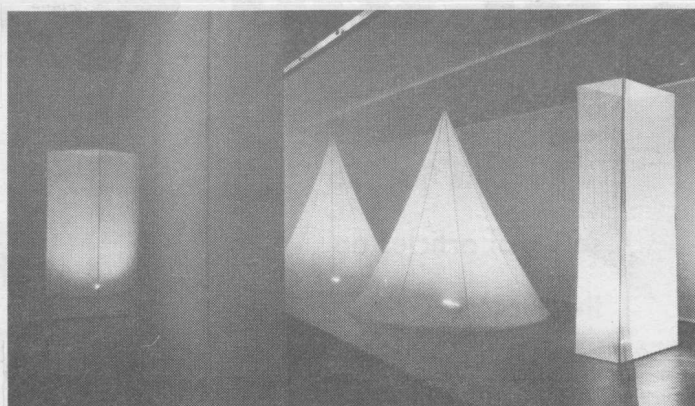


Art on Campus

BY CHARLES GIULIANO

Beth Galston—Geometries, 1986, scrim, aluminum tubing, black fluorescent and yellow fluorescent light, 48 x 48 x 16'. Montserrat College of Art Gallery, Beverly, MA.



No other region of the United States has as many prestigious universities, colleges, and private secondary schools as does New England. A high percentage of these institutions view the exhibition of works of art as part of their educational missions. These may range from such venerable museums as the Harvard University Art Museums or those of its archrival, Yale University. Their museums not only house the treasures that have been given to them by generations of alumni but also serve as training centers for curators and museum administrators. While the collections of Harvard and Yale are rich and diverse, there are more narrowly focused holdings; for example, the great depth of the Addison Gallery of American Art, maintained by Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and the great contemporary collection of Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum, which recently celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary.

While these are examples of university art museums with large permanent collections and a staff of curators and administrators, another part of the activity of New England exhibitors is an endless network of campus galleries. Typically, these small galleries serve as an outlet for faculty and student exhibitions as well as group and thematic shows. These spaces are run by faculty who are either paid for their services directly or are given the equivalent of classroom time. The part-time gallery director is dependent upon work-study assistants to hang shows and sit in the gallery. All of the gallery directors whom I talked with for this article concurred that they are overworked relative to the compensation that they receive.

While the small galleries tend to be oriented to campus exposure, and to serve the educational needs of the school, there is a mid-level group of colleges and universities that have been expanding their role in the visual arts. In the past year, for example, the architect Charles Moore has designed remarkable new museums for Dartmouth College and for Williams College. MIT also moved its quarters from the outmoded Hayden Gallery to state-of-the-art facilities in the I.M. Pei-designed List Center for the Visual Arts. MIT has had a unique and long-standing commitment to the visual arts. Other colleges, however, seem to be hovering in limbo between maintaining a gallery and acquiring a permanent collection and a facility to house it.

For Ethan Berry, the gallery director at the Montserrat College of Art, which is an hour north of Boston, the most important drawing card of his gallery is space. "We have a big gray box that is some 48' by 48'. It's the biggest space in the Boston area," he said. To show off this space in an unique manner, Berry recently commissioned an installation by Beth Galston, about which he is particularly proud. But despite an ambitious show such as this, Berry reports that it is difficult to get people to drive so far from Boston. The opening then takes on special importance as a rallying point.

"Our space is very large, but the room is rather bare," Berry said. "To achieve a more intimate feeling for anything other than a show of very large works or sculpture, we set up a system of panels. It doesn't seem to be worth the effort to upgrade the space as an exhibition area as the school is growing and may have another use for this space in the future, and the gallery would be relocated."

Since Montserrat is relatively removed from the Boston art world of galleries and museums, Berry tries to bring as much diverse work as possible to his gallery. Boston art galleries have been most generous in lending work; however, because of increased costs for insurance, and a greatly increased deductible clause on damage to works, Berry is concerned about the ceiling of net value of works in an exhibition. With a budget of just \$6,000 for the year—from which comes printing, mailing, transportation, insurance, installation, and openings—damage to a valuable work on view would be a setback. A major concern for galleries is the issue of liability, especially when they must rely on students to guard the gallery. In today's market, when works by emerging artists are sharply increasing, even relatively modest shows become very expensive to ship and insure.