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Soaring Heights, A Sense of Horses

Deborah Butterfield: New Work

Danese

535 W. 24th St., 6th floor
 (212) 223-2227
 Through Oct. 8

Greeting visitors at Deborah Butterfield's show of six bronze horse sculptures, her signature subject since the early 1970s, is *Many Glacier* (2011). The life-size horse is either rising up or lying down; or perhaps dying; or perhaps it has been dead for ages.



At left, Deborah Butterfield's *Happy Medium*; at right, *Many Glacier* at Danese.

Though made of bronze, *Many Glacier* was constructed originally out of twisted, weathered, "stray, downed pieces of wood," which the artist collects on her Montana ranch and in Hawaii; and the ghostly, whitewashed sculpture — a controlled state of collapse — suggests stone, petrified wood and a scrapheap of bones. Beautiful, conveying the body and essence of a horse, it also resembles the material of its origins.

Ms. Butterfield's recent horses are calligraphic and majestic; interweavings of contour, muscle, armature, intestine and spirit. Yet each is a unique portrait. A second reclining horse, *Kuli Pu'u* (2010), smaller than *Many Glacier*, is prickly and restless, as if it had been made out of snaking vines and crowns of thorns.

What is remarkable about Ms. Butterfield's horses is that they remain largely linear, hollow. Like good drawing, they convey movement, weight, energy and volume. Ms. Butterfield has been criticized for making horses, not sculptures. She is unmistakably familiar with the nature of her subject. This exhibition confirms that she understands the nature of art.