3RD Dimension
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Gillian Jagger in Conversation

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Gillian Jagger, Absence of Faith, detail of head, 2001, plaster, wire, plaster, wire and mixed media 366×610×427cm. (photo: Richard Schlesinger)

US based sculptor, Gillian Jagger talks to 3rd Dimension about her life and the philosophy behind her work.

Can you talk about your early move to America?

My father, Charles Sargeant Jagger, had died and my mother remarried an American, who ran a coal company in Buffalo in New York State. I was dragged over to America, almost kicking and screaming. At seven years old, I was forced to leave my beloved dog, cat and my father's art studio. One of my strongest memories was being on a German ship, the SS Hansa, surrounded by American submarines. Eventually they let us go, realising that we weren't actually at war after all; it was declared some time later. Up until then, 1938, it was common for British people to go to America on a German ship. The incident frightened me and symbolised my feelings about entering this hostile new country. Indeed, it was the beginning of a new life that I initially fought and rejected; I just wanted to go back to my own country, England. It was horrible to be here, made worse soon after, with the death of my sister.

1. Gillian Jagger, Steeplechase (Central Park West Bridle Path), 1967, plaster, pigment, earth, resin & fibreglass 76×162.6cm. (photo: Nathan Rabin)

What are your earliest memories of making art and what did the process reveal to you?

An interest in time, tracks, imprints and shadows has long dominated my work. The first work I remember making that started me on this process, which became the chief way I made my future work, was in 1960. At that time I lived on 102nd Street and Central Park West. Some buildings were being torn down on 100th Street and Central Park West. I entered a partially demolished building and was fascinated by what I saw that had been left standing. It was a sheet of tar that must have been used

behind the outside wall for insulation. The tar was moist. I took the sheet down and placed it on the Central Park West Bridle Path where it collected dust. Many horses passed over it for some weeks, after which time I retrieved the tar sheet covered with the multi-horse prints (fig.1). I hung it up on a wall, as a kind of contemplative panel. This process revealed to me a way of working; it brought me something I could endlessly learn from and believe in.

I had made artworks since I was two years old, when my father put clay into my hands and I created a dog that was recognisable as our Golden Retriever. By the age of twelve, people were asking me to paint their portraits. I had been given all this ability, but it didn't help me with finding a truth that I could believe in. The day that I took those horse-prints home, I felt that nature held the truth I wanted. If I put nature in the lead, when I made an artwork, then the truth that showed up I could believe in – I didn't control it or manipulate it. I have gone on to cast all of nature in action that I can find, including running water, which I captured by throwing cement into the flowing water.

2. Gillian Jagger, Kill Mary, 1964, wood, cement, galvanized steel, paint, coins, 243.8×132cm. (photo: Nathan Rabin)

During this period, how did you feel about being categorized as a Pop artist, and can you talk about the significance of Kill Mary (fig.2) in this context...

In 1964 the art world labelled me as a Pop artist, and they could not understand why I vehemently objected to this, but it was a distortion of what I was actually trying to achieve and what I felt deep down about nature. I had become interested in manhole covers for two reasons: they were made of iron that seemed to be one of the few elements that would endure. The other reason that I looked at manhole covers was because the decorative surfaces resembled, and sometimes exactly reproduced, the ancient decorative symbols that I had found on rocks and cave walls in Wales and Ireland. These were repeating patterns that humans had made all over Europe, through the centuries. For me, this represented a key to how art connects us even through time. People apparently re-invent these same patterns, even if they have never seen them. It seems that Pop artists were also looking for new connections, but in such a different way from me, at least I thought so at the time. Finding the same pattern on a gravestone in Cornwall carved a thousand years ago that resembled a manhole cover I saw in New York City in 1964, convinces me that something through time keeps on existing and was as important then as it is now. Just the fact of its continual re-emergence affirms its significance. Perhaps this is why I called my 2014 exhibition at David Lewis Gallery: *What Was And Is*.

