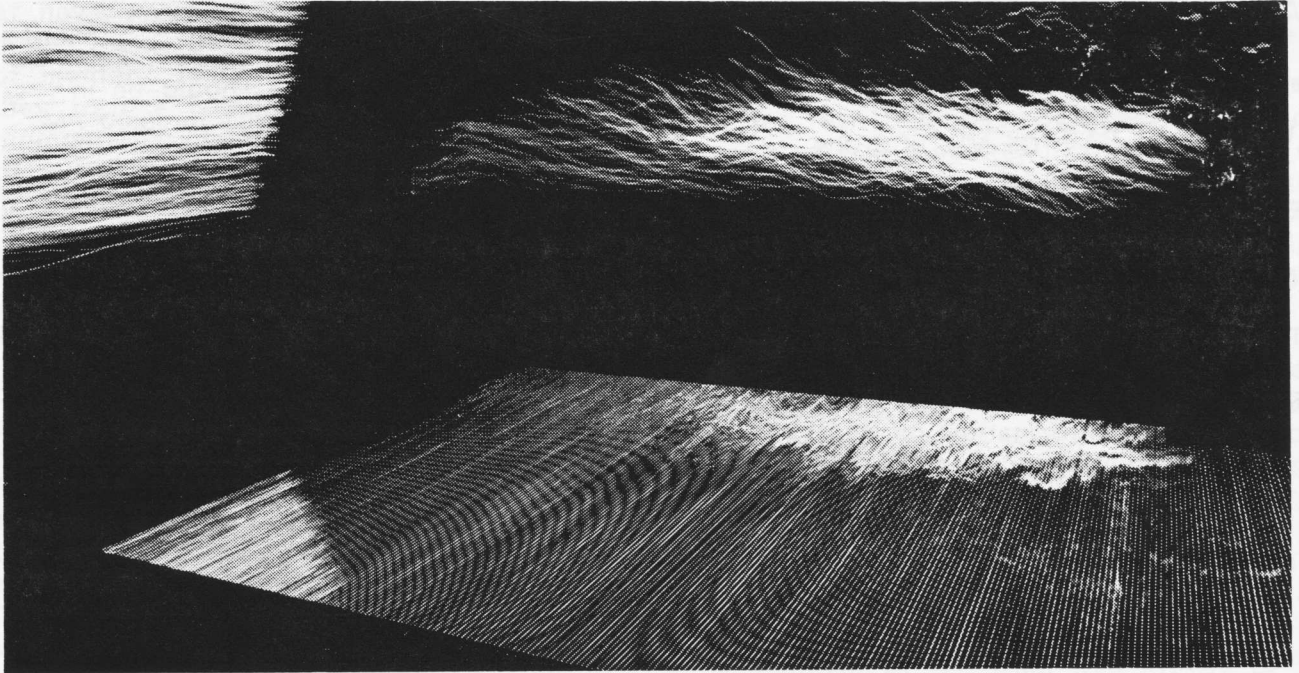


BETH GALSTON'S



LIGHTWALL

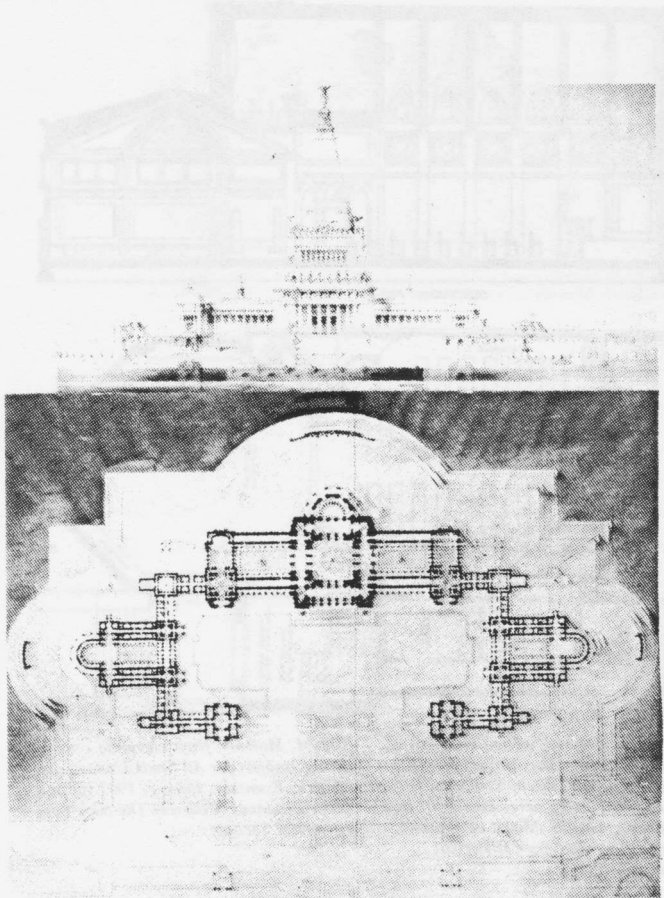
# architext

MIT DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

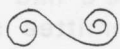
December 15, 1983.

will be represented at the December meeting of the Women's Advisory Group to President Gray.

