

The Science of Art: Turning Used Metal into Sculptures

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Here's proof that the career path we plan on is often not where life takes us.

Wendy Klemperer is an artist--a sculptor who crafts animals out of twisted steel once used in buildings and bridges. Her work, selections of which are now on exhibit at the Museum of Art in the Paul Creative Arts Center, has been shown nationwide. She is a graduate of the Pratt Institute in New York, where she earned a bachelor of fine arts in sculpture in 1983.

But before then, she studied biochemistry at Harvard.

“Both of my parents are scientists and I was encouraged to become one. I’ve always been fascinated with molecular evolution—with randomness; the way things change,” Klemperer says. “But art had always been there; I took classes all through college. I did get that biochem degree but art is my true love.”

A Brooklyn resident, Klemperer moved to New York to pursue that love full time after graduating Harvard, supporting herself waitressing and bartending for what she calls “a long time.”

It was a welding class she took during art school that shaped her future work. Using repurposed metal—“found steel”—and epoxy, she began sculpting life-size wolves and horses and deer, charmed by the image of their strength and energy.

“I really appreciate the way animals express themselves through their movements,” says Klemperer, who spends part of the year in Nelson, which is east of Keene. “I’ve been fascinated by that my whole life.”

Her exhibit “Restrain and Release” depicts gnarling skeletons of chained hounds coming out of the walls of the Paul Arts Center into Mills Courtyard. “Caribou” (Ihumataq) is located outside the Johnson Theater.



The hounds, with chains attached to their necks, weigh about 150 pounds and are nearly 4 feet long. Klemperer scavenges scrap yards and construction sites for materials to use in her sculptures. Most of the metal is rebar, the reinforcement rod used in buildings, bridges, and

highways.

“I’ve collected about 1,000 pounds of steel. I have it in a big pile in the parking lot near my house in Brooklyn. It’s my outdoor studio,” Klemperer says. “When I’m looking through it, I’ll think, ‘That would make a good shoulder blade. Or, this looks like a leg.’”

She likes the “raw, immediate quality” of the metal, saying it creates “a tension like the sudden sighting of a wild beast.” Klemperer also works in colored wax.

“An installation is a lot of work but I like my work to be out in the world,” Klemperer says. “I like knowing it’s there.” The exhibit at the Museum of Art will be there through 2015. (Read more information here.)

The museum is open September - May, Monday through Wednesday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.; Thursday, 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 1 - 5 p.m. During the academic year, the museum is closed Fridays, University holidays, and during exhibition changes.

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