Returning in 1961 from visiting the old ruins of Europe, while getting on a bus at Newark Airport, I observed a yellow traffic line on the road and near it a manhole cover saying 'Water Department'; it had no decorative symbol. Also, in the asphalt, was a dime and scratched under it were the words 'kill Mary.' When I returned to my studio in New York, I made a 7' by 4' cement panel with a yellow traffic line down the middle and set a garbage can lid in the cement. I scratched the words 'kill Mary' in the cement and inset a dime next to it. I was feeling the blatant harsh return to this country from the old ruins of Europe and this was my response to it. Perhaps that was my first and only Pop Art piece.

3. Gillian Jagger, Yellow Line & Time, 1963, mixed earth pigment, plaster, dirt on board 122×94cm. (photo: David Lackey, Whirlwind Creative))

How did Andy Warhol have an impact on you?

Andy Warhol was my friend at this time, he had left Carnegie Tech three years before me and I was always told by my teachers that he would come to nothing – all he could do was break rules. I found Andy to be a kind, dear man, who would sit in my apartment, which was full of mess, declaring, 'You are the real thing, Gill, I just want to be noticed...I tried pornography... now I'm trying advertising!' Although Andy pursued fame for himself, he encouraged my sense of conviction as an artist. He was truly generous on a profound level. As an artist, Andy

4. Gillian Jagger casting Con Edison at Bloomingdale's, New York, 1964, plaster, pigment, earth, resin, and fibreglass, diam. 104cm. (photo: Douglas Kaftan)

was completely open and followed his instinctive leanings without hesitation, shame, or embarrassment. It was fascinating to be with someone like that. Strangely enough, I think he helped me be open to follow my own instincts, no matter where they went.

When the media tried to define your identity, how did you react to this scrutiny?

The media came out of nowhere into my life. They apparently discovered this blonde woman casting dirty manhole covers on the streets of New York (fig.4). I was asked by the CBS news channel if anyone noticed when I was working on the street; I said 'No – it's New York. Everyone just goes on by.' Which they had, until then. That very night, I was featured on all the evening news programmes, caught working on my castings in the streets of New York, seeming not to notice that I was surrounded by a crowd of people who, of course, had been attracted by the TV cameras. After that, all sorts of TV shows endlessly called me, but the worst for me was that I was identified on all those news programmes and newspapers as a Pop artist.

I was certain that I wasn't. I didn't know much about Pop Art – but I knew I did not like beer cans or pieces of pie under plastic covers. I remember the critic, Gordon Brown, then editor of Arts Magazine, came back to my apartment and saw that I was now casting my own body, by sitting in plaster – of course, when I was naked. He wanted to photograph me doing this. Brown had triggered all this world-wide publicity about the manhole covers, even though it had shocked him, too. I suppose he saw what I was doing now as my second act. I should have felt grateful, but actually, I felt horrified and did not want to be portrayed in that way. Some artists around me just said 'Go with it. This is what success is.' At a young age, I couldn't cope with being labelled as something I was not.


5. Gillian Jagger, The Horses Ran By, 2009, latex, plaster, sand 609.6×1158.2cm. (Gillian Jagger's Home Studio) (photo: David Lackey, Whirlwind Creative)

I then moved myself out to the country and was accused of running away from fame. I now realize, what I did not know then – that I had a lot in common with the way Pop artists saw things in the 60s. For instance, most favourite sayings at the time were actually restrictive bromides like 'family values'. It sounded good for a minute and then you realized that people were being crushed under authoritative social control, from one group over another group. It was as if current metaphors had lost universal meaning and a younger generation no longer felt included with the times that they lived in.


6. Gillian Jagger, And The Horses Ran By 1, 2008, cast pigmented latex, sand, burlap, and rebar, over wood and foam armature 1219×670.6×244cm. (photo: David Lackey, Whirlwind Creative)

You began to explore the potential of plaster as a medium with which to capture the fleeting and temporal...

In the country I had to start anew, so I used plaster to cast my own body. I was looking for basic facts that I could discover and, perhaps then, to go on to build new metaphors. I started by identifying my own body when I cast it with plaster and I went on to use PlexiFoam, which under pressure against my skin, would take the form of my own body. It included pores and had a flesh-like colour, which I highlighted with spray paint. I drew around myself and even around the full body of a horse and other animals. Pursuing my belief in making art – with nature as the leading partner – I remember looking down at a path I made through the woods, in order to take daily walks with my dogs. In the following days, I saw deer tracks, turkey prints, and even bear prints on my

path. I then cast all of their tracks. They all found my path the easiest one to follow through the wild terrain. We came at different times, perhaps, but we all went the same way, inadvertently, keeping the path open for each other; I felt a real connection.

