

San Francisco Chronicle

How crews get the hand of moving big sculptures

Thursday, January 12, 2012

By Kenneth Baker



Stephen De Staebler's "Winged Figure Ascending" (2011) is unloaded from under an elevator cabin at DCG.

Visitors who enter an exhibition like that of Stephen De Staebler's bronzes at the Dolby Chadwick Gallery get the impression that it all came together effortlessly.

But logistical headaches often lie behind the seamless look of such a show.

"I started thinking about it six months beforehand," said owner Lisa Chadwick, knowing that the dimensions of De Staebler's upright figures might pose problems.

The gallery building has only passenger elevators, so "we created crude maquettes of the sculptures, and three of them would not fit," Chadwick said. "My next step was thinking we could crane them in through the windows, but because it's a historic building, we couldn't do that either."

The sculptures' rigidity presented another potential difficulty. Could they negotiate the narrow building lobby? A dry run with the maquettes said they could.

"We met with the art handlers several times and with the elevator company twice," Chadwick said.

The technicians proposed hanging each tricky sculpture from the bottom of an elevator, which could easily handle its weight.

It was a simple matter - for them - of parking the elevator above the open doors, strapping the problematic object to a shackle beneath the cabin and riding it up.

A crew of six, working after the close of business, had the job done in a couple of hours.