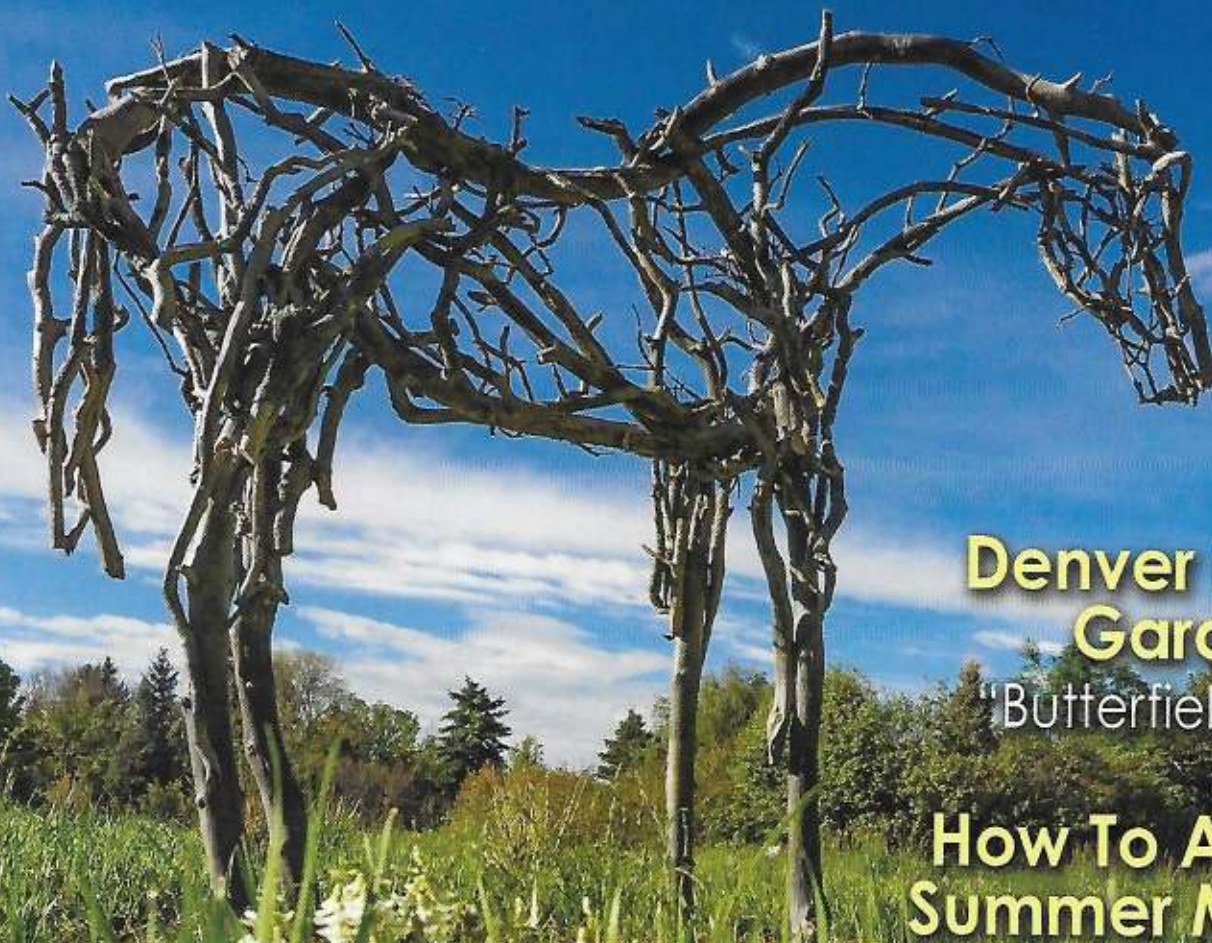


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It's Not Too Late to Treat Yourself to an Unforgettable Outdoor Experience

by Corinne Brown

A walk through a garden awakens the senses. Denver Botanic Gardens, still lush thanks to a long, wet summer, is no exception. As if its varied flora and fauna were not enough, add to it a herd of striking equine sculptures by Deborah Butterfield and experience the realm of the fantastic – a playground for the imagination.