The last room-sized installation that I made with tracks, I showed in New York at the David Lewis Gallery in 2014. It was called The Horses Ran By. This was the fourth configuration that I had made from its different segments. It was made of latex, resin, plaster, and shadows that were produced by special lighting effects (fig.5). So, what started for me, in 1960, on the Bridle Path in Central Park, continues now.

7. Gillian Jagger, Rift, 1999, calf stanchions, animal bones, farm implements & barbed wire 335.3×914.4×609.6cm. (photo: Russell Panzencko)

Although nature leads you, Rift (fig.7) is perhaps a more deliberate evocation. Can this be attributed to the particular gestation of Rift?

I have been so proud in the last forty or fifty years of my artwork that I have let nature lead and I have followed. But in this one instance, consciously or unconsciously, something in me, I suspect, has controlled the narrative here.

I was visiting a defunct game farm and I stumbled upon an open pit; it was full of the bones of many different animals that I could not identify. It was also full of water. A man, who seemed familiar with the place, saw me staring into the pit and said, 'If you want any of those bones, take them if you can handle the smell.' I took a number of bones away, including an enormous skull. I wondered how the animals at that game farm came to such an end. Eventually, I came across a veterinarian in this general area within the former game farm, who darkened my outlook further, by telling me, in an ordinary tone of voice, that this game farm sold animals, including white tigers, to a place in Texas, where, in a contained space, they offered hunters a chance to shoot them, for enormous sums of money (I was told $68,000 for the white tiger). I have no doubt that something of that narrative has influenced the meaning of this piece, and I must admit, I am leading and not following with this one aspect of the work, so I have broken my way of finding truth. Odd that you picked up on it.

8. Gillian Jagger, Rift, detail, 1999, calf stanchions, animal bones, farm implements and barbed wire 335.3×914.4×609.6cm. (photo: Russell Panzencko)

9. Gillian Jagger, Absence of Faith, 2001, plaster, wire and mixed media 366×610×427cm. (photo: Donna Calcavecchio, 2010, at Jagger's Home Studio)

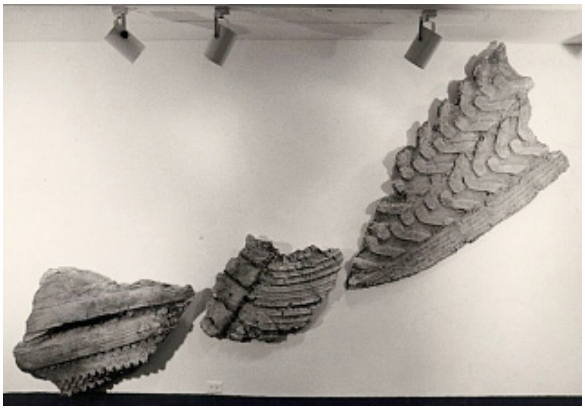
Menacing barbed wire and splintered wood are configured to suggest an elusive 'creature', as the negative space comes alive...

I hung the bones with the rusted barbed wire running through them to create a kind of multiple animal. By hanging them up, I felt that force could be best seen – even the bones of some of the skeletal animals seemed to defy their own death. I added the farm implements and barbed wire, which I found in the barns. In turn, the half-undone spools of rusted barbed wire seem, to me, to have naturally encircled the bones and the cats.

Rift pursues my search through what we can't completely see, but only sense. The bodies of the animals, which I have gathered in Rift, show me, in each case, that at the point of dying, each animal comes up with such a life force, one could feel that they have defied death; they have overwhelmed it. For me Rift is not about life or death... that is because I do not see the animal as succumbing to death, I see it as an energy that transcends defeat. It's the fact that it is undefeated, not that it died, that carries that force to us – and the configuration of each body displays this drama happening in front of us.

***Rift* is saturated with ambiguity. The cat might be trapped or pouncing (fig.8), suggesting an expressive energy conveying...**

I feel that this work made itself; I just gathered the animals and implements into the space. I found one cat under the ice, looking as though it could still claw its enemy. Another was found under leaves in a barn. Both were naturally mummified. Both personified and projected their extreme life force.



