with modern sculpture, but ultimately, it's worth the trip.

VICTORIA GANNON

"Terrain: Sculpture Today" shows Saturday, March 9-Wednesday, April 24 at the Institute of Contemporary Art, 522 Congress St., Portland. Hours: Wed., Fri.-Sun. 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; Thurs. 11 a.m.-7 p.m. A discussion by the artists takes place Thursday, March 14 at 4 p.m., followed by a reception from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. 879-5742 x229.