



Staff photo by Doug Jor

Sarah Speare, project adviser for the Forest City Annual sculpture show at Deering Oaks, tries to repair a recently vandalized sculpture made by Beth Galston of Somerville, Mass. Like other sculptures in the park, Galston's work was damaged by nighttime vandals.

Vandals damage Deering Oaks artwork

● Show organizers are looking for witnesses who may have seen the vandals at work.

By LLOYD FERRISS
Staff Writer

Vandals ripped and toppled James Calderwood's whimsical steel sculpture of a little house. They broke Lucy Hodgson's tree sculpture and heavily damaged John BonSignore's 500-pound creation of fieldstone and steel.

The artworks are among five beset upon by vandals since the Forest City Annual outdoor exhibit opened in Deering Oaks in late July. The pieces sustained their most costly hit Saturday night, and show organizers estimate damage at \$4,000 to \$6,000.

"When you come into Maine, you see that sign 'The way life should be,' and I'm not sure anymore."

John BonSignore, sculptor from Connecticut

Some artists say the damage is even more costly, and those staging the event are worried.

"When vandalism is persistent as it is here, you eventually have a hard time attracting artists to exhibit outdoors," said Evan Haynes, director of the Forest City Annual, which is sponsored by the Danforth Gallery and the city. "I have no idea who's done this."

Portland police are investigating but have no suspects, Sgt. Vern Malloch said Monday.

Show organizers are looking for witnesses who may have seen van-

dals at work.

"There are some real serious criminal activities going on here," said Sarah Speare, project adviser for the Forest City Annual. "We need the public's help."

The exhibit, which began July 26 and runs through Oct. 18, is the second Forest City Annual. Last year's outdoor sculpture event on Congress Street suffered practically no vandalism.

Artists say the extent of damage this year is shocking.

John BonSignore, a sculptor from Connecticut whose 6-foot-high, rock

and steel creation was toppled Saturday, said vandals had to work hard to knock over the piece, which was anchored with steel into 1,000 pounds of concrete.

"They had to do more than rock the piece to knock it over. They had to manipulate the steel fittings," said BonSignore, whose ruined sculpture is much like another he sold recently for \$9,000.

"When you come into Maine, you see that sign 'The way life should be,' and I'm not sure anymore," BonSignore said. "I haven't experienced this kind of damage in major cities, including Manhattan."

Like BonSignore, James Calderwood of Durham, N.H., was surprised to see his "Caged Chair" sculpture torn from its concrete mooring this summer. It has since been repaired.

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"I had that same sculpture in a state park in Brooklyn, N.Y., and there was no damage," Calderwood said. "But that was a fenced-in park. Deering Oaks is wide open. There are many ways to disappear."

BonSignore's sculpture, a stuffed chair in a house-like cage, was the first to suffer damage, shortly after

the exhibit opened in July. Then signs in Braille and English, all made from shovels, were ripped from concrete. A wire sculpture on a tree was ripped, and a tree sculpture was damaged.

The ferocity of the attacks on art has puzzled show organizers, who involved the Parkside neighborhood in the art celebration. The project that put sculpture in the park also included some art teaching at the Parkside Community Center, Speare said, and many in the neigh-

borhood voiced appreciation for the show.

But there may have been some bad feelings. Last week, after a review critical of the show in the Casco Bay Weekly newspaper, one park user yelled "Dumb art!" at Speare, while she was making adjustments to one exhibit.

Despite the damage, the co-director of the Danforth Gallery, Helen Rivas, says they'll stage the show again next year, probably on the Eastern Promenade.