10. Gillian Jagger, Cascade, 1967-76, plaster, resin, glassfibre and
rebar 243.8×457.2×45.7cm. (photo: Dick Lerner)

Can you explain the origin of the title?

My renowned author friend, my philosopher-of-seeing, David Levi-Strauss, gave me the title of Rift. He felt that the work exemplified a reunification of the terrible rift that happened approximately around the third century A.D., when early laws first required mankind to honour and take responsibility for animals, but then changed to a hierarchical system, which assumed that mankind was the dominant species, and, being considered as soulless, all others would be subject to his whim. In Rift David saw that here I am, trying to heal the rift in a reunification between all of earth's life forms and humankind.

There seems to be a fundamental connection between Rift, other works such Absence of Faith (figs.9 & 23) and the casting of hoof prints and shadows. Can you explain this?

Yes, there is absolutely a connection. All my installations came about from my search for evidence of my connection to the earth, to the animals and to the apparatus that held them, to the trees, roots, even to rushing water. In my search, I was driven to cast everything in nature, that I could. Finally, instead of the castings, I went on to include the thing itself. Doing these works, I found I was not only connected to, but that I fit in with all the others of the earth. However, the day in 1963 that I rubbed a charcoal shadow image of a little girl on a cast manhole cover (fig.11), I realized it was coming from a part of me that the animals would not share. Perhaps they have too much sense; they live in the now. I, on the other hand, am haunted by fleeting images of the temporal and driven to present them.

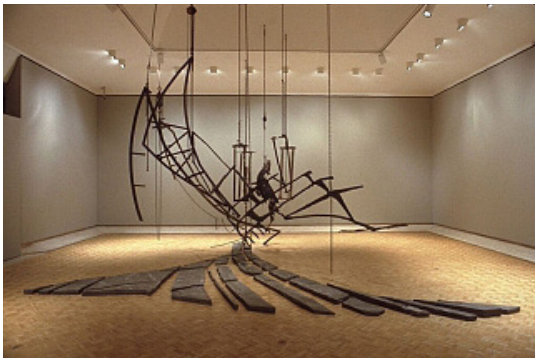
11. Gillian Jagger, The Shadow of Elizabeth Gonzales, 1963, dap, spackle,glue, pastel, chalk on canvas 152.4×91.4cm. (photo: © Gillian Jagger)

I have found that hoof prints are not just hoof prints left by one horse for the other to follow. When I cast a single hoof print in a field, I feel a connection to a horse. But when I present a hundred hoof prints in plaster and cast them back in latex, showing the two masses interacting, using lights to produce shadows, I have presented time passing. This perception of time is one way we humans differ from animals, along with the capacity to dream, to cry, to laugh, to invent science, and to create art... I guess I am stuck, if not compelled, to follow my own nature.

Imprints, foot prints and shadows are also like a negative, a duality of something that is there but not there – a fragile echo of presence. Can you describe how this sense of vulnerability guided your determination when you made the work Cascade (fig.10)...

With Cascade, I noticed that a truck made some extraordinary imprints of its tyres on a sandy beach in Southampton. So I carried 350 pounds of plaster on my back to the beach where these prints were, and dragged with me a garbage pail of water. I saw that there was a storm coming up and suddenly it was upon me. I couldn't drive that close to my casts to retrieve them so I literally had to carry that wet mixture of water and plaster on my back as fast as I could screaming at the clouds, 'No don't rain otherwise I will just end up with a pool of

12. Gillian Jagger, portion of The Horses Ran by (photo: David Lackey, Whirlwind Creative)



13. Gillian Jagger, Matrice, 1997-8, deer, stone, steel, rebar, wood, chain 426.7×762×548.6cm. (photo: Russell Panczenko)

plaster!' When I got the casts to my truck, I felt victorious but I realized something had happened to my back. It turned out I had compressed one vertebra between two others. Retrieving that piece, to capture that fleeting moment, to get that exact instance when those imprints were in danger of disappearing...I had actually risked my life. I felt impelled to cast it, to keep it, just because it was so ephemeral and transitory. I wanted to hold onto it by making it into a physically permanent object. It is not only a memory of that moment I wanted, but I knew that if I could cast that imprint, I could hang on to the fleeting second when something passes and by having a form to hold it, I could revisit it and know it better.

