

# D A N E S E

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## DEBORAH BUTTERFIELD: *New Sculpture*

September 9 – October 8 2011

Reception: September 8, 6:00-8:00 pm

Artist talk: **Saturday, September 10 at 11:00**

Danese is pleased to announce its inaugural exhibition of sculpture by Deborah Butterfield, opening Thursday, September 8 from 6 to 8 p.m.

There is an emotional and perceptual clarity and balance to Deborah Butterfield's sculpture and its depiction of her subject – the horse. In the six new works on view, Butterfield continues to demonstrate her uncanny ability to observe the equine spirit. Beyond the keenly depicted realism of her sculpture, however, there lies a profound relationship between artist and animal, revealing the very essence of both. *A work by Butterfield strikes us,...as absolutely true to our notions of a horse. And yet, if we give them time, her horses transcend those ideas and become something fresh and powerful, as well as tender and vulnerable.*<sup>1</sup>

Butterfield rejects the role of the horse as a mere prop in a human narrative. *In terms of art history, she shares more with Chinese art, particularly as it began to coalesce in the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907) than with Western art. Unlike the West's recurring representation of the horse as a subservient creature, as a pedestal for humans and as a tool of war, the Tang extolled the horse as a free, proud, and noble creature.*<sup>2</sup>

Deborah Butterfield first began creating sculpture in the form of a horse in the 1970's using mud, clay and sticks. In 1977, she moved to a ranch in Montana and in 1979 began using scrap metal and found steel. For the past decade, she has been making bronze work, cast from "stray, downed pieces of wood." Butterfield carefully, intuitively, selects the branches and sticks which are used to "draw" her horses. *The lines of the branches do not simply outline the forms of horses, they create the contours through an accumulation of simple or energetic lines that seem to build up from within. This is three-dimensional gesture drawing, and the result is both skeletal and muscular.*<sup>3</sup> These models or "ghosts" (as the artist refers to them) are then cast, burning the wood away with molten bronze, creating one, unique sculpture to which she then methodically, expertly applies her patina.

Butterfield's work stands as a consummate portrayal of the world's most durable, most mystical, most consistently recorded animal. From the prehistoric caves of Altamira and Lascaux, through ancient Chinese art, the Renaissance, and centuries of English and French artists (Stubbs and Muybridge, Gericault and Delacroix, Degas and Lautrec), Butterfield, along with Frederic Remington and Charles Russell, is one of few Americans to equal history's greatest interpreters of the horse ethos. Distinct from these other artists, however, is the sheer monumental scale of her sculpture. Larger than life-sized, the sculptures project an imposing physical presence, as well as a striking emotional content communicated through gesture and stance. *They are contemplative, self-contained creatures, like equine versions of the isolated, expressive humans sculpted by Giacometti.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yau, John "Introduction," *Deborah Butterfield: New Work*. New York: Danese, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Clemans, Gayle. "Deborah Butterfield's Contemplative horses." *The Seattle Times*. July 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

# D A N E S E

Born and raised in San Diego, Deborah Butterfield received her BA and MFA from the University of California, Davis. From the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s, she taught sculpture at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and at Montana State University, Bozeman. Since 1976, she has exhibited extensively with solo shows at the Seattle Art Museum; Dallas Museum of Fine Arts; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, Coral Gables; Madison Art Center, WI; San Diego Museum of Art, CA; Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT; The Contemporary Art Museum, Honolulu, HI; Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL; Tucson Museum of Art, NM; and Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, NJ, among others. Her work is included in numerous public collections including the Art Institute of Chicago; The Brooklyn Museum; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA; Cincinnati Museum; Dallas Museum of Art; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Walker Sculpture Garden, Minneapolis, MN; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

A full color catalogue, with an essay by John Yau accompanies the exhibition.

On Saturday, September 10 at 11:00 a.m., the public is cordially invited to join us for coffee at a gallery talk to be given by Deborah Butterfield. The artist will also be signing copies of her acclaimed and now rare monograph, *Deborah Butterfield*, published by Harry N. Abrams Inc., which will be available for purchase.

For further information, please contact Carol Corey or Jillian Brodie at 212/223-2227 or [contact@danese.com](mailto:contact@danese.com).