

Gillian Jagger

DAVID LEWIS

In 1997, John Perreault published a glowing review of Gillian Jagger's work: The artist, the critic gushed, will "eventually be seen as one of the great ones." Is there loftier praise than that? This recent exhibition—a refreshing, if too small, sampling of the upstate New York-based artist's sculptures from between 1963 and 2014—signaled the beginning of the reassessment Perreault predicted. It took a while. Jagger and her anthropomorphic output have typically had slippery affinities to past movements. In the mid-1960s the artist famously made plaster casts of manhole covers on the streets of New York City as a method of what she called "fact collection"; throughout the '70s, Jagger cast



Gillian Jagger, *And the Horses Ran*, 2009, latex, plaster, sand, dimensions variable.

more found objects with diverse materials, including polyurethane foam, while keeping a distance from ephemeral, photographic, and entropic modes. (Notably, Sol LeWitt's photo-grids of manholes were presented at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1978; her casts never were.) In the '80s, Jagger made cement molds of fractured, parched earth, and began to suspend fifteen-foot lengths of stone in the air, as in *Talabim*, 1987. Indeed, many of the artist's monumental pieces from the past twenty-some years are hung up, as if left to bleed dry—morbid mobiles of trees, chains, and animal bones. Hers is a gloomy romanticism tinged with a pragmatism that resonates strongly today as questions around affect, posthumanism, and animal studies are debated amid urgent concerns about climate change.

Caked with dirt and tucked into the gallery's office, *Yellow Line & Time*, 1963, and *Traffic Impressions*, 1964, two of Jagger's manhole plaster casts (mounted on board and Masonite, respectively), were the earliest pieces in the exhibition. The rest of the show focused on a theme found throughout her oeuvre: horses. Three large works from 2014 made simply of white, brown, and black matted horsehair encrusted with resin hugged the walls near the gallery entrance. Illuminated only by simple floodlights on the floor, these textured, totemic variations are broadly evocative, variously bringing to mind a flayed carcass suspended by a rusty chain (*Swirling*); a spiral spinning both centripetally and centrifugally (*Whirl 3*); and a stout megalith (*Shielding*).

In a second dim and cavernous room, viewers encountered the sprawling *And the Horses Ran*, 2009. Similar to the sculptures in the first gallery, this dusty installation was illuminated with a few floodlights, which bounced off a group of chunky, broken-up casts of hoofprints in plaster and threw craggy shadows. More casts of hooves in brown, velvety latex ran along the wall and resembled a bumpy landscape. This

theatrical piece presents a deictic representation of hoof and terrain—of the horse as an intrinsic, essential part of a whole—which has been a component of Jagger's work for at least the past thirty years. In her 1983 book, *Overlay*, Lucy R. Lippard quotes Jagger saying, "A horse in a field is seen as part of the field, a man in a field is not." The artist continues: "We see ourselves without backgrounds . . . and then of course suffer from that awful feeling of disconnection. The price I suppose of narcissism."

Throughout the show, Jagger hinted at this narcissism and its consequences. Her oddly disorienting works allow us to turn away from discourse, textuality, and even technology and confront the oft-unsettling truth that agency and causality are not always connected to us, that nonhuman matter is self-organizing and informational on its own. Throwing off this nature/culture balance, Jagger shows us that humans are not only dependent on the natural world but indebted to it. The non-nostalgic ethics underpinning these works recall those recently expressed by contemporary theorists such as Brian Massumi, who, in his latest book, *What Animals Teach Us About Politics* (2014), proposes a "mutual inclusion" between the human and the animal. With his non-anthropomorphic understanding of thought, behavior, and instinct, Massumi's approach is in line with one Jagger has apparently embraced all along—surely, as one of the great ones.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler

Hannah Wilke

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

Hannah Wilke's art was always one of intimate gestures. Sculpting gum she chewed into vaginal voids, photographing herself nude in various poses, and drawing watercolors that detailed the deterioration of her body from cancer treatments, Wilke used touch and extreme candor to explore feminine form. Tibor de Nagy's exhibition included examples of these well-known bodies of work, yet, most interestingly, it also shed light on the way in which intimacy came to inflect Wilke's practice through a foregrounding of her personal relationships: namely her friendship with a single family, the Axelrods, whose collection of Wilke's art, much of it given to the family by the artist as a gift, constituted the majority of this small show. Signed dedications by Wilke to the Axelrods' son Mayan in many of the pieces gave a sense of the decades-long rapport between the artist and these collectors/companions. With the Axelrods' consignment of their Wilke holdings to Tibor de Nagy comes a distinct lens through which to view the artist's deeply personal practice and the provocations that mark her influence.

Creating her first vulval works in the late 1950s, Wilke was one of the earliest and best-known artists to explicitly deploy this imagery as a feminist intervention. To make the two 1975 works from her "S.O.S. Starification Object Series," 1974–82, that were displayed together at the exhibition's entrance, she chewed bubble gum, then stretched the elastic material into the aforementioned folds. Wilke's palate became the palette for her artmaking

Hannah Wilke, *S.O.S. Starification Object Series*, 1975, chewing gum on rice paper mounted on rag board, 33 3/4 x 26". From the series "S.O.S. Starification Object Series," 1974–82.

