

Perspectives

Artists make the outdoors their canvas

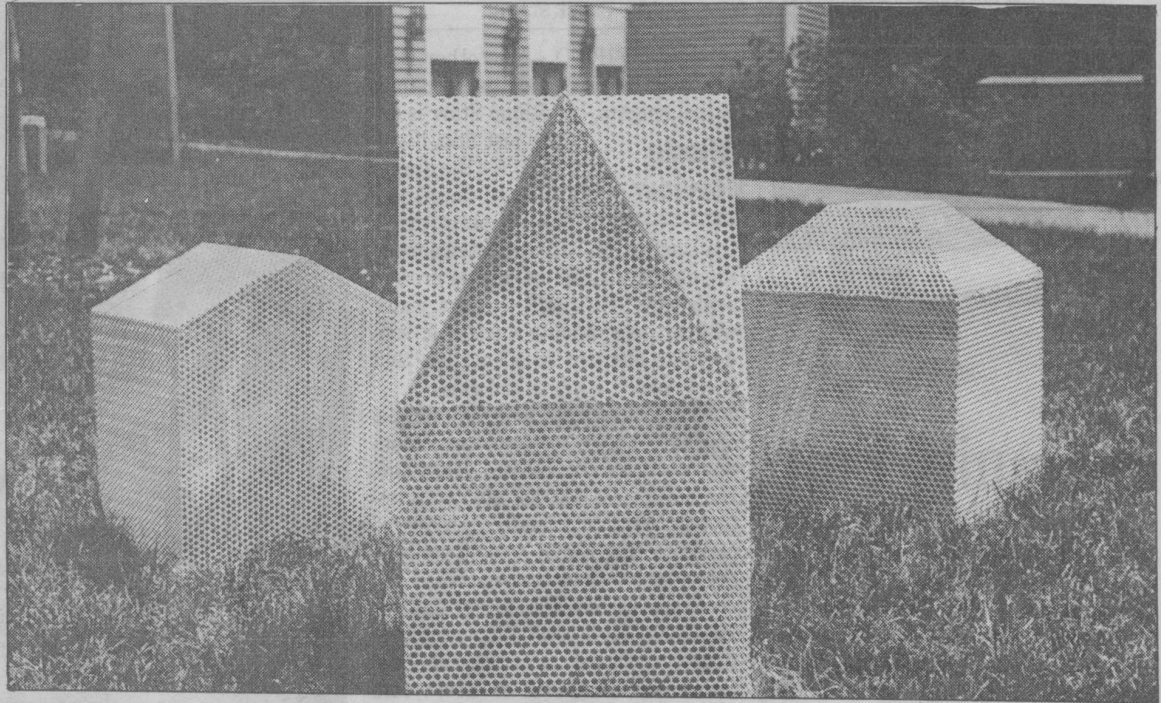
By Christine Temin
GLOBE STAFF

In summer, art goes outside just like people do, and so some of the most intriguing exhibitions around now are sculpture shows out-of-doors. There's the sixth annual sculpture exhibition at Bradley Palmer State Park in Topsfield, where 37 works by area artists have been created especially for their sites, in and around trees and ponds, on paths and slopes, often using materials that blend gently with nature. Many of the artists involved are well-known hereabouts, and all of them worked for free, putting up with mosquito bites and poison ivy to create works that are by definition unsalable. As curator John Chandler points out in his introduction to the exhibition's catalog, the artists' dedication is remarkable. This show is up through Aug. 15.

At the other end of the state, there's the 14th annual exhibition of contemporary sculpture on the grounds of Chesterwood, once the summer home of Daniel Chester French, sculptor of the Minute Man in Concord and Lincoln Memorial. Contemporary work looks particularly attractive here, against the Berkshire hills or in the secretive woods. The most promising sign that this year's show will be a success is that Trevor Fairbrother, the excellent contemporary curator from the Museum of Fine Arts, is the juror. The show is on view at Chesterwood in Stockbridge from July 4 through Oct. 11.