Still on view through October 18th, 2015, "Deborah Butterfield: The Nature of Horses" showcases fifteen life-sized horse sculptures at the Garden's York Street location at 9th and Josephine. An impressive retrospective of a world renowned sculptress, the show spans the artist's work from the 1990s to present, including the premiere of a brand new sculpture created just for this show

Said Brian Vogt, Denver Botanic Gardens CEO, "The Butterfield horses provide a dynamic and organic complement to the Gardens' varying landscapes. This year we

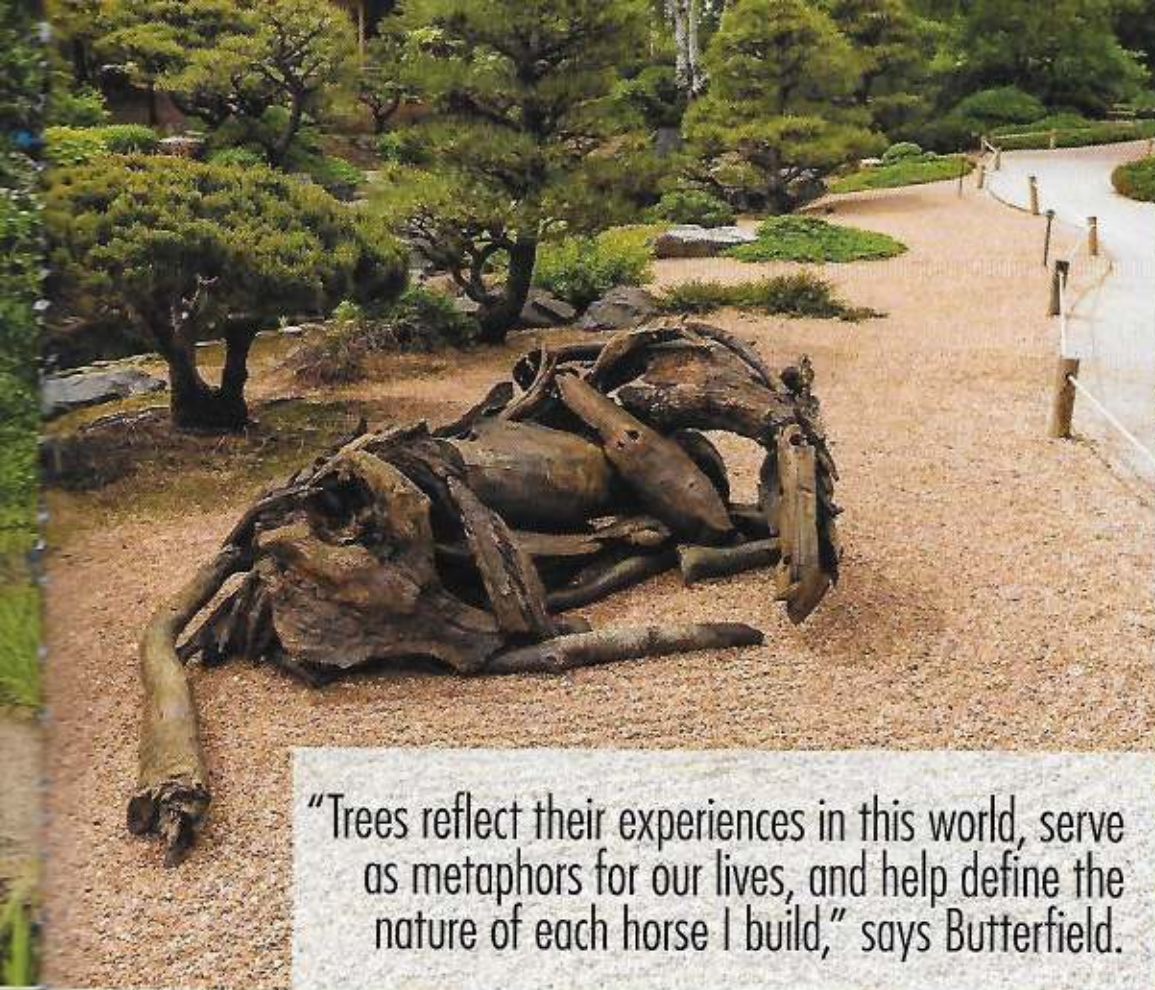
are celebrating the Great Plains and similar steppe ecosystems around the world. There is no more iconic animal of the steppes than the horse."