While the group was begun by women in the M.Arch. program, participants want it to encompass the interests of women throughout the Department. Efforts are being made to notify women in the S.M.Vis. and S.M.Arch.S. programs about the meetings. They are held Tuesday evenings at 6:15 in the Cheney Room kitchen. All women in the Department are encouraged to attend.



*Ida Annah Ryan, plan and elevation, project for a Pantheon and Home for Soldiers and Sailors, winner of the Travelling Fellowship for 1907. MIT, Historical Collections.*



## profile

### BETH GALSTON



sculptor, environmental artist, fellow CAVS, MIT

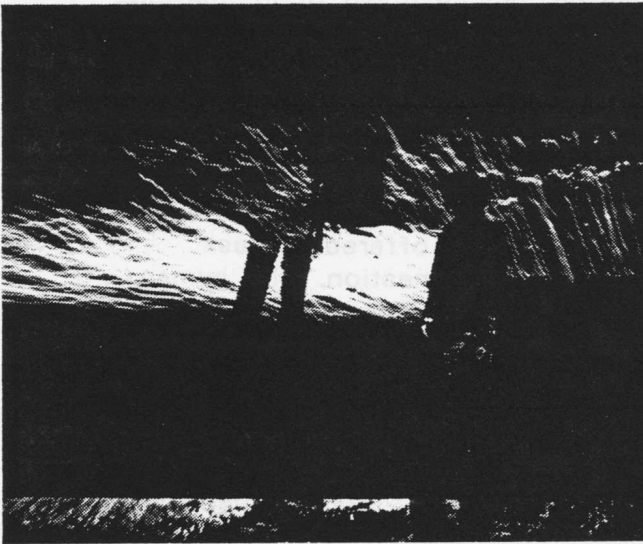
The avant-garde theme today in the world of art and architecture is "environment". Artists and architects are striving to create a wholeness which lies beyond the walls of art galleries and the glories of individualistic architecture. The broader spectrum i.e. the environment, is now the gallery of artists and the concern for architects. Architecture, the utilitarian art is striving to find a meaningful way to contribute in the making of our environment; art, on the other hand is giving a new meaning to our environment.

The phenomenon, happily, is interactive. The environment is giving back as much to art as it is receiving. It is giving art new material, new forms, and most important of all a new dimension. Light, sound, space, walls, graffiti, beach, island, forest and sky are being revealed everyday as new dimensions with which to work. The experiments on these new dimensions fascinate, amuse or bore people but the possibilities seem endless and eclectic.

The predominant concern of environmental art, however, is its relationship with space. Artists who are concerned about this form of art are responding through their work to the inherent attributes of a particular space and its surroundings. Implied in their work are the factors that a particular environment dictate the nature and form of the art for which it is suitable, and the

forms, given the creative aspect and personal taste of an artist, would not be mathematically absolute. Different artists may come up with different pieces of work for the same site but they all would reflect the considerations of that specific space, surrounding, and the artist's sensitivity to the problem. This common consciousness is the most powerful attribute of environmental art. It would deliver the artist's work from a prohibitively personal expression to a communicable meaningful and humane experience of everyday life.

In this article we would like to look into the evolution and experience of one of the conscious entities around us, the sculptor, the artist, and the environmental artist, BETH GALSTON.



The latest work of Beth Galston, "Lightwall", is the development of Galston's preoccupation with the interactions between sculpture, light, and space. "Lightwall" was reviewed by SOJOURNER, the New England Womens Journal of News, Opinions, and the arts. According to the Sojourner, "Lightwall is a deceptively simple piece of environmental sculpture that can be transformed by viewer interaction into layers of light that are of dreamlike complexity ..... and it extends the realm of sculpture into that of architecture and theater."

ART NEW ENGLAND magazine commented on the implied environmental quality of the work. "Beth Galston's installation "Lightwall" at the Kingston Gallery reminds us that the time may be right to assess minimal, perceptual, and phenomenological art in terms of its place in recent tradition, as well as to judge particular works in terms of their aesthetic and message..... it has been twenty years since Robert Morris presented his first "primary objects" in the Green Gallery in New York, those lone, blank, cubic solids which, as everyone quickly discovered not only demonstrated the radical reduction of the sculptural object but also inescapably demanded that the viewer's attention include the surrounding space as well as the object itself."

Galston started working with environmental art while an undergraduate in the Kansas City Art Institute. Inspired by the availability of plentiful outdoor spaces at the school, she made large scale constructions using available architectural elements placed outdoors.

"It was important to me," the artist said, "that there was a specific relationship between the sculpture and its site."