Where did this impetus originate – when you met the little girl you mentioned?

It all began in 1963, when I was casting a manhole cover, and I was erroneously being identified as a Pop artist. The last manhole cover that I cast on 100th Street, in Central Park West, was nearly complete, when I saw a small shadow appear over my upturned 5'x 4' casting which, fortunately, had dried. In response, I used some black pastel and quickly smudged the shadow onto my piece. I looked up and saw a little girl. I asked her name and she replied, 'Elizabeth Gonzales'. I named the piece The Shadow of Elizabeth Gonzales (fig.11). What was so important about the shadow that I had drawn on my cast was that it seemed to be the same thing in life as it was in art – and appeared just as quickly. She could walk away and it would now stay on my board. The capture of the fleeting moment has been the essence of my work ever since. To my gratification, as an artist I have become a tool of nature, merely a facilitator in capturing the moment's reality, and in so doing, escaping the manipulations of my own ego. For me, it's about respecting the reality of what is present – not my creation of some personalized abstraction.

14. Gillian Jagger, Aon, 1992, wood, steel, chains , 348×183×74cm. (photo: Nathan Rabin)

How does the idea of 'the ground' translate into your response to the gallery floor as an arena for spatial exploration, and your concern for negative space?

15. Gillian Jagger, Yearning, horsehair and resin , 213.4×86.4×45.7cm. (photo: David Lewis Gallery)

Negative space is one of my central concerns, as it was in Rift. Again it's a sense of life that can emanate from there. It's not empty, at all. In 1975, I went to Africa where I saw a volcanic pouring of lava, frozen in place. It carried movement and inspired me to focus on landscape and what is under our feet. Since that moment in Africa, I have done at least six 30' × 16' floor pieces, because of the natural way things fit into the environment. My latest work, The Horses Ran By, is a massive piece that printed a hundred horse footprints into cracked natural sections that seemed to be floating as separate fragments, similar to ice breaks on a river surface. If seen as an object, each fragment has a natural connection with its environment, which I have done in five different configurations. Earth connects by sand or water framing of all things that are seen in it – especially things that lie flat. To me a floor is the ideal flat space for positive and negative space to meet. Neither is considered major or minor – one of the main advantages of horizontality over verticality.

Why is the setting of the barn in Matrice important to you (fig. 13)? Does the hanging and sense of suspension convey an underlying tension between the elements or a unifying harmony?

16. Gillian Jagger, Reveal downward view, 2011, wood, steal and chains 457.2×152.4×99cm. (photo: David Lackey Whirlwind Creative)

The son of a friend of mine knew how much I missed the calf that I had left behind in England, so we got a three day old calf that was slated to be slaughtered. He turned out to be very sick with an E-coli infection. In the end, I had to put a peg in his stomach to feed him. By getting such hourly care, the calf survived and soon grew to be huge! The barn became very personal and meaningful to me. It was as if I had brought the calf I left in England back to this barn. I also found implements that had been used for three generations of farming, like calf stanchions first made of wood, second of wood and steel, and finally of all steel. All were hanging here in the barn. In the surrounding fields, I found the skeletal remains of deer, horses and calves. I hung them from the ceiling of the barn and they evoked memories of past farm living. I instinctively knew they would fit, as a metaphor for being part of a whole system within the context of the American farm and, indeed, within our relationship to nature, which I see as portraying both tension and harmony.

With Aon (fig.14), the form feels tethered yet there is also a feeling of hoisting as well as being supported...

I was guided not by a pre-conceived idea in my head, but by the tree, itself, which I found lying on the ground after a rainstorm. I found myself looking at it, and asking 'What do you need? What do you want? What belongs to you? What would help you stand?' It is actually now hanging, but it does touch the ground and that allusion of needing support is an inherent part of the work. All I added to this tree was a second leg, which I found as a branch on the ground near the tree. Each time this work is installed, it needs two chains to keep it straight, and as you say, it is the ambiguity that a chain implies between supporting and retaining it, that gives it tension – as if you are holding a tiger on a leash. I like the way the tree holds its 'body self'. Although it is chained from the ceiling, it seems to me to be beginning a dance. Trees have torsos and 'sway', something like humans do – yet they have something of their own, which conveys an ancient quality, by dancing in the wind, but never really changing the place where they stand.