Butterfield, a resident of both Montana and Hawaii, has been exploring horses as a subject through various sculptural media for over 30 years. An avid horsewoman, she understands precisely how horses look and feel. Riding helps process that kind of information. In spite of the animal's rectangular shaped body on long, thin legs, the horse becomes a masterpiece of fluid design and grace when in motion. It's almost impossible to imagine that various, random, rigid pieces of wood transformed into bronze could ever capture this fluidity, but Butterfield's talented hand and eye and her crew of technical assistants accomplish this and more. We sense the space the sculpture occupies and the space it creates. Whether the figure is standing or lying down, wind and light move through each installation and

expand our understanding of what it means to be a horse; the very essence of a horse. Butterfield manages to internalize that essence while she intuitively creates, discovering each work's unique personality while it evolves beneath her.

The sculptures presented in this unique exhibition, shown only in Denver, are on loan from the artist, from museum collections, private collectors, galleries and universities around the country. Three come from our own Denver Art Museum's permanent collection. Her work is also represented in more than 20 other museum collections, including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Walker Art Center.

In spite of the sculptures' highly organic appearance, the majority of those pieces in *The Nature of Horses* are crafted of cast bronze. Both abstract in conception and literal at the same time, most were originally



"Trees reflect their experiences in this world, serve as metaphors for our lives, and help define the nature of each horse I build," says Butterfield.



created in wood collected from locations around the world.

"Trees reflect their experiences in this world, serve as metaphors for our lives, and help define the nature of each horse I build," says Butterfield. "Because the branches are cast in bronze, even the most fragile and ephemeral become permanent structural parts of my horses. The opportunity to have my sculptures interact with the varied landscapes and exhibits at the Gardens speaks poetically to my process."

Following the initial assembly, molds are made of each numbered branch, the wood burnt out, and the cavity filled with molten bronze, similar to the classic lost wax casting technique used by traditional sculptors and jewelers. Following that, the bronze branches are welded back together to create the finished horse, then painted and patinated to resemble the wood's original color.

Some sculptures are also made of welded steel. Since the late 1990s, cast bronze has been Butterfield's preferred material of choice, but both the style and materials have evolved over the course of her career. She began with plaster over a steel armature, and by the mid-1970s, used natural

materials such as mud, clay and sticks over a wire armature. In later work, Butterfield used found and industrial materials such as barbed wire, pipes and fencing.

Part of the exhibition experience is a 14 minute film summarizing the artist's technique and her relationship to her own horses. It's well worth seeing, either before or after your tour. Therein, Butterfield describes her relationship to her living companions; a deep friendship and dialogue, if not an ongoing conversation.

Associate Director of Exhibitions, Art & Interpretation, Kim Manajek points out, "This show is a significant milestone for the Gardens as we approach the 50th Anniversary since the opening of the Boettcher Memorial Tropical Conservatory. Outdoor exhibitions are a national trend but we are the only botanic gardens thus far to curate our own shows. Adding art installations is an important way for people to have an entrée into the wonder of plant life and vice versa."

Don't miss this chance to change your perception about horses and gardens. It might just touch your soul.

Deborah Butterfield Exhibition Tours

Sat, Sep. 18, 9 a.m. or 6 p.m.

Every Sat and Sun, Sep. 19 – Oct. 18
9 a.m. or 3 p.m.

\$14, \$7 member - includes Gardens admission

A one-hour, docent-led tour explores the artist's inspiration, her artistic process and the role of horses in the West. Immerse yourself in artist Deborah Butterfield's world of horses.

