Aviary
1988, MIT Media Lab, Cambridge, MA
Beth Galston (sculptural environment), Ellen Sebring (video and music), with Sarah Skaggs (dance).

Materials: Scrim, steel pipe, cables, plexiglas, hardware, theater lights
Dimensions: 46' 6" H x 61' W x 62'

Excerpt from the Press Release

"Aviary," a one hour performance, creates a mythic world of birds and fairy tale narrative… The audience is enveloped in the bird environment of the aviary and surrounded by a towering scrim set, spatial music and lighting, large screen video projection and a solitary dancer. The three artists have designed "Aviary" for performance in "The Cube," the MIT Media Lab's unusual four story high "black box" for experimental theater. The premiere of "Aviary" marks the culmination of a two-year collaboration between the three artists.

The audience is seated in two areas of the set and surrounded by a nearly floor to ceiling layering of scrim fabric designed by Beth Galston. This scrim set is continually transformed by a spatial lighting palette of cool blues, greens and whites. In the light, the canopy overhead alternately creates the illusion of a protective covering or a soaring sky. Thirty foot tall fabric columns, set in the center of the space, create an open yet cage-like interior and are transformed by the light from opaque stone-like structures to flickering flames to translucent veils of mist.

Ellen Sebring's video, projected onto a 10 1/2' x 14' screen, uses slow motion to evoke a dreamlike quality in the depiction of the narrative… The music is composed entirely of imaginary instruments, designed by Sebring from digitally sampled sounds such as bird songs, and will emanate from all points in the room through the use of a specially designed twelve speaker sound system. Sarah Skagg's choreography works and interacts with the set and the video to become an extension of each of the other forms. As she moves through the passages within the set, Skaggs is alternately revealed, concealed, and seen through layers as a dreamlike figure.