17. Gillian Jagger, Crossing Borders, 2008, wood, chains 457.2×457.2×154.4cm. (photo: Donna Calcavecchio)

The work Yearning (fig.15) is hanging on a single rusty chain with the suggestion of a carcass. Yet the form is resolutely abstract, soft and inviting and refuting definition. What inspired this work?

The reason I named that work Yearning, is that sense of reaching up. That form is an endless shape of verticality that one sees in nature – it seems to be a reach-up; probably comes from things growing up towards the sun. I feel it as a metaphor for yearning. The horse that inspired this piece is now thirty-two years old, but when she was one or two, I would put oats above her head – so she had to reach up and eat them. I then photographed the underside of her jaw, to capture this movement and that unique shape of the underside that you seldom see. The jaw bones go up in a triangle when you get up to the mouthpart which bulges out. The bottom of the cheek bones is the widest part, and then they come completely together at the top, almost steeple-like.

19. Gillian Jagger, Quantum (front view), 2010, wood, metal, acrylic, cable, resin 365.7×426.7×487.7cm. (photo: Ron Van Beek)

18. Gillian Jagger, Quantum (side view), 2010, wood, metal, acrylic, cable, resin 365.7×426.7×487.7cm. (photo: Ron Van Beek)

The chains are also significant in this piece – giving the work a feeling of vulnerability. All animals, wild or domestic, live under our care or the lack of it. I suppose, as you say, some people will react to the work as a carcass, but I think that form of reaching up is stronger than that, as is the sense of the visceral and sensual that comes from the use of the real horse's hair.

You have a very haptic response to the hair of horses and lions, is it a similar to your reaction to trees? How does your 'connection' to wood underpin works such as Sheltering Tree and Reveal (fig.16)?

20. Gillian Jagger, Root Dancer, 1988-90, 2014, resin, 106.7×182.8cm. (photo: David Lewis Gallery)

I think the world we now live in separates us from each other. I am always trying to find a way to connect. Sometimes through my senses. The feel of actual fur, whether on a lion, which I have been fortunate enough to touch in Africa, or the sense I get when rubbing my face into my horse's neck, seems to get me closer to another being, regardless of species. From the touch I feel some kind of support, as I do in Reveal, which is the 15' remains of a 70' tree. I turned it upside down, hung it up, and cut it vertically into four parts. It reaches upwards through three storeys, which, due to the cuts, one can climb up and see inside. It seems to hover as it hangs... the sense of weight has increased. And, strangely so has its sense of sheltering. At the same time, I share with it a perilous sense of our existence.

In your earlier work, Crossing Borders (fig.17), can you describe how your relationship to wood inspired its configuration and underlying metaphor.

The gallery owner, Phyllis Kind, had a magnificent White Oak on her land. She had to take it down before it fell. The entire bark had gone and what remained had an amazing white moon-like surface. You could not sculpt a body or a face that could express more than that entire tree did, naturally, by itself.

I showed that tree in its entirety in Phyllis's gallery. After exhibiting it, I felt I wanted to know it more deeply. I felt compelled to get a chain-saw with a ripping blade and cut vertically down its centre. I leaned the first half of the 16' towards us and the back half I leaned slightly back. The two parts touched at the bottom. I knew that the two parts would still come together, visually, to close the gap between them, because they still are only really one.

21. Gillian Jagger, Whirl 3, 2014, horsehair and resin, 213.4×86.4×45.7 cm. (photo: David Lewis Gallery)

Then I got some end pieces of wood from a local mill, which are very fragile, and compared to the thick oak, they look like matchsticks, yet they are beautiful in their own right, both delicate and natural. Despite bisecting the piece with a kind of fencing, it does nothing to actually separate the two main sections of the tree. So we are left with a sense of the absurdity of the human interference. So far, I have only seen this concept understood by Native Americans. No matter what language we speak, we seem to insist on making all things into property of our own and arbitrarily putting borders around or through them.

