

Art Now LA
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The Equine Transformed
Deborah Butterfield: 'Three Sorrows' at LA Louver
November 15, 2017 – January 6, 2018



Deborah Butterfield's exhibition at **LA Louver** begins outside the gallery with ***Kelly Canyon***, 2016. At 98" high x 86" long, this cast bronze horse originally constructed from disparate pieces of wood faces the wall as if to say, *"Let me be, I am content in this concrete courtyard. The wood used in the creation of my structure might come from Kelly Canyon, Idaho, but it has been transformed and now I am a stoic, solid presence guarding the entrance to the gallery."* Butterfield's other works, located in the sky-room and on the second floor also suggest this idea of transformation.

Throughout her long career, Butterfield has been assembling large and small-scale horses from found objects – specifically different kinds of wood, which are then cast in bronze to create freestanding sculptures, each with a unique structure and personality. Butterfield uses the horse as another artist might use the figure.

Her sculptures are representations: self-portraits and metaphors for myriad emotional and physical states. Each horse is constructed from actual wood, and then documented, disassembled and cast in bronze. The sculptures are then given a patina that approximates the tonalities of the original, making it appear as if the works were made of wood, not bronze.

What is most striking about her latest work, ***Three Sorrows (quake, tsunami, meltdown from Gretel Ehrlich in Facing the Wave)***, 2016, is that Butterfield branches out in an exciting new direction – incorporating debris from natural disasters into the work as well as scattering this

detritus on the floor around the sculpture. The work takes its title from ***Facing the Wave***, Gretel Ehrlich's accounting of the aftermath of the 2011 **Fukushima** earthquake and tsunami.

Collecting fragments that washed ashore in remote **Alaska** islands, including bits of plastic and marine scraps that found their way across the ocean, Butterfield has created an emotionally charged work. As always, the physical horse stands tall.

It is a regal subject, though in this instance many of its internal parts are assembled from pieces of blue plastic and dried out buoys rather than cast bronze, giving the animal an aura of tragedy. The creature is surrounded by well-worn and disintegrating fragments from another time and place, infusing it with a sense of loss and melancholy.

Butterfield has an intuitive knack for knowing what pieces of twisted and knotted wood will define the uniqueness of each horse's presence and personality. Sometimes she combines numerous smaller pieces to build up an area, such as the back legs in ***Elkhorn***, 2016. At other times, the body and head of the horse contain larger pieces of refuse like in ***Kōkai***, 2017, where Butterfield has incorporated large sections of yellow trash. All horses, like all people, are not the same, and Butterfield recognizes these differences, thinking of each work as a specific representation that transcends place and time. They become figurative works with spiritual and emotional resonance.

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