

DISPATCH

Roberley Bell and Boston Sculptors at Chesterwood

When tackling the challenge of outdoor work, sculptors can either collaborate or compete with the landscape. Some of the 24 artists in "Boston Sculptors Gallery at Chesterwood 2015" chose the former route, while others chose the latter. Their success varied. In general, artists who worked in screaming colors made me want to look away and focus on the lush surrounding greenery: Chesterwood has 122 acres of sweeping lawns, a formal garden, and woodland paths. Interestingly, no one selected the estate's most dramatic setting—an overlook at the far end of one of the paths.

Several vividly colored pieces did succeed. Murray Dewart's aluminum *Big Red* continued his ongoing series of archways and gates. *Big Red* was a very bright red sited amid trees in the woods. It sported a red aluminum boat shape on top, a curious and even humorous touch in the landlocked setting. Caroline Bagenal's *Words and Leaves* also used red. A library's worth of books, all bound in red, hung from the branches of a tree, moving delicately in the breeze, seemingly alive, commanding attention but out of range for reading.

They also recalled French's association with various authors of his day, including Emerson and the Alcotts. Laura Evans's *Threading Yellow* also used vivid color to good effect. The yellow line, reminiscent of those that cordon off construction sites and crime scenes, skipped merrily all over the place, through trees and branches, disappearing coyly and reappearing, breaking into little yellow flags that blew in the breeze.

Some artists used white to advantage. Elizabeth Alexander's *Golden Dream*, a latticework structure that looked a bit like a fallen Eiffel Tower, with roots protruding from the bottom as if it had been planted in the ground, was surrounded by trees that seemed relatively triumphant by comparison, although some of them had also fallen. In Eric Sealine's *Aegis*, clouds of white fabric row cover, typically used to protect plants, billowed in the trees, responding to the wind. Andy Zimmermann's *Floating Flower* also resembled clouds, though it was made of welded steel and polypropylene and sat on the lawn. Unfortunately its white shapes were so sturdily anchored that they couldn't move; the motion of the surrounding trees was more captivating.

Nancy Winship Milliken's *Landmark I, II, and III* consisted of three tall, skinny, pyramidal structures made of barn board weathered to gray, along with steel, feathers, leather, stones, and clumps of wool. A tribute to the history of New England farming, the forms were assertive and ruggedly majestic, needling their way up against the backdrop of Monument Mountain. They stood on a roughly

Above: Caroline Bagenal, *Words and Leaves*, 2015. Books, paint, and fishing line, 15 x 25 x 25 ft. Right: Leslie Wilcox, *Barkmoore*, 2015. Stainless steel screen and staples, 12 x 6 x 6 ft. Far right: Mags Harries, *Columnar Reflection*, 2015. Tree, pipe, and aluminum leaf, 2 elements, 7.6 x 1.3 ft. diameter and 11 x 1.3 ft. diameter.



mown lawn, visible at some distance, commanding a large share of the Chesterwood space. Mags Harries's *Columnar Reflection*—a pair of wood and aluminum leaf columns at the entrance from the formal garden to the woods, which is otherwise marked by a pair of stone columns with Ionic capitals—also used its setting to advantage. One of Harries's columns was toppled; the other leaned over. Like their site, they were somewhere between nature and designed landscape.

French's association with Lincoln through his iconic monument is of course well known and highly trumpeted by the estate. Christina Zwart took a more humorous and subtle

look at the connection with Chesterwood in *Heads or Tails*, which involved hundreds of pennies, all bearing Lincoln's profile, flanking a stone staircase. You might not have noticed them without the label—they looked like the spilled contents of a coin purse.

Leslie Wilcox's *Barkmoore* is one of her signature stainless steel screen tree garments. Twelve feet high, this one looked just the right size to be wrapped around a very tall beech tree. It was the piece that looked most at home in its bucolic setting and, along with Zwart's penny piece, the one you might miss were it not for the label.

—Christine Temin

