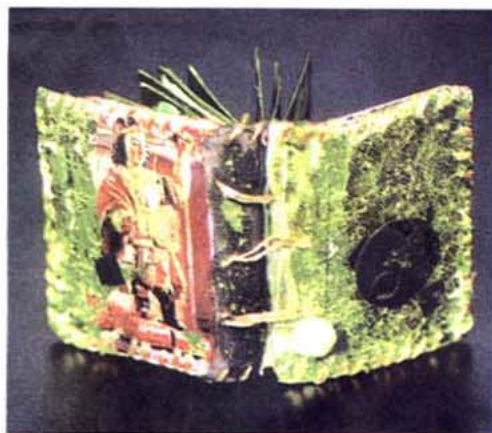


In Bridgeport, Female Artists Go Back to the Garden



By BESS LIEBENSON

BYOND the Garden Wall" takes flowers beyond their normal form, place and season — well beyond.

The juried exhibition, on view at the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport June 10 through July 29, represents the museum's third annual collaboration with the 70-year-old Connecticut Women Artists Inc. This year works by 44 artists are featured.

It is also part of the museum's major fund-raising festival of garden events, including a tour next Friday of six private gardens in Greenfield Hill, Southport and Westport, and a black-tie dinner-dance reception to open the exhibition on Saturday.

"The committee running the benefit wanted a special theme for the art show that would tie in to the 'Art in the Garden' benefit," said Kit Powers, a museum spokesman. "They thought the title would be intriguing to artists because what lies beyond the garden wall is your imagination. So in a sense that left it wide open — whatever the artists interpreted."

Both Mr. Powers and Wendy Kelley, the museum's consulting curator of art, were surprised and amused at the results.

"We would have thought more artists would pick up on the garden theme," Mr. Powers said.

Ms. Kelley said the most literal submissions were generally not the ones chosen by the juror, Judith Tannenbaum, curator of Contemporary Art at the Rhode Island School of Design.

"The jurying was done from slides — without my knowledge of the artists' names, ages, educational backgrounds, exhibition histories, race, ethnicity, and other identifying characteristics," Ms. Tannenbaum said. "The theme was open-ended enough to allow for a very broad interpretation."

She spoke of two general categories — "those that do stay closer to the idea of the garden and the other where works in fact do not represent landscape and are not based on gardens — where things do not seem to be related."

"But," she added, "the whole idea beyond the garden wall is the mental image of extending outside the garden, which opens up into different kinds of experiences."

More 400 slides of paintings, prints, sculpture and photography were submitted; for the show 55 works by 44 artists were selected, 18 of which are award winners. The artworks are for sale, with 30 percent of the proceeds benefiting the Discovery Museum's educational programs for children and teens.

First place went to June Bisantz Evans' "Stay in the Struggle." It pictures as a group of seven, dressed mostly in leopard-print leotards, pulling on a rope, with just beyond a hint of greenery. The artist places herself in every

picture (like Alfred Hitchcock).

"Cliff Dwelling" by Nina LoRicco, an imaginary contemporary greenhouse in glass and mixed media that took second place, "is closer to the theme in a very inventive way," Ms. Tannenbaum said.

Third place went to a mono print and mixed media work called "Innocence" by Susan Newfold, which pictures only the bottom half of a little boy in short blue pants.

The works will be arranged in two large galleries with floral arrangements set on pedestals creating a garden-like atmosphere. Local garden clubs, inspired by nine of the works, will create their interpretations. "It's a challenging interpretation of an interpretation," Mr. Powers said.

As Ms. Kelley said, "Sometimes it takes works that are a little off-the-wall or beyond the garden wall to make us stop, think and look."

A reception to meet the artists and an awards presentation will be held at the museum June 17, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. For information about the reception and the garden tour as well as the black-tie dinner and dance, contact the Discovery Museum, 4450 Park Avenue in Bridgeport, open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Information: (203) 372-3521, extension 134.

An exhibition next Sunday through July 29 called "Beyond the Garden Wall," at the Discovery Museum in Bridgeport, will display works by women, including "Stay in the Struggle" (above), which took first place, June Bisantz Evans,

Discovery Museum