Later in the artist's own studio in Connecticut she constructed her own forms with metal, brick, wood and glass. Many of the sculptures were skeletal, thus allowing light and vision to penetrate through them. Unconsciously she started playing with skeletal structures and their interaction with light and shadow. Apparently light was an implied element in her work but she did not fully realize its potential until she came to the S.M.Vis.S. program at MIT. She took a number of architecture courses and began, on a small scale with paper cutouts and models, working with skeletal structures. What evolved in her thesis project was a large scale installation/performance, consisting of a series of gridlike wooden skeletal walls which, interacting with changing lighting scheme, transformed an indoor space into a moving cityscape of light and shadow. People moving through the space became a part of the sculpture.

"Through light and shadow," Galston recalled, "my work moved from dealing with objects in a space as in the previous architectural constructions, to dealing environmentally with entire space."

Galston's latest work is actually a 'negative' of her previous work, using reflected light instead of shadow. She first started using mirrors to reflect light on surfaces, but the difficulty of handling large mirror panes necessitated that she use mirrored plexiglass. She found out soon enough that it is easier to handle plexiglass, it is flexible, and thin strips of mirrored plexiglass reflect lines of light and a whole panel of mirrored plexiglass strips can reflect a mass of lines creating a luminous textured panel.

In April 1983, Galston exhibited the "Mirror Light" a performance at CAVS, which was the prologue of "Lightwall"; the notable difference was in the fact that "Mirror Light" was a performance designed to integrate human performers moving mirrored strips through beams of light creating a "living sculpture". "Lightwall", on the other hand, excluded human performance from the setup, making its impact independent of constant human interaction.

Explaining the process and the problems of creating "Lightwall" Galston said, "The problems presented at the Kingston Gallery were much different than at CAVS. Instead of a huge room with a 25' high ceiling I was working in a smaller space with a wooden floor and 12' high ceiling. Also, as the exhibit was open from 12 to 6 everyday it could not be a performance. My problem was how to develop an environment which had movement and change, implied audience participation but could exist without the interaction of people. I wanted the installation to be utterly simple so that I could spend my time working on the subtleties of the lighting. Initially I planned to build a suspended wall of double-sided mirrored strips, forming a vertical line across the gallery, dividing it in half yet allowing passage along the edges. The reflected vertical lines of light would have given the

viewer the impression of being surrounded in a forest of light. After experimentation I discovered that more unusual and softer effects were created when the mirrors were placed on the floor. Due to the unevenness of the floor the mirrors reflected light in soft wispy (horizontal) lines. The final installation consisted of two panels: an 8' x 18' panel on the floor and a 3'-6" x 8' hanging panel (creating both horizontal and vertical reflections). I used four slide projectors coupled with a computer with a dissolve unit and memory which was programmed for a four minute loop to create a sequence of slow, almost imperceptible change of light on the mirrored panels (see photographs showing the sequence). The viewers could watch the sculpture from outside the space, but the space took another dimension as one entered into it, shadows of the viewer were projected among the reflections, rightside up, upside down or in multiple."

The resulting effect, was a cubic space of ethereal, ephemeral and sensuous light defined by the reflecting panels and the walls and the ceiling they were reflecting on. The gradually changing light played with the patterns on the surfaces but the intermediate space offered endless possibilities of delineation. The human figure in the space could be the mobile sculpture bathed in streams of light, a large crystal prism could possibly create numerous rainbow colors, and any other solid form inside the space could go through the exciting transformation from dimly lit shape to a vibrating web of light.

Born in Los Angeles, California, Galston attended Cornell University in New York where she completed her B.A. in English Literature in 1970. After working for five years as a potter, Galston turned to sculpture. She completed her B.F.A. in sculpture at the Kansas City Art Institute, Missouri in 1977 before joining the S.M.Vis.S. program at CAVS at MIT. Subsequently she was appointed a fellow at CAVS in 1981.

Galston has also been a visiting lecturer at Tufts University and the University of Connecticut where she taught sculpture and environmental sculpture respectively. At

present Galston is co-teaching Environmental Art in the Urban Landscape, with Lowry Burgess and Sally Weber at CAVS.

So far, Galston has won five awards and honors and her work has been exhibited in Boston, Connecticut, Medford, Amherst, Missouri and Kansas City in different group and individual exhibitions.

Galston is currently working on an outdoor adaptation of "Lightwall" in the commission for Sennott Park in Cambridge. The sculpture will be installed in the spring of 1984 in the playground of the park. It is a development of the first light and shadow installation consisting of gridlike stainless steel structure which would interact with the sun throughout the day to create an everchanging shadow pattern. It would also be participatory play structure for children who would be able to climb or go through it in numerous ways.

Galston is very optimistic about the creative application of lighting schemes for stage performances. She regularly attends dance and experimental theater performances in Boston and New York. Someday, she hopes to work in collaboration with dancers and choreographers to develop a series of movements integrated with special lighting affects. "Lighting should not merely illuminate, it should create and celebrate the essence of the dance".

