

# An open door to art's mysteries

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**R**ebecca Doughty's work includes ethereal marking; postcards printed with provocative thoughts; words stamped onto a wall. Doughty is the first to say that her art might mystify some people, which is why she's happy to be participating in the open studio event at the Vernon Street Studios this weekend. It's a chance for her not only to show, but also to tell - to talk to visitors about what she does and why. The open house is noon to 5 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, at the handsome old brick manufacturing buildings at 6 and 20 Vernon St. in Somerville. It was here that the first open studios in the Boston area were held, back in 1975. The annual event has grown and prospered, with more than 50 artists participating this year. (Admission and parking are free.)

Doughty and fellow Vernon Street artists Laura Barling-Gould and Meg Alexander have rolled out a meta-

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phorical red carpet for their visitors, in the form of words written in chalk on the creaky floorboards of the hallway leading to their studios. The words have to do with materials and methods, and there is chalk available for visitors to add to the lexicon. The idea was to intrigue people even before they entered the actual studios.

Once in Doughty's digs, they'll see wispy little drawings tacked on the wall, with more stacked on a shelf. Then there are the piles of wooden blocks on the floor: These were made by Doughty's father, who is recovering from a stroke and learning to speak all over again. The little wooden cubes represent the building blocks of language, which Doughty will make into a sculpture.

Prilla Smith Brackett's work is less likely to mystify than Doughty's: Brackett paints easily recognizable landscapes. People who stop by her studio will get a guided tour of the places she's depicted, from Madagascar to the Arnold Arboretum. In her current paintings, she juxtaposes scenes from the Northern and Southern hemispheres, focusing on tree trunks and roots. To add to the play of opposites, she often uses black and white and color within the same work. The most glorious piece in her studio just now is a grid of 24 small rectangular paintings, each depicting trees Brackett painted on-site. Trees by night and at dawn, trees casting shadows, trees seen from below: Brackett is almost obsessive in her loving observations. What she offers in open studios is the chance for peo-

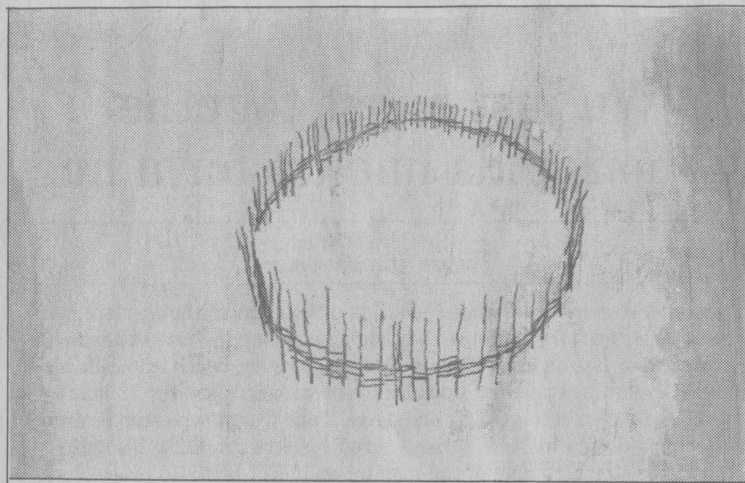


PHOTO / R. DOUGHTY

Rebecca Doughty's "Corral," 1992, graphite and oil on wood.

ple to witness her working method, through studies and preliminary drawings, and a chance to chat and to buy: She'll have large paintings for sale for around \$2,000, big drawings for \$700 to \$900, and smaller works as well.

Beth Galston doesn't have anything to sell at open studios: Her installation pieces are site-specific. But commissions may well result from visitors fascinated by the magical look of her studio during this weekend's event. Galston's primary materials are light and shadow and, in the case of the large work currently in her studio, long rolls of white tracing paper and columns of metal perforated with different patterns. The lighting Galston has created causes the patterned columns to cast weird shadows: One even goes around a corner. "I like watching people in the space," Galston says of the crowd she's expecting this weekend, "especially kids, because they're so unin-

hibited and they'll go up and really explore."

The installation in her studio is the outgrowth of a residential project Galston is creating for an adventurous Connecticut couple who asked her to design a pathway, patio, fence and mailbox for their home. She started experimenting with the perforated metal, and the work in her studio is one result. On a nearby wall she has tacked up images of inspiration - everything from a photo of a Japanese garden to reproductions of paintings of squares by Klee and Mondrian. And there's a tiny drawing of a proposal for the Connecticut mailbox: It's perforated metal wrapped over a solid metal sheet, and because of those peekaboo holes, Galston has dubbed it "the negligee mailbox."

The Vernon Street studio Jeanee Redmond shares with animation artist Karen Aqua is crammed with Redmond's opulent ceramics. On one

wall are a set of fireplace tiles, destined for a Colorado client but temporarily installed in Somerville to give open studio visitors a peek at one of her more ambitious projects. The tiles are gorgeous, carved with lavishly curling leaves and flowers. On the opposite wall is an example of what Redmond calls her "ceramic wallpaper" - abstract and floral patterns that do indeed resemble a Victorian wallpaper, only executed in clay relief.

Redmond also makes smaller pieces, and for open studios she'll be selling her Goat Men Cups for \$75 each. These intricate depictions of a creature half-human and half-beast can be used not just as cups, but as salt cellars or candle holders. There are also conceptual works in the studio, including Redmond's "Identity Platter," patterned with fingerprints, chromosomes, DNA strands and so on. And this weekend Redmond will even show ceramics that dance - in the form of an animation collaboration with Aqua, called "Yours For the Taking" and featuring the peregrinations of a three-legged cup.