

SEANKELLY

Considine, Austin. "Rebecca Horn," *Art in America*, November 13, 2014.

Art in America

Rebecca Horn



View of Rebecca Horn's exhibition, showing *Revelation of a Tree*, 2014, bronze, steel, brass, motor, electronic device, 57½ by 90½ by 59½ inches; at Sean Kelly.

Rebecca Horn's recent exhibition of sculptures and large-scale works on paper, "The Vertebrae Oracle," possessed a poetry rare among the benumbingly cool intellectual calisthenics of so much neo-abstract art today. Focusing on the emotional and spiritual qualities of her materials, the German artist demonstrates an animistic approach that recalls Joseph Beuys.

Visitors to Horn's 2011 Sean Kelly show, "Raven's Gold Rush," would have recognized the spare, impressionistic brushwork in the 12 works on paper, made between 2009 and 2014 and shown here for the first time. Horn's deft strokes, drips and scribbles—rendered in acrylic, pen and pencil—suggest tree branches, lakes, wings or bones; they culminate on the surfaces like abstract, gestural renditions of Japanese *sumi-e* landscapes. Several compositions feature haiku-like verses scrawled in pencil. As with those verses, much of the works' meaning arises from the gaps between the components.

Where "Raven's Gold Rush" was originally framed in mostly economic and political terms, "The Vertebrae Oracle," more appropriately, presented Horn's enigmatic work with themes of human connection and loss, of nature and phenomenology. The exhibition was titled after a poem that Horn wrote to commemorate what would have been Surrealist artist Meret Oppenheim's 100th birthday last year. "Meret had this lightness," Horn has said of her friend, who died in 1985, "so that a poetic wind could open up the bones of her spine to leave behind messages in her world." For all the obscurity of that description (the poem is obscurer still), it illustrates the loose, associative way in which Horn's work functions.

At once polished and rough, Horn's dazzling new kinetic sculptures (all 2014) are composed of materials including brass spindles, tree branches and volcanic rock. Each sculpture bears fragile tensions between natural and mechanical, light and heavy, blunt and delicate, sacred and profane. *Metamorphoses between Rock and Butterfly* presents a replica of two iridescent butterfly wings attached to a small motor on a rock placed in a vitrine. Flapping intermittently, the wings recall meteorologist Edward Lorenz's theory that small events, like a butterfly's flutter, could produce significant, far-reaching disturbances.

The wall-mounted sculpture *Marcel Duchamp's Montgolfiere* brings together two round, mechanically pivoting mirrors that created soft spots of light ghosting across the gallery walls, and a whirling rotorelief by Duchamp that hypnotized the eye. In *Golden Dream of a Cricket*, two brass spindles moving atop a rock suggest cricket legs, and cause an adjacent piece of gold leaf to tremble beside a glass ball. Affixed to the work's pedestal is a naked, pinkish tree branch, which for me conjured the dead tree allegory from Andrei Tarkovsky's final film, *The Sacrifice* (1986): replanted after its death and watered daily by a faithful monk, the tree bursts into bloom. The largest sculpture on view, *Revelation of a Tree* (around 5 by 7½ by 5 feet), features tree limbs cast in bronze sitting on a polished steel table; amid the branches, a ring of brass spindles opens and closes slowly, evoking a decelerated heart valve, or perhaps a spider enveloping its prey.

The mechanisms activating such movements in Horn's sculptures are plainly visible. Still, one imagines paranormal and vaguely alchemical phenomena igniting in the spaces between the works' varied material elements, like sparks firing in the synapses of a dreaming brain.