Can you discuss your construction of Quantum (figs.18 & 19). Your utilization of light and shadow heighten the impression of attack and ferocity – what other elements play out this drama?

22.Installation view, And Then, And Now, New Work from The Cave, with Gillian Jagger, John Davis Gallery, New York, 2013; cave drawing Of The Bull, 2012, charcoal and acrylic pastel on collaged paper, 335×335cm.with And Then And Now, 2013, plastic colour coated electrical wire, brass, copper, chicken wire, hung from wood ands cable frame 183×213× 366cm. (photo: Edward Gomez)

Yes, light and shadow are an intrinsic part of the dynamism of the piece, as they are in most of the work I make. I always have to consider the light they are shown in. Often the shadow that they throw is as important as the original form. Quantum includes five roots that I had used before in other pieces. This time, instead of hanging the various parts from above, I used armatures that would hold them up from the floor, imitating the root structure. The work is cantilevered in one place by standing a root on top of a torso-like tree that is then counterweighted under its reflection on the ground. The piece comes towards you by 10'; it is actually hanging from itself. It is using weights underneath some parts and leaning back in others. I took lead sheets and pressed them into the face of the largest root and then lay it on the ground as if it were a skin, implying my usual connection between animal and skin, or tree and bark, or tree and shadow. I hid counterweights

under the skin that are on the ground under the root and then painted zebra stripes on the lead sheets to strengthen the animal analogue. I painted red on the remaining stumps that were still attached to the roots, to suggest that they had come to us, by way of a kind of slaughter.

One often sees a field with stumps sticking up from overturned root bundles, left from the clear-cutting of trees. When I first acquired the roots, yellow jacket wasps flew out and stung me. The following day, I found myself covered in poison ivy by pulling the stumps out of the field. I'm sure that also affected my use of the red, white, and black paint on the stumps of some of those roots.

You have talked about your use of materials, wood, plaster, latex and stone. But you seem to have a particular engagement with resin. What quality do you feel this gives your work, and your affinity for capturing the temporal?

I like working with the material that suits my approach to a piece. Plaster has always meant an ease of use and comes with a sense of solidity for me. Resin has become a very important material for me as I have continued to direct my work towards the exploration of light and transparency. Root Dancer is a good example of its use (fig.20). I made the original piece from rubber, hammering lead into a root. In Quantum I used the lead imprint as a reflection of the root and in fact had painted a resined glass cloth on the back of the lead to make the lead permanent – it became a kind of skin.

In Root Dancer, I pulled the glass cloth imprint off the lead and kept the transparent image as a piece in itself. I needed to bring out the qualities of light, almost like a light reflection of a shadow. The hairs of the glass cloth almost linked the piece to something furry. I realize my interest in connectiveness has led me to want to produce not only mixtures of plant and animal life but also of air and water. Root Dancer comes close to this. Lately I have gone on to produce pieces resembling horses' necks and stomachs, made of actual horsehair. I build the original armature out of lathe, which is a very light steel structure full of holes. I'm aiming at a kind of reflection and at the same time a light airy shadow. When it is covered with resin it becomes hard and semi-transparent, which shows through the hair, such as in Yearning, Shielding and Whirling, works which I showed at David Lewis Gallery in New York.

23. Gillian Jagger, Absence of Faith, 2001, plaster, wire, mixed media 366×610×427cm. (photo: Richard Schlesinger)

Organic patterns are repeated in your work such as Whirl 3 (fig.21) in the exhibition What Was and Is, can you elaborate on your theme of 'interconnectedness' here?

As I have said, I started out in life with this sense of disconnectedness. I think part of it was my reaction to so much death in my family and of my animals, the brutal finality, and the futility. Early on, my work became a search to find 'what the real connections were' in the world around me. I found my answers in the underlying patterns in nature, in the 'flow' from life to death. I felt part of a system which was bigger than me, which made sense and was immensely comforting – even though my personal world had made no sense at all, for such a long time.

I became aware of the actual physical patterns present in nature, which I saw repeated everywhere. Off the Aran Islands, I saw whirlpools, which had the same spiral pattern as in the eye of a hurricane. There are at least four similar spiralling whirls underneath a horse's stomach; these are caused by new hair growths to cover change of direction as the legs meet the torso. We humans all have a least one of these same patterns on the top of our heads, which we refer to as crowns. These shapes become icons to me and speak of our interconnectiveness to all things in nature, including waves in the sea.

