

LEE BOROSON

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'Windowbox' on the world

Artificial garden brings its exhibit space to life

By ALICE THORSON
The Kansas City Star

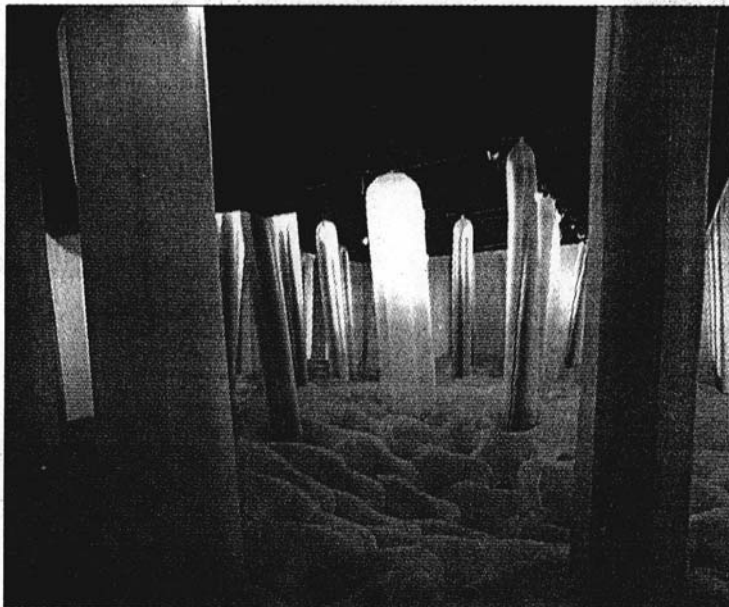
Entering Lee Boroson's installation at the H&R Block Artspace is to feel like a speck on a microscope slide, surrounded by towering tubular chromosomes that ever so slightly wiggle and wave.

Boroson, 37, is one of several New York artists who look to realms remote from the hurly-burly of Manhattan and Brooklyn for inspiration, grounding their work in the experiences offered by nature, gardens and landscape.

"Windowbox," a new installation by the Brooklyn-based artist, is a viewer-encompassing, pneumatically animated artificial garden. The work was inspired by the elaborate design of the fountains, ornamental hedges and walkways of the Villa Lante garden near Rome, which Boroson visited last summer.

Here, he re-creates the experience using parachute cloth (silicon-coated nylon), polyester organza, polar fleece and foam, fitting out the Block's entire 3,000-square-foot gallery space of two-story atrium and adjacent exhibition area.

Capping off a decade of exhibits at



MATT McFARLAND

'Windowbox,' an installation by New York artist Lee Boroson at the H&R Block Artspace at Kansas City Art Institute, as seen from the gallery's second-floor balcony

galleries and museums from San Diego to Cape Cod, Boroson recently exhibited a pneumatic and organically inspired installation called "Underpass" at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, on Park Avenue in New York. Similar in scale,

but more complex by virtue of its numerous components, Kansas City's "Windowbox" represents his most ambitious work to date.

In a recent interview at the gallery,

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BLOCK: Pneumatics an animating factor

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Boroson explained that the Villa Lante, like many formal Renaissance gardens, is adjacent to a planned forest.

He devotes the gallery's atrium space to this element of the garden concept, filling it with a forest of inflated white nylon columns. Ranging in diameter from 1 to 2 feet, they dangle from the ceiling 22 feet above and sway slightly from the forced air drawn into them from the building's HVAC system.

