

Deborah Butterfield (American, 1949-)

Hara, 1989
Bronze



Deborah Butterfield is an American sculptor who has chosen horses as the sole subject of her work for more than 30 years. Her love for these animals is a driving force behind



Deborah Butterfield (United States, b. 1949)
Hara, 1989 Bronze

Butterfield's art practice.

Butterfield lives on a ranch in Montana where she cares for horses. When she was younger and learning



Deborah Butterfield at her studio / ranch in Montana

about art, she wanted to create sculptures that looked like people. She then chose to do something new: she would create sculptures of horses using found objects. We are used to seeing statues of horses leading armies into war, but Butterfield's horses assume the gentle, natural gestures of horses standing or reclining. She originally thought of these sculptures as self-portraits—she was depicting herself. But over time she wanted to honor each horse's unique character and personality. Her sculptures are often referred as free, gentle, and

proud. They reflect the artist's deep concern about the mistreatment of animals and the habitats they call home. They can also inspire us to think about environmental vulnerability and the fragility of nature.

Hara appears to be made of wood, but it is actually made from bronze. Butterfield's early horse sculptures were made of fragile materials like mud, sticks, and straw. After moving to a ranch in Montana, the artist started using scrap metal and found steel to make her **assemblage** sculptures. Eventually, with sculptures like *Hara*, she turned to an enduring material, ensuring that the sculptures would last a long time. How might these choices of materials reflect her feelings for animals?



Deborah Butterfield. *Finch*, 2006. found steel, welded.
Private collection Dallas, TX



Butterfield collects and organizes driftwood and reclaimed metal as materials for her sculptures.



Deborah Butterfield. *Small Dry Fork Horse*, 1978. Sticks, mud, grass, steel and wire. Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park, Gift from Lillian Heidenberg

Sustainability as Caring

For ages 8-12 | 2 hours

Butterfield's choice to use repurposed and recycled materials to make her sculpture speaks to **sustainable** living as a way of caring for the natural environments that animals live in. Animals **habitats** become threatened in areas of rapid human population growth when natural areas are cleared for farms, livestock, towns, and roads. Pollution follows when automobiles, power plants, factories, agricultural chemicals, and household waste release harmful substances into the environment. When we change our own behavior and reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials we use in our daily lives, we can slow the impact of pollution and reduce the need for nature's resources. How can we choose more sustainable ways of sharing the natural habitats of animals?

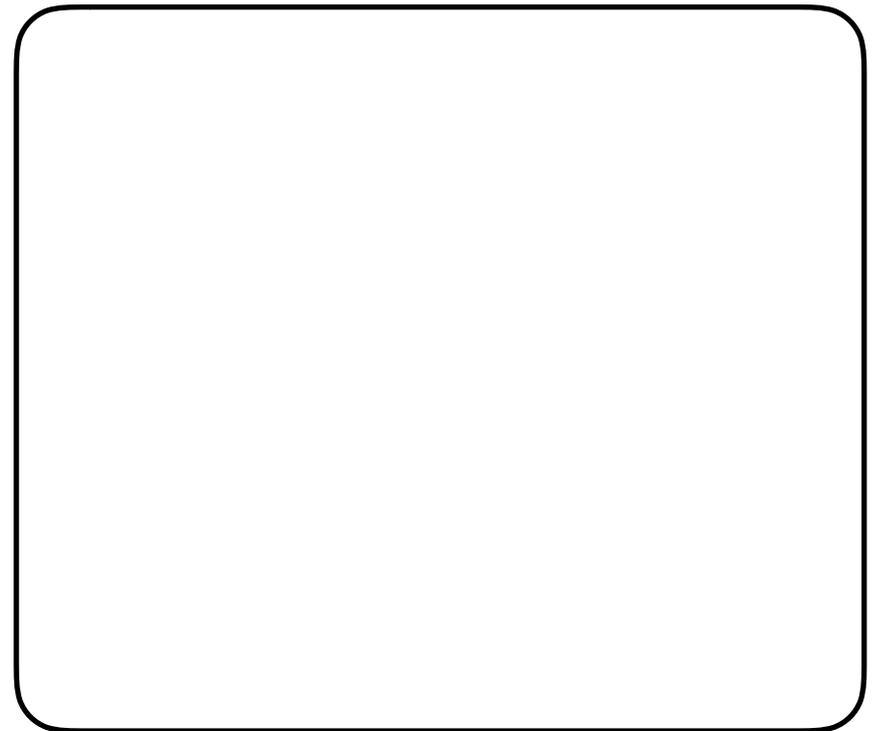
Choose Your Animal

Butterfield shows her feelings of connection to horses through her art work. Is there an animal you care about and feel concern for because their habitat is threatened by human development? Before beginning the art making, do some background research on this animal to answer the questions below. Then draw a picture of your animal in its natural habitat.

