

A meshing of nature, technology

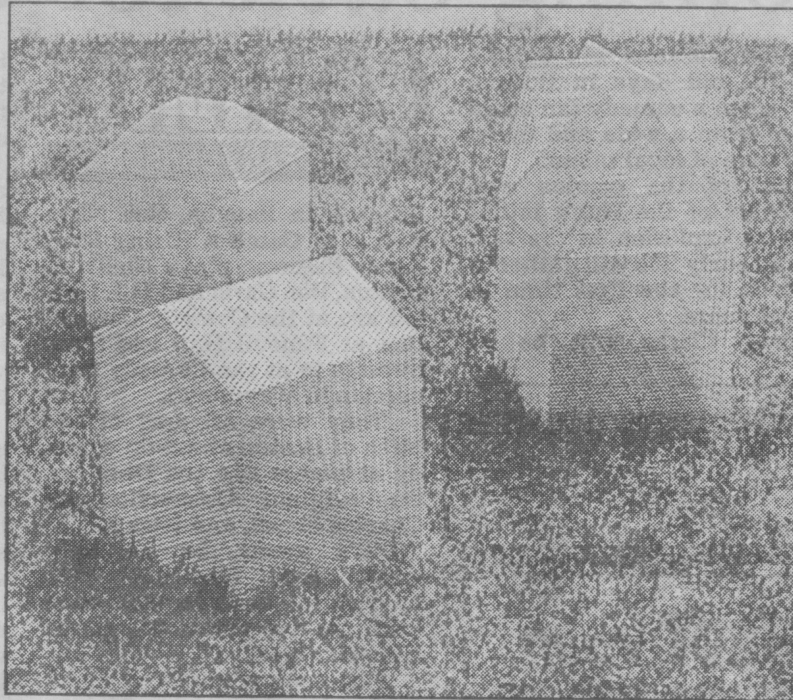
ART

By JOANNE SILVER

Environmental structures a symbol of hope

"Translucent Garden," environmental sculpture by Beth Galston, at The Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College, 34 Concord Ave., Cambridge, through Aug. 31.

In a garden where others have planted lilacs, rhododendrons, azaleas, yews, oaks, maples and a lone cherry tree in memory of a friend, Beth Galston has planted houses. More than a dozen of these simple structures are sprinkled about the grounds of the Bunting Institute, where Galston was a fellow. Some stand large enough for a person to enter; others are more like dollhouses or doghouses or dwellings for some woodland sprite. With their sun-dappled walls of perforated metal, Galston's works are filled with the spirit of nature: light, air and grass gleefully growing high enough to poke through even the taller platforms. And yet, because they resemble buildings, paths and tree-



BETH GALSTON'S structures grace the lawn surrounding Radcliffe's Bunting Institute.

houses, the pieces in "Translucent Garden" serve as a constant reminder of the human environment as well.

Only a thin membrane — represented by the perforated sheets of aluminum and steel separates, or perhaps unites, nature and technology, inside and out, book-learning and first-hand experience. You can see through all of Galston's structures with vary-

ing degrees of clarity, depending on the size and spacing of the holes and the arrangement of the walls. The result is architecture that is not an end but a means, architecture that embraces its surroundings.

Galston's Garden subtly echoes the designs of Mary Bunting-Smith, founder of the 30-year-old institute, which claims to be "the largest and oldest multidisci-

plinary center of advanced studies for women in the country." The male-dominated world might operate as "racetracks and may the best man win," Bunting-Smith said. "If the promise of democracy is to be fulfilled, a very different approach is needed. Not racetracks but gardens. The Radcliffe Institute offers its members a place to grow, each according to her own design."

Democracy triumphs in Galston's sculptures. As if to announce that fact, a little kiosk of perforated metal welcomes visitors; only its shape — a cylinder perched on a pole — hints at its purpose.

Beyond the kiosk, Galston plays upon images — visible and imagined — suggested by the community and buildings framing her display. One cluster of three miniature houses mimics the rooflines and pastel tones of the prestigious Bunting's four Victorian houses. If the diminutive houses' peaks and gables hint at austerity and purpose, however, their Necco-mint colors and dollhouse size evoke a world of childlike wonder.

At every turn, Galston's message seems to be to welcome the unexpected. Two short serpentine paths, as wavy as the Victorian houses are linear, have become overgrown with grasses. Just as Galston's houses offer little shelter from the elements, these paths hardly present the most efficient route between two points.

What they do is to invite us to

wander with no particular goal, and to glimpse the beauty of our meanderings. Two tiny rooftops, plunked directly on the ground, do the same thing. Too small to be entered by adults, they proved just the right size for a 4-year-old looking for a place to sail a new toy ship. As he cruised the boat through oceans of tall grass, he glanced up at the bunting's violet-gray main house and asked, "Are the big buildings part of the show, too?"