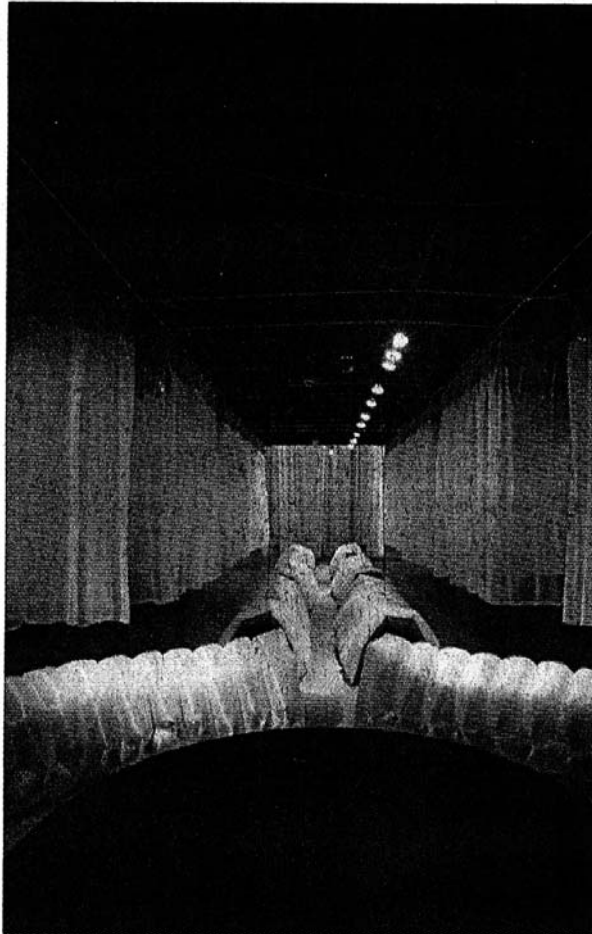
The columns travel through a perforated overhead canopy of white nylon, which the viewer can experience close up from the second-floor balcony. From this higher vantage point, the canopy suggests a puffy cloud and the columns a kind of celestial forest. Either way it's a magical vista.

By comparison, the formal garden segment of the exhibition, which occupies the adjacent main exhibition space, does not maintain this same standard of magical illusion. The elements have a lesser degree of finish, and one remains aware of the "real" architecture of cement floor and trussed ceiling.

Running the length of the gallery are two low parallel tunnels of inflated nylon fabric channeled like a down jacket. The tunnels are white on the outside and green on the inside and are meant to connote ornamental hedges.

Boroson has divided the space on either side of the "hedges" into chambers. "Curtains" of translucent white polyester organza fabric, bordered at the top in green and hanging to within three feet of the floor, create a series of rooms. In many of these rooms, Boroson provides viewer seating and symbolizes water by means of drumlike foam rubber forms covered with lime-green and royal-blue polar fleece.

The drums and the rooms, which are linked by openings in the fabric curtains, are oriented to the location



MATT McFARLAND

Lee Boroson's 'Windowbox' installation at the H&R Block Artspace

of the building's former windows. Indeed, the entire piece was designed to relate and integrate with the specifics of the building.

Boroson carried the concept onto the exterior by covering the luminous panels fitted over the windows

with backlit photographs of leafy ivy. Inside, he used the HVAC system to provide the air for most of the inflated elements. He also modified the Villa Lante's symmetrical plan to suit the shape of the Block Artspace.

"In the case of garden architecture,

ON EXHIBIT

"Lee Boroson: Windowbox"

Where: H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute, 16 E. 43rd St.

When: Noon to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays; noon to 6 p.m. Saturdays. Closed Sundays and Mondays. The exhibit continues through Dec. 20.

How much: Free.

the pattern and logic of the structure is often only evident in the plan or if one could have a bird's-eye view of the locale," he says in his artist statement.

Boroson provides the viewer with this orienting bird's-eye view in a series of engaging acrylic-on-Mylar drawings for the "Windowbox" project, on display in the gallery's second-floor Cohen Resource Room.

In its architectural scale and use of unexpected materials like parachute cloth, "Windowbox" brings to Kansas City a little bit of the feeling of the St. Louis Art Museum's summer "Wonderland" exhibition of contemporary art installations, for which Boroson was considered. Certainly his work shows affinities with several artists in that show, including Teresita Fernandez, who also finds inspiration in garden plans, and Ernesto Neto, whose work frequently incorporates towering columns of translucent fabric.

Boroson derives his particular artistic identity from his investment in pneumatics as an animating factor of his sculptures and installations. While pointing up areas that need refinement and development, "Windowbox" represents an ambitious step ahead.

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