

Turning the pages of life

Katherine Venturelli's house-shaped books transcend traditions

By Victoria Dalkey
Bee Art Correspondent

For Sutter Creek artist Katherine Venturelli, whose artists' books and monotypes are on view at the Art Foundry Gallery in midtown Sacramento, the house is a symbol of the self.

Venturelli makes most of her elegant, sumptuous books in the form of rudimentary, streamlined houses. Take off the roof of one and you find inside an accordion-folded book that opens to reveal etchings or monotypes melded with texts from her journals.

Several images recur on the pages of her books — boats and ladders, cups and chalices, circles and triangles. They are archetypal symbols of change and transformation, Venturelli said.

"The house is a sacred place," she said in a recent telephone interview from her studio in the foothills. "It is a womb, a place to rejuvenate. Just as we are always working on our houses, we are changing ourselves."

Venturelli's book "Trinity," a triad of copper house forms, examines the relationship between the body, the mind and the spirit. The body is symbolized by a boat and a ladder, each emblematic of exploration and movement from one world to the next. The mind is symbolized by a bridge that forms the connection between the body and the spirit. The spirit is portrayed as a human figure caught up in an ascending spiral.

"This is an image of human energy," she explained. "We have an energy force and we are conduits for it. It is the spirit that moves through us."

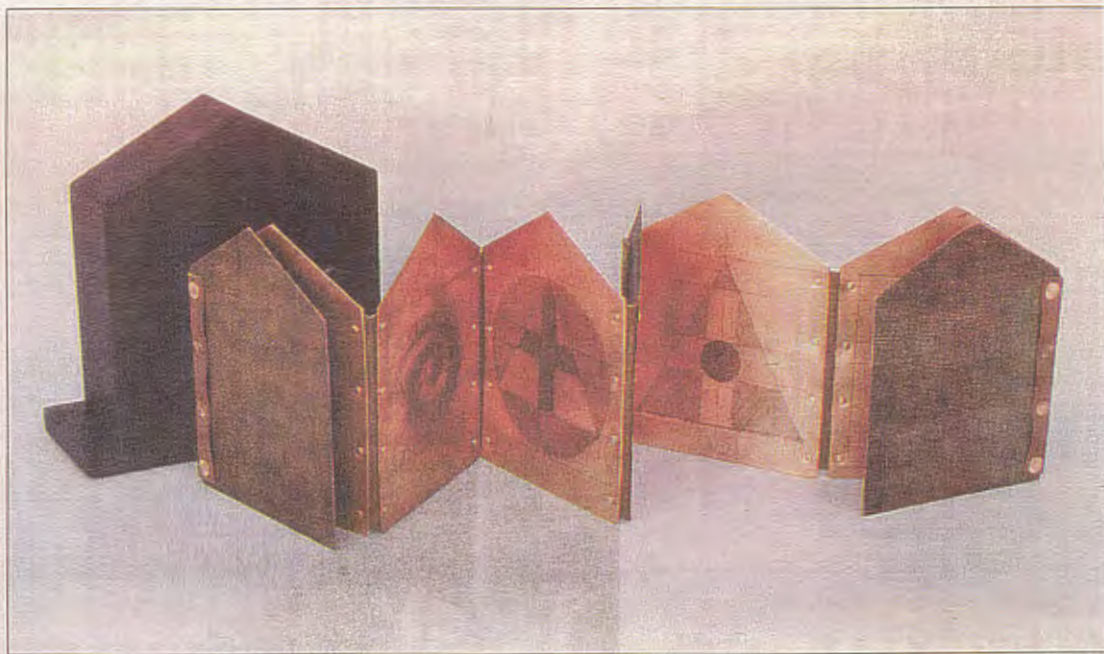
Several of Venturelli's delicate, richly textured monotypes include the image of a cup or chalice. Both are feminine symbols, she says, relating to nourishment and the force that is in us.

Triangles and circles also appear in many of her books and prints. The triangle, she noted, is a symbol of the mountain, denoting vision, and also a sign for the trinity, a conjunction of heaven, Earth and man. Circles relate to the moon, feminine cycles, the infinite and the timeless.

In addition to serving as a three-dimensional casing for Venturelli's books, houses also appear as images in many of her works. Often they are engulfed in flames.

"Fire, again, is a symbol of transformation," she said. "Fire purifies and renews life. It has power and energy, yet it destroys. Sometimes we have to destroy in order to transcend a situation. Death is a form of transformation."

Venturelli, who had been a sculptor, became fascinated with making books while attending a workshop in Santa Fe. Delighted by the accordion-folded structure of some Japanese books, she



Katherine Venturelli's "Blueprint of a Symbol" is formed from copper etching plates.

AT A GLANCE

Katherine Venturelli:
Artists' Books and Monoprints;
and Ken Matsumoto: Stone Sculpture
At the Art Foundry Gallery, 1021 R St.
Through Oct. 30, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Tuesday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sunday: (916) 444-2787.

produced her first volume, a 64-page visual interpretation of the "I Ching." The structure of the book, which unfolds to reveal its images, symbolized the unfolding of time or the facets of change.

In addition to books whose pages are etchings done on copper, some of her books — "Blueprint of a Symbol, for example — are formed from the copper etching plates themselves. "I love the look of copper," she notes. "It has reflective qualities and yet it is ephemeral. It ages and turns green. It has a wonderful patina."

