



Deborah Butterfield
Hoku (Untitled 2411), 2001
Unique cast bronze

**Deborah Butterfield
(born 1949-California)**

and “Hoku”-KIA Collection

While working on equine sculptures at her Montana Ranch, Deborah Butterfield will often go outdoors to interact with her live horses, give them a carrot, and thoroughly enjoy each moment of being in their presence. She has said “I interpret the world through animals”... I have been owned by some wonderful horses in my life and my work is my way of remembering, honoring, and enlarging, making them as huge as they are in my heart”. As a very young woman Butterfield thought she would become a veterinarian; she maintains a tactile connection with her beloved animals by riding and training them, and by talking as well as listening to them.

Butterfield is a renowned sculptor, exclusively creating horses out of sticks, metal, and bronze. She was born on the day of the 75th running of the Kentucky Derby; she believes this to be the source of her love and passion for horses. At 5 years of age she began riding lessons which evolved into learning dressage, with this came a consuming desire to draw horses, for which she was teased by her classmates.

During a time of pursuing a Bachelor and later a Master's degree in Fine Arts from the University of California-Davis, Butterfield lived on a horse ranch for \$25 per month rent, arranging her environment to include her inspiration. Butterfield originally “set out to be a potter” and her first works were ceramic saddles in the decorative style of the Ming and Sung dynasties of China, utilizing the colors and poppy flowers of that time; however, making the wooden stands for the saddles proved problematic, as Butterfield was “terrified of table saws”. Butterfield's first horses were made of plaster; she painted them with bright colors to avert the realism of the form-of course they were very heavy and cumbersome. Coming of age in a time of increased environmental awareness, Butterfield began to create more earthy horses of sticks,

mud, and straw. The degradable property of these materials prompted a search for a more long-lasting medium, and so Butterfield began to use scrap metal and other found objects in her sculpture. Butterfield discovered that a horse's body proportions were the same as hers, and her earliest works included only mares. As she progressed in her work Butterfield created reclining horses; saying " a horse will lay down when relaxed and feeling safe". She compared her own growing confidence in the face of "predator, wolf (art) critics" to this "displaced self-portrait" of lessening vulnerability. Butterfield celebrates the horse in its own right; she depicts the state of mind of the horse using "internalized gestures" that can be intuited by the viewer.

For the creation of "Hoku", parts of an oak tree on Butterfield's Montana ranch were selected for their shape, weight, curvature, color, and texture. This is true of her other pieces . She has found that the most interesting bits of wood and vine are also the most fragile. After assembling the sticks, twigs, branches and vines, she photographs the assembled horse from all angles; the sticks are documented as to their relationship to every other stick in the horse-figure. The sticks are sent to Walla Walla Foundry in Washington state, where she consults with her long-time collaborator, Mark Anderson in the bronzing process. The following lines describe the lost wax technique of casting the pieces in bronze; they can be found in the Docent paper written by Tracy Kleinstecker in 2012, and cannot be improved upon: " She created a ceramic shell over the wood and fired each piece separately. The firing incinerated the wood, leaving a very detailed impression of texture. After firing, the kiln temperature was lowered, and the shell removed. Hot wax was poured in the cavity of the shell, rotated, then poured out again many times, leaving a wax film inside the shell 3/16ths of an inch thick. Wax rods called "gates" were attached to the top of the shells and then were submerged into a form made of plaster molding material. When the plaster hardened, the piece was placed inside a kiln again and the wax melted away, leaving a hollow core. The form was pulled from the kiln and molten bronze was poured into the core.

After the metal cooled, the ceramic and plaster molds were broken away, revealing an exact metal copy of the original wood”.

The pieces which would comprise the completed horse were welded together, carefully following the photographs. Sandblasting then prepared the pieces for the white pigment patina and applied chemicals. In an interview Butterfield has said that this is the most difficult part of the process in the creation of her sculptures; often she will work for many hours and then decide that it is all wrong and begins again.

Butterfield is married to a fellow artist, John Buck, whom she met in college. They have two sons, Hunter and Wilder. Deborah and John work and reside in Montana and Hawaii surrounded by many horses. Butterfield has stated “ My work is not so overtly about movement. My horses' gestures are really quite quiet, because real horses move so much better than I could pretend to make things move. For the pieces I make, the gesture is really more within the body-its like an internalized gesture which is more about the content , the state of mind or of being at a given instant.-and so, it's more like a painting...the gesture and the movement is all pretty much contained within the body”.

**Marilyn Garry
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