

# HYPERALLERGIC

## GALLERIES

### The Deceptive Power of a Drove of Horse Sculptures

When I read the captions and found out that all the pieces are cast in bronze, I was simultaneously disappointed and enlightened.



Seph Rodney | 22 hours ago



Deborah Butterfield, "Big White" (2017), unique cast bronze with patina, 94.5 x 116 x 34 inches (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

For me, there's something post-apocalyptic about [Deborah Butterfield's horse sculptures](#). Certainly they have that appearance of a creature out of the imagined world of fantasy (like *Game of Thrones*): sparse stick figures that are blasted by fire or wind or sand, wretched, seemingly held together by necromancy and ill will. The artist has reduced the horse to its skeletal structure, with occasional bits of what looks like reclaimed colored plastic debris to substitute for musculature. The horse is one of those creatures that is easily recognizable even in outline form: just the snout, belly, legs and tail is enough. Butterfield takes advantage of that iconic physicality to make these sculptures that have manifestly wide appeal. Seeing the work at [Danese Corey gallery](#), I feel I've encountered the work before. I likely have given that Butterfield's horses, by my count of the list [in her bio](#), has been collected by 88 museums and corporate institutions including BankAmerica Corporation, Clise Properties, Principal Financial Group, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and the Walker Art Center.

Then I read the captions and found out that all the pieces are cast in bronze and was simultaneously disappointed and enlightened. That



Deborah Butterfield, "Orenji" (2016), unique cast bronze with patina, 25.75 x 26.5 x 10 inches

move gives away the entire game for me, but makes the work infinitely collectible. Carol Corey, a partner of the gallery, said to me that Butterfield first worked with found objects and in the 1980s switched to bronze "to make them last." The horses only seem fragile, barely held together, but manufactured in bronze instead of bleached driftwood, they will stand in a corporate lobby for ages, and will likely outlast us all. Butterfield will undoubtedly continue to churn these out, and Danese Corey who have been representing the artist since 2010, have found a winning formula.

At its core, these sculptures are a visual metaphor for ineffable nature of a creature we consistently use and sometimes revere, but do not take into our homes. Horses have always been close to us, a crucial part of our development into modern people, our metonym for speed, yet alien, not truly domesticated because they live for themselves, not us. The fragility of that peace we have made with them could be part of that work, but then, I suppose, it wouldn't be as salable.



Deborah Butterfield, "Millie Fire" (2016), unique cast bronze with patina, 96 x 132 x 36 inches

Deborah Butterfield New Sculpture, *continues at [Danese Corey](#) (511 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through June 23.*