

# **Philosophical, and now artful First-ever show includes a sculptor's tribute to Franklin, on his birthday.**

January 16, 2009|By Victoria Donohoe FOR THE INQUIRER

It's time to say happy birthday to Ben Franklin. Why not celebrate that Jan. 17 occasion with a visit today to the American Philosophical Society, America's first learned society, founded by Franklin in 1743?

Featured there is an exhibit, "Manuscript As Muse," centered on Rebecca Kamen's 13 sculptures that were inspired by the treasure trove of scientific rare books and manuscripts in the society's collection. This Philadelphia native, who lives in Virginia, has included a piece, Magic Circle of Circles, relating to Franklin's experiments and observations on electricity.

Kamen's artistic skill is most apparent in her Black Hole piece, which tries to tell its story by itself, and succeeds. Most of her other works of acrylic and graphite on mylar are placed near texts that inspired them for her.

Adamantly curious about the natural world, Kamen creates images that are a resourceful patchwork of learned and invented geometric signs. Often with striking effect, she renders these statements, while keeping the focus on the inner world that she so consistently illuminates for us.

The many translucent layers she uses are as indispensable to her as pages in a book. And she handles her task here with impressive subtlety that heightens our understanding of such realities as intricate river diagrams and the complex hexagonal system that bees use to create their hives.

This first American Philosophical Society show by an artist opens up a whole world of scientific inquiry for us in a new way. I especially liked Kamen's sculpture Black Hole, gobbling up outmoded library catalog

cards, and a 1782 book's Geographical Clock. (After 227 years, the paper clock still tells time in other parts of the world. Just pull a string.)

American Philosophical Society Library, 105 S. Fifth, Philadelphia. To March 31. Mon-Fri 9-5. Free. 215-525-4161.