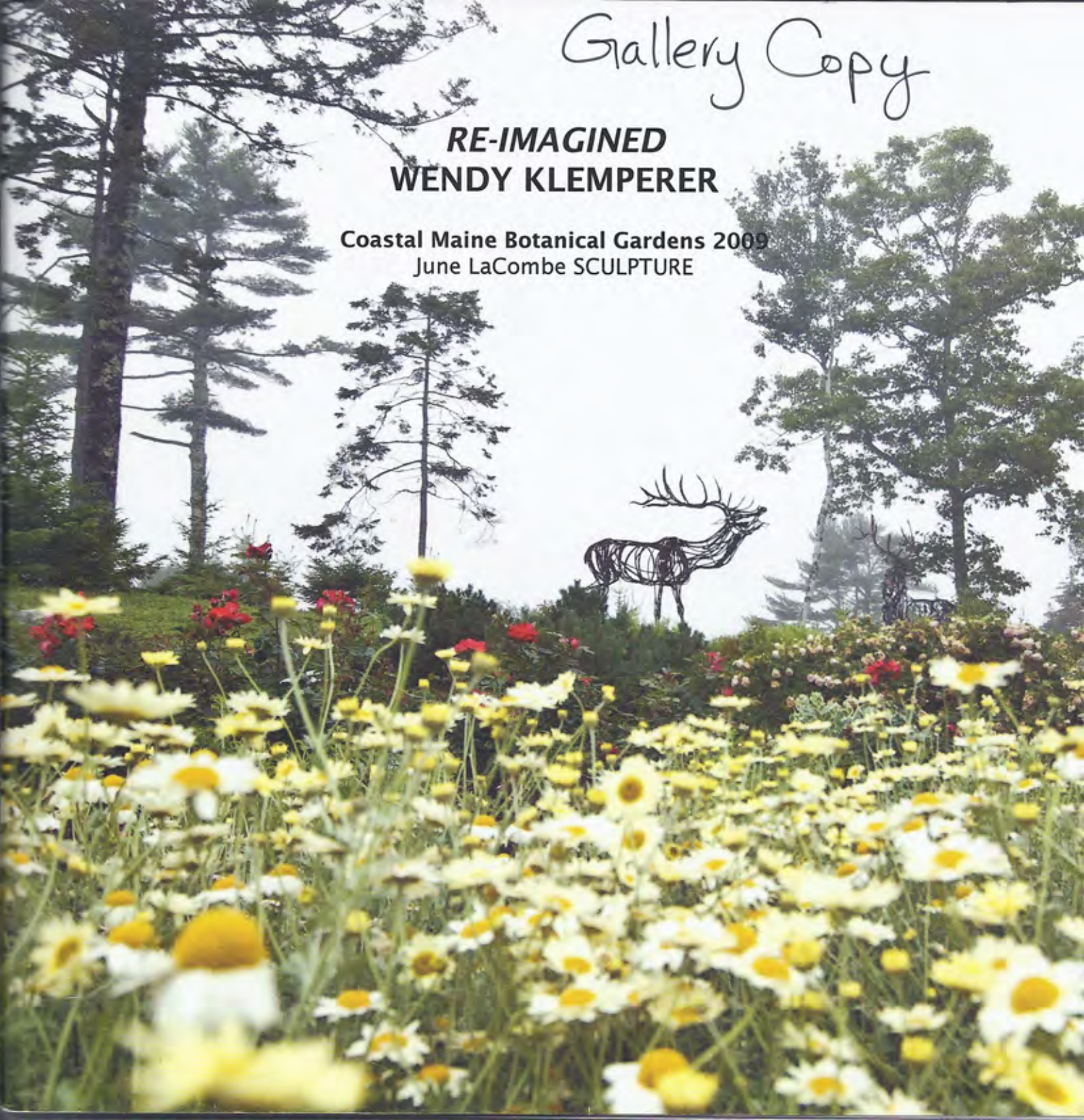
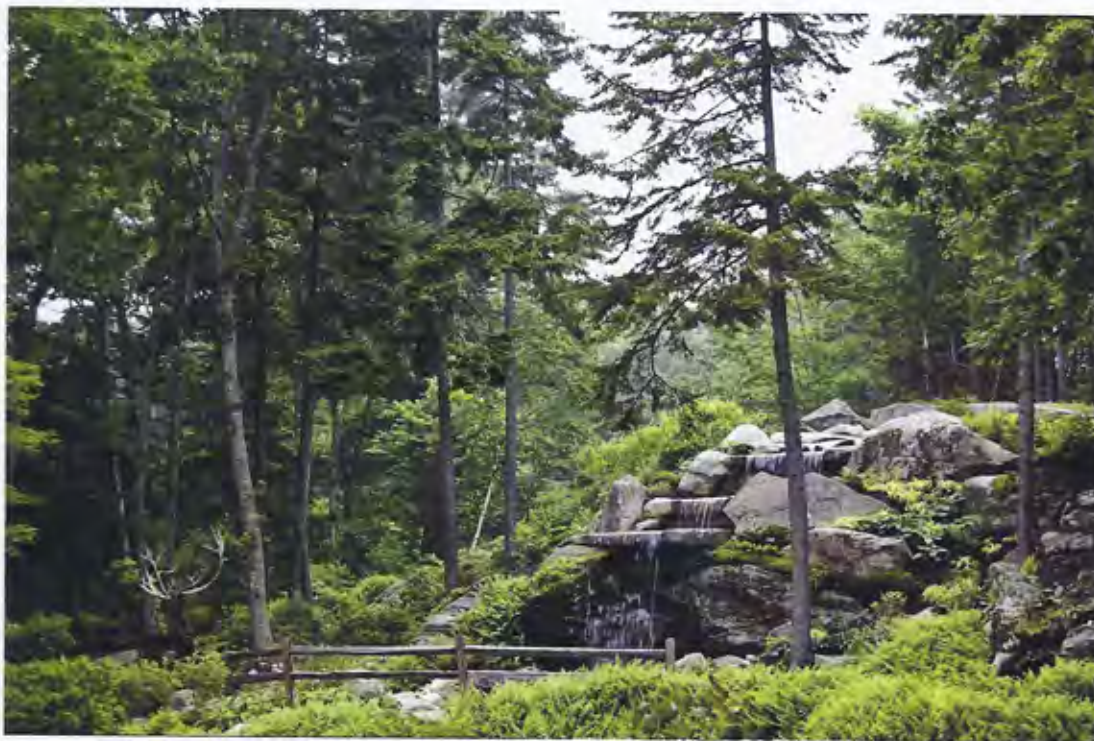