1. What does your animal need to survive? (Think in terms of food, water, habitat.)
2. How are human changes to the environment making it difficult for this animal to meet their basic needs?
3. What can be done to help save the **resources** this animal needs to survive?
4. What can you do to help?

Vocabulary

- *Sustainability* avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance.
- *Habitat* the natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.
- *Resources* component of the natural environment.
- *Recycle* the process of converting waste materials into new materials and objects.
- *Assemblage* a work of art made by grouping found or unrelated objects.
- *Armature* framework on which a sculpture is molded with clay or other material.



Explore and Create

For ages 8-12 | 2 hours

How can we help others know we care about animals and the places they live? In this sculpture project, we'll make an **assemblage** sculpture from materials that might have otherwise ended up as waste. When collecting materials for this project, find things that would have ended up in the trash or **recycling**. This will reduce your waste footprint.

Materials: A piece of thick cardboard or wood for a base, wire (take apart an old hanger if you don't have a spool of wire), pliers, tape, a hot glue gun or tacky glue, a collection of reclaimed items from a junk drawer, trash, or recycling bin that can be cut or altered (plastic containers, bottle caps, twist ties, nuts and bolts, scrap cloth, used papers, old buttons, string, machine parts, etc.) Keep an eye out for items whose shape or color remind you of parts of your animal's body: head, eyes, feathers or fur.

1. **Background:** In this video, Deborah Butterfield describes her working process and how she responds to the materials she works with to make her horse sculptures. <https://youtu.be/vEnk880WuHw> For related inspiration, watch this video of Saya Kaganz who creates animal sculptures from reclaimed plastic objects to promote environmental awareness: <https://youtu.be/1hNy7CJitAU>
2. **Build an Armature:** Working from your animal drawing, bend wire into the basic 2D shapes to join together into a 3D form of your animal. This will become the "**armature**" or skeleton of your sculpture. You may find it helpful to build individual wire body parts first, joining each together later to make your animal's full body. You could start with the body shape, then make the head, legs, and so on. You should end up with a free-standing armature to which you can attach materials. It may help to glue your wire armature to a base made of cardboard or wood to give yourself a stable structure to build upon.
3. **Organize your Collection:** Study your collection of reclaimed materials. Separate them into piles by size, color and shape. Then look for objects that resemble parts of your animal's body. You might find that buttons make nice eyes, for example, or that torn paper reminds you of feathers. You may wish to alter your materials by cutting or ripping them before starting to attach them to your wire armature.



Butterfield begins her assemblage sculptures by organizing materials into piles of similar sized pieces of wood.



Working from an armature, and without a set plan, Butterfield adds pieces to this basic structure. She describes this process as like having a dialogue with the horse.

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4. **Attach Your Materials:** You can attach materials to your sculpture with glue or tape, but explore other ways to attach or fasten materials: wrapping, tying, threading, pinching. Some of these methods could reduce the amount of material you use!
5. **Raise Awareness:** Write a short story to help others understand why you care about this animal (artists call these “artist statements”). Is there something special about your sculpture that shows how you feel about your animal? How can using recycled materials help the natural areas these animals call home? Choose a public place to display your sculpture and statement so that others will encounter it. Like Butterfield and Kaganz, sharing your work can help raise awareness of what others can do to live sustainably. What other ways can you think of to raise awareness to protect animal habitat?
6. These posters from the Green Education Foundation can be printed and shared with your project:
 - Why should I recycle? <https://tinyurl.com/ybao4lo2>
 - How can I make a difference? <https://tinyurl.com/y9vuposd>



Saya Kaganz, *Wayne*. 2009. Reclaimed black, brown, and white plastic objects, wire, cable ties.



Student project examples from Lynden education programs

We can make a difference! The bald eagle population in Wisconsin has made a huge comeback in the last 45 years because people have passed laws to stop poisonous pesticides from polluting the river habitats that support the food and clean water these animals need to survive.