

Kevin Concannon, "Artist Transforms Breezes on NSCC Campus," *Daily Evening Item*, April 8, 1986, p. 24.

Sculpting the sound of the wind



Liz Phillips gives the anemometer on the roof of North Shore Community College a last minute check. (Inset) Phillips at the control console of the synthesizer which processes the impulses which come down from the wind-measuring devices on the roof and converts them into sound.

Sights and Sounds

Artist transforms breezes on NSCC campus

By KEVIN CONCANNON
For The Item

Modern art doesn't get more modern than Windspun For Lynn, a sound sculpture featured all this month at Lynn's North Shore Community College campus. New York sound sculptor Liz Phillips, in residence last week at the new oceanside campus, has built unusual sonic environments at museums and

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arts festivals from Los Angeles to Japan. She has been commissioned to create Windspun as part of the college's twentieth anniversary celebration.

Using two anemometers and a weather vane, Windspun processes the ocean breezes into a musical landscape through a custom-built synthesizer. Sitting in the campus's east garden, listeners can watch the

anemometer cups spin furiously as the wind howls like they've never heard before. The two anemometers are placed with an ear toward different wind paths, allowing a greater range of variables for the synthesizer. At times, one anemometer might be rotating almost imperceptibly as the other seems about to fly off its axle. While the wind speed affects the melodies, the musical scales are determined by the weather vane. Phillips explains: "In this piece, it'll play different scales with different wind directions - Eastern scales when the wind is coming from the east, Western scales when it's from the west - four different scales for four directions. When there are several different fronts meeting on a day when the weather is changing, you'll hear constant shifts. It'll almost sound like a marching band with several different ethnic groups."

While each site with which Phillips works has its own special qualities, the winds alone do not account for the unique personalities of each piece. Windspun has been installed in a number of different locations. Last year the piece was featured at the Whitney Museum of American

Art's prestigious Biennial Exhibition on New York's Madison Avenue. For each installation of the piece, the artist spends anywhere from four days to two weeks "tuning" the sculpture to the environment. Once ready to work, she explores the synthesizer's many "voices," turning a knob here and there or rewiring the board. "I make my work a lot like a painter paints - with a wide palette. You mix a little of this and a little of that until you build up the right textures of background and foreground. A lot of what I'm trying to achieve is a dynamic variation that's very much like landscape - like the wind would carve sand dunes." During last Friday's opening, the piece ranged from silence to cacophony, perplexing not only students and faculty but a visiting mockingbird as well. In fact, Phillips says that birds are some of her best customers, frequently flying in to her exhibition openings for impromptu singalongs.

English teacher Carl Carlsen discovered Phillips at an art festival conducted last summer by the New England Foundation for the Arts, a regional organization which tours a variety of exhibitions, performances, and installations. Aside from the project's aesthetic merits, Carlsen was working with some purely practical considerations: the college is not insured for (more traditional) visual artworks. He also feels that the piece will expand the students' ideas about art in general. Virtually everyone who enters the building will be exposed to it, and to some extent will have to make sense of it.

Phillips' assistant for the week, electronics student Dave Litle, reports that few passers-by missed the opportunity to solicit his "explanation" of the project.

Windspun will be operating from morning to early evening every day this month at the Lynnway campus. Have you heard today's weather?