

# Sculpture exhibit beckons you to Hawk Ridge Farm

Evocative works by artist Meg Brown Payson headline ‘Awakening’ at June LaCombe’s home in Pownal.



George Sherwood, “Memory of Fibonacci,” stainless steel

Image 1 of 3



**By JORGE S. ARANGO**

It’s time for June, by which I mean the month, as well as the woman: private art dealer June LaCombe.

Twice yearly, in June and October, LaCombe gathers the work of artists from around New England – many from Maine – and exhibits their sculptural work around her

30) sprawls along sylvan paths, a meadow adjacent to a pasture, a detached garage, a barn, the backyard and around her pool.

With almost 160 works by 40 artists, La-Combe's sculpture shows are indisputably blockbuster events. But crowds won't mar the experience because she requires reservations (made through the website). You won't probably like it all, but the sheer volume and diversity—media include bronze, granite, basalt, stainless steel, copper, aluminum, stoneware and weathered steel—ensure there is something for everyone.

Each exhibition has a headliner, and this year it is well-known coastal Maine artist Meg Brown Payson.

She most recently exhibited at Cove Street Arts in Portland, but the most succinct description of her work, to my mind, was a catalog essay by Edgar Allen Beem for "Chiasm," her 2014 exhibit at Merrimack College in Andover, Massachusetts.

Her art, wrote Beem, is a response "to the mysteries of creation. The chromatic loops, strands, cells and protozoan forms that animate her work read like the primordial soup of which all life emerges, whether from the microscopic broth of the Petri dish or the cosmic plasma of the Big Bang."

The beautiful patterns of her paintings and textiles can resemble endlessly dividing cells and spirochetes, leaves on the surface of a lake or colorful Rorschach tests, among other associations. For her sculptural works, she has printed these patterns onto aluminum panels using a dye-sublimation process, a computer-generated technique that employs heat to transfer images onto metal.

When placed in the woods, those with a green palette are like camouflage, coming up on you almost by surprise. Others in blues or bright oranges announce their presence from a distance and bring a stunning blast of color to the monochromatic greens and browns of the forest. They are all rectangular panels, some standing alone and others in groupings. The latter feel most interesting to me, as they evoke the sensation of figures quietly immersed in a secret conversation.

They can telegraph the quiet dignity of Rodin's compelling political sculpture "The Burghers of Calais."

Singly they are also lovely, especially when they emerge out of a stand of ferns or a mound of perennials.

But the effect is not as lasting as the clustered works. Whether alone or in groups, they look most impressive when the legs that support them are not visible but, rather, the bottoms of the panels come flush with the ground. The legs are intentionally designed to raise the panels above whatever foliage might obscure them. But when they are visible, they feel spindly and diminish the more powerful monolith effect, especially because their barely one-inch thickness emphasizes their slight volumetric presence.

Two other exceptional standouts in the show are David Allen and Miles Chapin. Both work in granite, though Chapin also explores bronze. Allen's "Elemental Goddess" (#118 on the tour map), "Expanse" (#154) and "Halo" (#123) reveal what distinguishes this sculptor from others working in this medium: the unexpectedly graceful kinetic energy he creates that is counterintuitive to a material we perceive as heavy and immovable.

"Goddess" is an exquisite, perfectly smooth U-shaped piece of granite sitting atop a roughly chiseled granite bench. It appears stationary, yet the gentlest push interrupts its inertia, activating a slow, calm rocking movement. "Expanse" is a flawlessly polished inverted top shape sitting on another roughly chiseled base.

Again, its apparent weighty stability belies the fact that it can be rotated easily by the viewer.

And "Halo" is nothing more than a technically impeccable ring hanging from a tree, though carving and polishing it without cracking was surely a feat unto itself. As it spins gently in the breeze, it frames various views. Its title comes most stunningly to life when it perfectly rings a marvelous circular sculpture by George Sherwood called "Memory of Fibonacci" (#122) in the distance, which arranges metallic discs in the pattern of seeds on a sunflower that glisten as air currents cause them to oscillate in the sunlight.

Chapin is a magician at making stone (“Traverse,” #112) – and in the case of “Flutter 2/5” (#83), bronze – feel fluid and pliable. His meticulously executed sculptures excavate rib-bon-like forms from these dense, implacable granite blocks that twist and tangle into themselves in one continuous line, as if perpetually dancing in midair.

Of course, Mark Pettegrow, who splits his time between New Hope, Pennsylvania, and Kennebunkport, has been casting liquid-like forms in bronze for years.

His “Tidal Series: Eventide” (#84) recalls the swirl of an eddy, while “Arabesque 7/15” (#85) reproduces the intertwining line of this ornament common to Moorish design.

Whimsy also abounds at Hawk Ridge Farm this season. Most delightful is “Morning Cloud” (#94) by Bar Harbor-based Melita Westerlund, a polychrome rustling of irregular painted-aluminum shapes. Westerlund has several other playful works here, including a quirky bench called “After Picasso” (#156). Lincolnville’s Antje Roitzsch, who began as a fine art jeweler, contributes several colorful, Calder-like powder-coated mobiles. They are fun, but when executed in copper they feel not only ideally balanced between sculpture and jewelry, but also handsomely well-suited to siting in the woods, as a quintet of them proves here.

They are “earrings” for the trees.

For sheer sensual form, it’s impossible to compete with South Portland-based Sharon Townsend’s “Personage #4 and #5” (#107).

Equally evocative of trees and women’s bodies, they conjure the virginal Greek dryad Daphne, whose father, the river god Peneus, protected her by turning her into a laurel tree as she fled from a lovesick Apollo.

Her acute sensitivity and admiration for nature – and her deft handling of the ceramic medium – is also poignantly on display in the garage LaCombe’s husband, Bill Ginn, built to charge their electric vehicles. The wall sculpture “Cascade” (#40) appears like layers of birch descending the vertical plane yet appreciating that it took such labor to recreate it in this medium – forming, glazing, firing, etc. – makes it precious and encourages us to take a closer, more appreciative look at what nature already gives us.

The sense of gifts from nature is even more literal in three other Townsend clay works in this gallery that appear as sticks and twigs wrapped in birch bark.

The small gallery also exhibits three delicate works by another Maine artist, Pat Campbell, whose freestanding and wall constructions are made of rice paper and reeds. Her art draws heavily on Buddhism and Japanese culture as well as nature.

They are “meditation pieces,” she has said, “meant to be peaceful and about peace.” Her more overtly Buddhist works – lotus blossoms, ginkgo leaves – are not shown here. Instead we happily get the movement of water, in “Sea Play” (#61) and “Wave” (#38), and wing forms, in “Flight” (#26).

This is just a sampling of the riches on display. Your next opportunity to experience this special gathering of artists will be in October.

Don't miss it!

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**IF YOU GO WHAT:** “Awakening,” sculpture exhibit **WHERE:** Hawk Ridge Farm, 90 Minot Road, Pownal **WHEN:** Through June 30 **HOURS:** Every day by appointment **ADMISSION:** Free **INFO:** [junelacombe-sculpture.com](http://junelacombe-sculpture.com)