Landmarks Guide for Adolescents

Deborah Butterfield
American, born 1949

Vermillion
1989
Painted and welded steel

Subject: Symbolic imagery

Activity: Animal portrait

Materials: Pen, pencil, or paint and paper

Vocabulary: Iconic, symbolism

ⓘ Introduction

Deborah Butterfield originally went to college to be a veterinarian, but instead she studied art. Bringing her love of animals to her art making, she makes sculptures of horses. In this sculpture Butterfield uses recycled scrap metal that would otherwise be trash.

Horses have been used throughout art history as symbols of strength and victory in paintings and sculpture. There are several examples of sculptures on the UT campus that use horses symbolically. The materials Butterfield chooses, as well as the mood of her horses, differ from traditional depictions of horses, challenging the meanings we associate with this iconic animal.

⍰ Questions

Based on its posture, how would you describe the mood of this horse?

What do the materials and color suggest about its mood?

Does the sculpture appear to be strong or fragile?

How do the materials differ from the mood of this sculpture?

How does this sculpture compare to other sculptures of horses that you've seen?

Activity

Think about how you usually see a specific animal depicted. For example, cats and dogs are often shown with their owners in paintings as symbols of loyalty and the comforts of home. Using pen, pencil, or paint, make an image of a familiar animal in a new and different light. What aspects of this animal's personality or life are not usually shown in works of art? How can your image reinterpret expectations about this animal?

BTW

All of Butterfield's works of horses depict mares, which she originally conceived as symbolic self-portraits, or as the artist describes it, "a metaphorical substitute for herself."

Vocabulary

Iconic - Something that is an emblem or symbol

Symbolism - Representing an idea or concept through images

LANDMARKS