

Sporting art in the Genesee Country Museum, Mumford, New York

BY VICTORIA SANDWICK SCHMITT

A YOUNG MAN'S vision became a reality when the John L. Wehle Gallery of Sporting Art of the Genesee Country Museum in Mumford, New York, opened in May 1976. More than thirty years ago John L. Wehle of Rochester envisioned a collection focused exclusively on scenes of the hunt, animals in the wild, and the last American frontiers—the West and Alaska. He wanted to document the changes in taste and style which sporting art had undergone in the past centuries, and he wanted to record wildlife around the world before it was eradicated. His interest in and understanding of these subjects allowed him to judge the pictorial accuracy of the works he collected.

Today the Gallery of Sporting Art houses a permanent collection of nearly six hundred paintings, prints, and bronzes spanning four centuries. The subjects range from fox hunting and wild-fowl shooting to trotting horse races, broncobusting, and North American and African animals.

The collector's father, Louis A. Wehle, was a New York State Conservation Commissioner who frequently took his two sons on hunting and fishing trips in the United States, Europe, and Africa. The sportsmen who accompanied the Wehle family whether politicians, writers, businessmen, or members of the judiciary, shared a common interest in the outdoors. "But most important of all," John



Pl. I. *The Game Larder*, by Francis Barlow (1626 or 1627-1704), 167. Signed and dated "Francis Barlow 1672" at lower left. Oil on canvas, 4 by 54 1/2 inches. The first native sporting art appeared in England in the late seventeenth century when the country became increasingly wealthy, settled, and ruraly oriented. Barlow anticipated nearly every subject which later sporting artists depicted: domestic farmyard scenes, wild fowl, horse portrait races, hunting scenes, angling, and wild animals not native to England. While he obviously drew from Flemish still lifes of game for this painting, he rendered his subjects with more straightforward, lively naturalism. *The objects illustrated here are in the John L. Wehle Gallery of Sporting Art, Genesee Country Museum, Mumford, New York. Photograph by Richard Margolis.*

VICTORIA SANDWICK SCHMITT, a graduate of Connecticut College, has been curator of the John L. Wehle Gallery of Sporting Art since 1978.



Fig. 6. *Hamadryas Baboon*, by Rembrandt Bugatti (1884–1916), c. 1910. Inscribed “R. Bugatti,” and in relief “CIRE-
PERDUE/A. A. HEBRARD” and “(6)” on the base. Bronze; height 17 inches. Bugatti, an Italian, was the first important animal sculptor to break with the French tradition of strict realism. Like his predecessors, he was thoroughly familiar with animal behavior, having spent much time at the Antwerp zoo. He worked very quickly and if he could not finish a model in a day, he abandoned it. This is one of his most striking works. *Danicic photograph.*

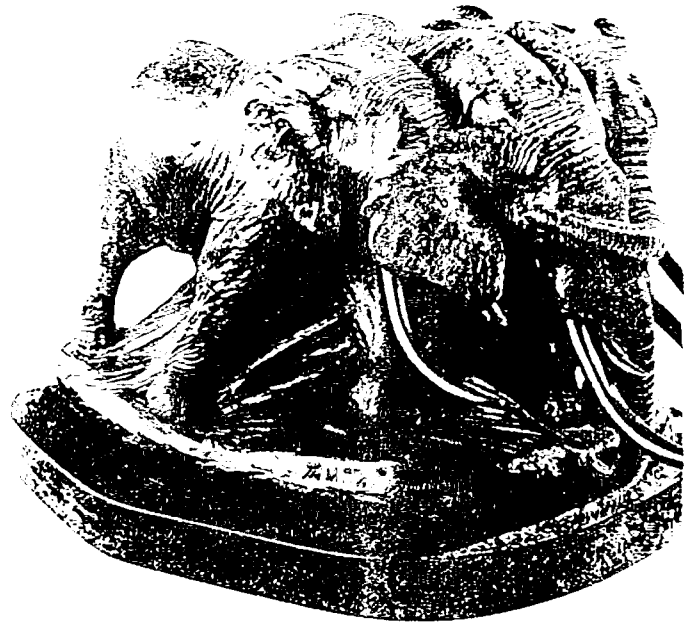


Fig. 7. *The Wounded Comrade*, by Carl Akeley (1864–1926), 1913. Inscribed in relief on the base, “The Wounded Comrade. Carl E. Akeley 1913”; “Cast for John T. McCutcheon/Our Comrade in Tembo Land C.E.A.”; and “ROMAN BRONZE WORKS NY. Bronze; height 11½ inches. Akeley was a pioneer in taxidermy who worked for the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago from 1895 to 1909 and for the American Museum of Natural History in New York City from 1909 until his death. He made several expeditions to Africa to study and collect specimens for the African Hall of the American Museum of Natural History, on one occasion at least accompanied by John T. McCutcheon (1870–1949), a cartoonist for the *Chicago Tribune*, who was also an aviator. Akeley’s firsthand knowledge of animal behavior and anatomy enabled him to elevate taxidermy to an art and to produce several sensitive and realistic sculptures of animals. The social behavior of elephants appears to have much in common with that of humans; it is not uncommon for them to wrap the trunks and tusks around a wounded member of the herd to keep it moving. *Danicic photograph.*

Fig. 8. *Rhinoceros Charging*, by Jonathan Kenworthy (b. 1943), 1971. Inscribed “KENWORTHY 1971 1/5” on the base. Bronze; height 12½ inches. Kenworthy, an Englishman, was invited to attend the Royal College of Art when he was only eleven years old. He studied animal anatomy at the Royal Veterinary College and later dissected animals at the Veterinary Department of University College in Nairobi, Kenya. The lively surfaces of his sculptures add energy to his representations of wildlife. “I am always alert to that sudden spectacular burst of movement which determines survival,” he wrote. “When a startled Rhino wheeled round with surprising agility to charge my landrover, he instantly became a compelling subject in every way” (Jonathan Kenworthy to Victoria Schmitt, February 26, 1982, in the archives of the John L. Wehle Gallery of Sporting Art). *Danicic photograph.*