Gallery Copy

**RE-IMAGINED
WENDY KLEMPERER**

**Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens 2009
June LaCombe SCULPTURE**





RE-IMAGINED

During the summer and fall of 2009, visitors to Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens will be met by wildlife created from gestural sketches in steel by Wendy Klemperer: a calling Elk along the entry drive, Wolves on rocky outcroppings, a Mountain Lion crouched on top of a waterfall startling a Caribou below, a Lynx lurking along a dark mossy ledge, and Deer drinking from shallow pools. Species extirpated from Maine, (Caribou, Wolves, Mountain Lions, and Elk) are re-imagined with those now common on the Maine landscape.

But these are wild creatures also re-imagined by the artist, taking on mythic qualities and proportions. The animals are larger than life, predators have grown in ferocity, the antlers and racks are abstracted, all reflecting the place the wild holds in our imaginations. And the recycled materials, pulled from industrial salvage piles, give the animals a rough visceral quality. Rusty rebar, metal, saw blades, and nails are given new life in each sculpture.

Wendy Klemperer is a keen observer of animals and their behavior. We can visualize their next step as they participate with their places. The search for the next animal sighting in the woodland gardens sharpens our own observational skills. Wendy Klemperer's sculpture make us more aware of our own relationship with wildlife and the land we share.

