

# Chicago Tribune

ART: REVIEWS

Alan Artner; Tribune art critic

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Joan Backes' "Paper House," a mixed-media, light and sound piece at the McCormick Gallery, is an installation that has a visual impact exceeding the sum of its parts. Even when seen only in photographic reproduction from the outside, it conveys almost the intensity of a hallucination, which probably is owing as much to the primal shape of the house as its external treatment or internal blaze of light.

The exterior of Backes' house is covered with strips of white recycled paper that allow light from inside to pass through, causing a shaggily diffused glow. The white interior has many compartments set into the walls, displaying, among other things, X-rays, drawings, models and cross sections of trees. A headset adds the sounds of wind passing through trees as well as New Age music inspired by that phenomenon.

There also is embedded a participatory element that goes beyond listening, as the bound stacks of drawings, most of which we cannot see, have been provided by people in many fields who were asked to create a rendering of their favorite tree. This adds an element of fantasy to the various artifacts and documents, so the artist's arboreal theme is expanded beyond the literal to the poetic.

In the end, however, all the information does not accrue to impart knowledge. Instead the house is here the counterpart of a cabinet of wonder, presenting variations on a theme that stimulate personal reverie.