

ART

The Nature of Art

June LaCombe, Maine's leading curator of outdoor art, continues her landscape explorations with two major sculpture exhibits.

BY EDGAR ALLEN BEEM

June LaCombe, Maine's queen of outdoor art, has organized a pair of major exhibitions this summer – *Sculpture at Maine Audubon: A Celebration of Art and Nature* at Maine Audubon's Gilsland Farm headquarters in Falmouth, and *Sculpture at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens: Pollinators* in Boothbay. The Maine Audubon show, consisting of 80 works, is a celebration of LaCombe's 25 years of organizing outdoor sculpture exhibitions and placing art in the Maine landscape. The Boothbay show features 20 pieces inspired by the birds, bees, butterflies, and beetles that are the focus of the garden's 2014 theme, A Year of Pollinators. "I have always been interested in art and the environment," says LaCombe, who has done doctoral work on the use of art in environmental education.

LaCombe dates her curatorial career to an exhibition she organized in 1989 at the Aucocisco Nursery, in North Yarmouth, but she actually began exploring art in the landscape some 30 years ago when she worked as a naturalist, sanctuary planner, and education director at Maine Audubon. Over the past 25 years, she has curated exhibitions not only at Maine Audubon and Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, but also the Chewonki Foundation, in Wiscasset,

June LaCombe is curating two outdoor sculpture exhibits this summer. *Sunflower with Bees* by Christopher Russell (top) is part of the *Pollinators* exhibit at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens. *Birds of a Feather* by Cynthia Stroud (left) and *Porcupine* by Wendy Klemperer are included in *A Celebration of Art and Nature* at Maine Audubon's Gilsland Farm, in Falmouth.



Barn Gallery in Ogunquit, Maine Festival in Brunswick, Waterfall Arts in Montville, Blum Gallery and Farrand Gardens in Bar Harbor, and at her own Hawk Ridge Farm in Pownal.

LaCombe shows the works of more than 40 sculptors. Most of her exhibitions feature, among other regulars, welded steel animals by Wendy Klemperer, chiseled granite abstractions by Gary Haven Smith, shiny steel pieces by Stephen Porter, wood and stone beasts by Cabot Lyford and Lise Becu, stone figures by Roy Patterson, ceramic vessels by Sharon Townshend, and blunt little birds by the late Edwin Gamble.

LaCombe, an artist herself, possesses a talent for locating art in the environment in ways that are transformational rather than ornamental, ways that heighten the experience of place. Beyond her exhibitions, she has also worked with collectors to place works of art in public spaces such as the Klemperer deer and Jesse Salisbury stone carvings at Portland International Jetport and sculpture by Lise Becu and Mark Herrington at Curtis Memorial Library, in Brunswick.

In the catalogue for the Maine Audubon exhibition, LaCombe writes that "art can help us to rediscover a reverence for place."

"Placing art in the landscape, where one places it, is powerful in itself," LaCombe says. "It can become its place, it can reflect its place, it can define a place and it can be a place." 🐝

IF YOU GO

Sculpture at Maine Audubon: A Celebration of Art and Nature runs through September 30 at Maine Audubon's Gilsland Farm, in Falmouth (207-781-2330, maineaudubon.org). *Sculpture at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens: Pollinators* in Boothbay (207-633-4333, mainegardens.org) also runs through September 30. Hawk Ridge Farm, in Pownal (207-688-4468, junelacombesculpture.com) is open by appointment except during August.

COURTESY JUNE LACOMBE