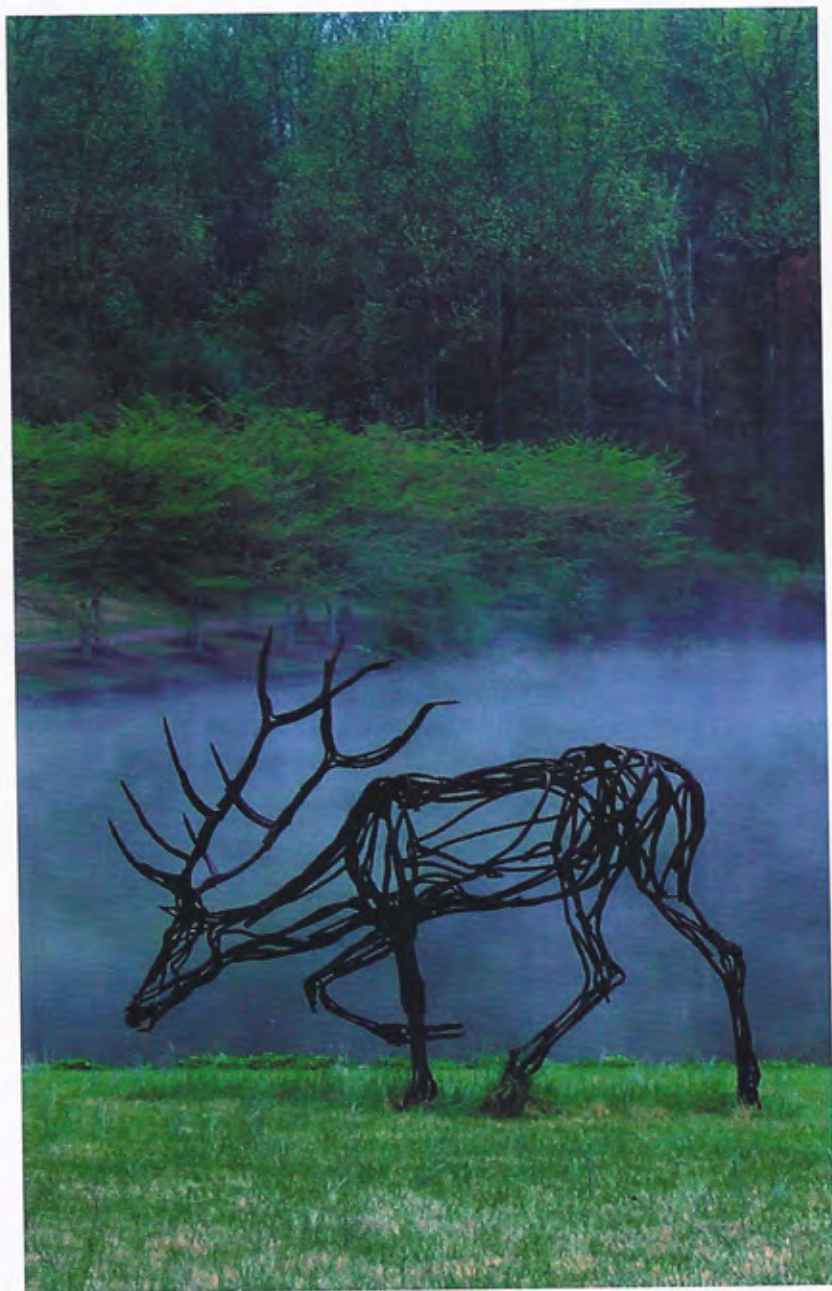


Photo by Chris Lieberman

ARTIST STATEMENT

When I was invited to show my work at CMBG, I first thought of working with images of animals found in this region, but soon found myself most interested in the ones that no longer exist in Maine. Extirpated species represent a lost group, but they have not vanished completely. Hunted out of existence, eradicated on purpose or inadvertently, and pushed out through loss of habitat, they still differ from extinct species gone forever; these animals survive elsewhere and it is possible one day they could return.

I find it exciting and physically engaging to work on a scale somewhat larger than life. The elk and caribou sculptures combine ponderous mass with the elegance and agility of some of the largest of the deer family, while the preposterous antlers create abstract, branching shapes. The size seems prehistoric, recalling an era when Elk and other giants may have wandered across all of North America. This expansion of scale reflects the place a wild beast holds in our imagination: not the actual animal, but the huge space it takes up in the mind's eye, the creature that is the basis for legend and myth. I want the experience of encountering the sculpture to elicit a jolt of excitement like that of encountering a wild animal. The Cougar is considered eradicated from this area, but sightings keep occurring; no one knows for sure of their certitude. Presence and absence play back and forth in the sculptures. A network of diverse lines builds the form, which together appear to be in constant motion drawing and redrawing the animal. The piece is simultaneously there and not there, as if disappearing before our very eyes. This creates a tension akin to the apparition-like quality of a fleetingly glimpsed wild creature, gone in a flash, just barely perceived before it vanishes into the woods again. Largely transparent, the surrounding environment fills the negative spaces between the lines of sculpture; emptiness is imbedded in the piece and echoes the absence of that animal from this land. Naturalism is an underpinning of the work, but just the starting point for the imaginative, expressive development of form as motion.

Obsolete industry lingers in the sculptures. The material has a raw, rough-edged quality. A Lynx studded with washers, a Red Fox ruffed with saw blades, or a Wolf bristling as if on fire with rusty nails explore color and texture: raw metal, rust, oil on steel, epoxy, and at times paint. They are built with tactile directness and the material retains its legacy of the scrap yard and construction site; industrial refuse discarded and ravaged by demolition holds energy and potential new life.