This links to your earlier reference to finding a pattern on a Cornish gravestone which you felt was similar to a manhole cover you found in New York City. Is it the idea of time as a palimpsest, where the past is overlaid in the present...

What interests me is that all humans scratching on cave walls or lying on the beach will draw triangles, circles, and dots in the middle of the circle. I'm finding that if you follow this as a root into Paleolithic times, those abstract shapes come first and then later they're turned into something figurative. Like the dot in the middle of the circle becomes the dot in the center of the flower, and triangles bringing the points to the centre make the petals of the

flower, in which, suddenly, you have a figurative illustration. But it all started with the need to draw something symbolic. If any symbols or icons repeat through many generations, it speaks of a connectiveness that may never reveal the 'why', just the 'is'. I think it's more the 'is' that convinces me of a connected reality, than the 'why', which leads us to multiple divisive interpretations. And the fact that I find these symbolic patterns continually repeating in nature, seems to verify the significance of these abstract patterns, that they are fundamental, primary functions of the mind. They come before word thought.

What is the role of drawing in evoking these key themes in your work?

When I am attracted to something and it persists, I start drawing to bring it inside me, in order to follow wherever it leads. The drawings, in turn, influence the media, the size, the shape of the inevitable sculpture. I use this method of work to get past the tedium of my own themes, calculations, and rationalizations. I feel the metaphor of the immediate use of charcoal, as if on a cave wall, I guess.

I made the recent sculpture entitled Then and Now (fig.22), based on drawings I made during a time I spent in the Les Eyzies Caves of L'Abri de Cap Blanc. It was there that I drew the animals that a woman had carved into the walls, 17,000 years ago. In the making of Then and Now, I was hunting to identify her sense of empathy. I used wire, as I had in Rift, but in this case, to go back so far in time, I used the wires for their colour, their transparency and their lack of substantial weight.

With my cave drawings as a loose reference, but unlike the often helpful use of preparatory sketches or drawings, it was only after completing this work, that I drew my completed wire structures. I do this very specifically with many of my complex pieces, so that I can strategically move the work and also can take it down.

Presently, I have completed some twenty dvrawings of the horses rearing up in my fields, and have – for the first time – been following up with the making of small wire models, in preparation of another large wire piece.

Can you relate the story behind about your most personal work, Absence of Faith (figs.9 & 23)

I came back from England, where I had gone to 67 Albert Bridge Road in London where a plaque was being placed on my father's former home, to honour his lifetime of sculpture. This is where I was born. When I returned to my farm in the U.S., it was a bleak and cold February. I remember seeing blood on the stake, near the water tank. It turned out that one horse had bitten the rear of another one, Faith, who, in turn, kicked out while leaping in the air. She landed on a fence post, which had impaled her abdomen.

When I went into her stall, I saw the hole in her body. The veterinarian said that there was no hope. I had been standing with her, holding her head for over an hour. But as she was collapsing from the veterinarian's injection, I couldn't let go of her... I went down with her to the stall floor. Eye-to-eye, as we went down, I saw her right eye go blank. I saw life leave her. The other three horses began screaming. Even when we removed her body from the stall and the pasture, the horses kept on screaming.

Despite the bitter winter weather, kneeling in the frozen blood-soaked earth, I soaped her body, poured plaster on her like a sheet, and then pressed aluminum strips into the plaster, to create sections and to keep the sections that were being cast from sticking together. As it was below thirty degrees Fahrenheit, the sections somewhat crumbled, sometimes into powder, as they dried.

When summer came, I had to first reconstruct the broken bits into wholes, before I could take a cast of anything. By the end of summer I had completed two separate horses from the original body cast pieces. These I hung together in the stable from overhead wires. The more abstract of the two involved considerable negative space, which allowed one to go inside her body. To create the separate sections and hang them on wires from the ceilings, I found that the trembling of the wires caused the piece to move. And when some of her hair transferred to the casts, I felt the horse almost came alive. Staying connected to her through those months of intensive work helped me through my intensive loss. I had found my way to cope with grief.