Then there's a much smaller, solo show by the Boston artist Beth Galston, the result of her work as a fellow at Radcliffe College's Bunting Institute. Galston is known for her installations that use fabric scrims to sculpt space. Her "Translucent Garden" is an extension of that work: a series of architecturally inspired shapes made of thin sheets of perforated aluminum that let the light through. The works are placed in a civilized urban oasis: the grounds of the Bunting Institute.

You might walk right past Galston's sculpture if you weren't tuned into it. The cylinder on a pole stuck into the ground — the first piece you encounter if you arrive through the parking lot — could almost be a trash receptacle or even a new-fangled form of phone booth or mailbox. It



From Beth Galston's show, "Translucent Garden," on the grounds of the Bunting Institute.

has an official character.

These are not attention-grabbing works. But they're very good ones. Most of them are situated on an oval of grass in the center of the Bunting buildings. Those buildings, converted 19th-century houses, are architectural translations of Victorian rectitude. A couple of them have mansard roofs with scalloped slates, while the others are plainer farmhouse types. They're painted pale rose, peach, buttercup and warm beige. The effect is one of traditional femininity — not at all the image of the Bunting, which describes itself as "the largest and oldest multidisciplinary center of advanced studies for women in the country."

Although I'd been to the Bunting several times, I'd never thought about these buildings as anything but attractive and useful: It took Galston's installation to make me really look at them. It was a pleasant task, sitting on a teak bench among orderly plantings of rhododendrons, holly, potentilla, and day lilies, all parked in pine bark. This is a very managed, controlled, ladylike environment. Some of Galston's works comment on that ambience. The doll-size houses that repeat in miniature the sweet pastel colors and the gabled, mansard or just plain peaked roof lines of the *real* houses, also seem to be making fun of them. Some of the pieces contradict the sense of control and order, especially

those works where tall grass has been allowed to grow through the holes in the metal. It's ironic that the man-made high-tech material is nurturing wildness, literally protecting it from being mowed down.

A pair of serpentine paths, each maybe eight-feet long, lie on top of the grass. A sign says you can walk on them, but they seem better to look at: You'd only be able to take half a dozen steps, anyway. The wiggly lines of the paths have an obvious feminine reference, as do their diminutive scale.

The largest pieces suggest walls, doors and platforms, and they both shape space and, because of their ethereal translucence, evade it. Down a path, away from the other pieces, is one that looks like a treehouse. You can stand up inside it, and your view of the rest of the world is automatically softened and filtered.

A work that subtly implies danger and adventure is one that extends straight out from a little slope; it reminds me of those houses that cling to the sides of canyons in Los Angeles, until a mudslide sweeps them off. This sculpture, too, is being conquered by nature, in the form of overgrown grass poking up through the holes.

Galston's "Translucent Garden" is on view at the Bunting Institute, 34 Concord Ave., Cambridge,

through Aug. 31.

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The Museum of Fine Arts' current exhibition, "Prized Possessions: European Paintings from Private Collections of Friends of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston," is a fun show, combining masterpieces and eccentricities, often by artists you've never heard of. If you want to find out who these folks are, consider one of the gallery tours the MFA's European Paintings and Education departments are offering, starting tomorrow. All tours begin at the Museum's Information Center. They'll be held tomorrow at 11; this Sunday at 2; July 16 at 11; July 29 at 6; and Aug. 9 at 2.

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Artists' colonies give artists the chance to rest, reflect, renew their spirits and make work in serene surroundings, uninterrupted by mundane matters. Some of the best known colonies are in New England, and three of these — the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, N.H.; the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine; and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown — are the subject of the annual summer symposium of the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln. "Creative Environments: Three Artist Communities in New England" is at the DeCordova on Tuesday, June 30, at 7:30. Admission is free, and there will be refreshments.