The work ultimately is not just about animals, but uses the body language of animals to express a feeling or state of being, with motion conveying emotion. The driving force is the dynamic line building form as visceral raw energy. These are animals of human imagination, interpretations of the meaning of the animal, and meditations on the state of being alive. The sculptures, though still, evoke life re-imagined.

WORK PROCESS

Wendy Klemperer

To make the sculptures, I scavenge scrap yards and construction sites for evocatively shaped pieces of metal, looking for pre-existing lines and shapes with which to draw. Most of the metal is rebar, the reinforcement rod used in buildings, bridges, and highways. Pulled from the concrete for recycling, it is tortuously twisted with fantastic curves and shapes and comes in a great variety of texture and thickness. Such pieces contain energy and a potential new life. I collect loads in my pickup truck and take it back to my studio. A large sculpture of 1,000 lbs requires about 2,000 lbs of raw material.

I start with an idea of the type of animal it's going to be and have a rough mental image of the gesture, then I research photos and make sketches to understand the motion and character of the animal. I put all those images up around me for reference as I work. I weld a few pieces of rebar together to make a simple tripod that I can build from. It's very free form; I don't measure or draw it out exactly first. I work out a backbone, which helps determine the gesture, and then sketch freely, welding steel line to line in the air. For the most part I choose pre-existing curved lines from my pile, and cut them free with the oxy-acetylene torch. If I need to adjust the curve I can heat and bend with the torch. Because the arc welder is immediate, I can tack-weld a steel line in place, step back and look, and if I don't like it, make revisions.

I refer to drawings and photos to refine the sculpture. Usually the whole piece gets tack-welded in this fashion, and it's only when I'm sure about everything, each section gets welded thoroughly. Because it's not a solid form, all the connections have to be strong, so I spend days on the final welding to make the piece able to survive transportation and installation.





Photo by Wendy Klemperer



Photo by Barbara Freeman



ELK HERD on Great Lawn



WALKING ELK *Salvaged steel (93 x 108 x 44)*



CALLING ELK, (117 x 112 x 70) TALL ELK (123 x 90 x 74) Salvaged steel



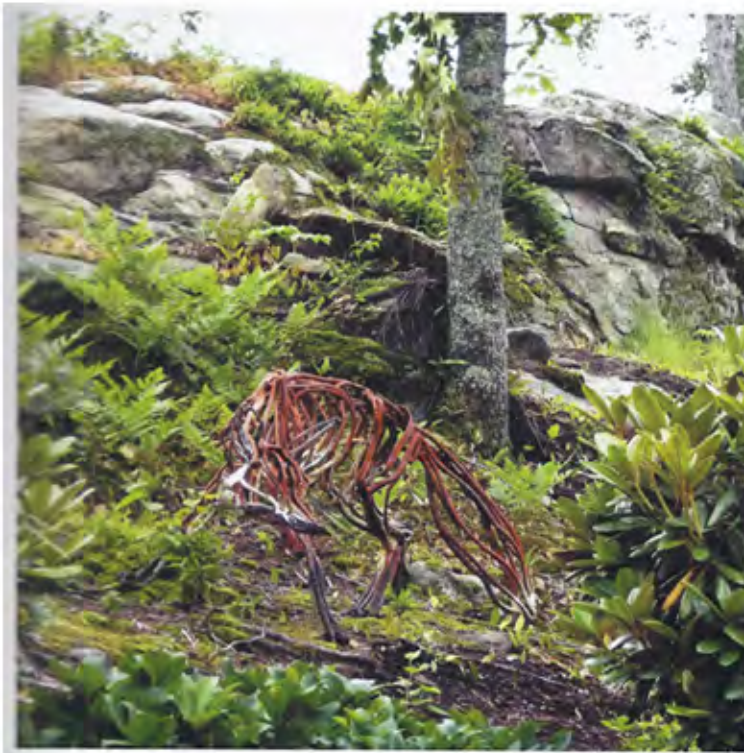
DRINKING DOE Salvaged steel (55 x 60 x 18)



ALERT RED STAG *Salvaged steel (102 x 96 x 60)*



YEARLING *Salvaged steel, paint (53 x 64 x 31)*



RED RED FOX *Salvaged steel, paint (27 x 57 x 32)*



FOXY FOX (VULPES VULPES) *Salvaged steel (32 x 48 x 14)*



FIERCE WOLF *Salvaged steel (50 x 81 x 36)*



FENRIR (OMAR) *Salvaged steel, nails (52 x 100 x 36)*



FELINE SHADOW *Steel (36 x 96 x 1/8)*



WHITE LYNX *Salvaged steel, washers, chain, epoxy, paint (32 x 69 x 34)*