



DEBORAH BUTTERFIELD

American, b.1949

Half Moon, 2007

Cast bronze with polychrome patina

Museum purchase with funds provided by
anonymous donors, 2007.38

Half Moon



Deborah Butterfield (b. 1949) Born in San Diego on the 75th running of the Kentucky Derby, this renowned American sculptor received her MFA from the University of California, Davis in 1973. She holds honorary doctorates from Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana, Rocky Mountain College in Billings, Montana and Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. Known for her intricate process of sculpting horses from materials such as wood and metal, Butterfield beautifully captures the spirit and mystique of the horse. Her works reflect our relationships with the organic world, other life forms and ourselves.

A product of its time

Butterfield trained as a ceramicist, but found limitations with the medium in creating large sculptural works. She began experimenting with steel armatures, or frameworks, onto which she applied plaster, mud and sticks to create animals—first reindeer and then horses. Like clay, this method also had drawbacks; deterioration became an issue, especially for artworks that were installed outdoors and therefore subject to inclement weather. Butterfield needed to find a material that was durable yet malleable. Her solution was found metal and, eventually, cast bronze.

Take a closer look

Half-Moon's patina, or surface treatment, looks so realistic that many people believe the sculpture is made of wood rather than bronze. In order to achieve this patina, Butterfield applied white pigment and chemicals to the artwork while it was heated to 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Butterfield repeated this process until she was satisfied with the color and then sealed the entire sculpture in wax.

Did you know?

Deborah Butterfield's husband, John Buck, is also an artist. While their artistic careers have grown side-by-side, they've only worked together on one project, *John Buck/Deborah Butterfield: A Collaboration* (1986). The installation features two figures. A man carved from wood (Buck) and a steel horse (Butterfield), share space with a large ball and a small shelf, all viewed against a green and rust-colored panel. Some have called this a wedding portrait because it is the only time an inanimate human form is known to have shared a space with one of Butterfield's horses.

On your own

Gordon, Robert, et al. *Horses: Deborah Butterfield*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003.
Tucker, Marcia. *The Art of Deborah Butterfield*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992.