



Gillian Jagger, “What Was and Is”

by Anne Doran
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That we’re living in a new geological epoch (the Anthropocene, or age of man) isn’t news to 84-year-old, British-born artist Gillian Jagger. In the late 1970s, after a career in New York, she moved to the Hudson Valley, where she’s since focused on the interdependence of man and nature.

Still, she’s never left her past entirely behind, which is what makes this exhibition of old and recent works so fascinating. Pieces ranging from early-’60s paintings incorporating casts of manhole covers to brand-new sculptures made of resin and horsehair variously bring to mind Sue Coe’s activist art, Robert Rauschenberg’s indexical work of the 1950s, Bruce Nauman’s casts of animal bodies and Jack Pierson’s early installations, as well as fiber art and African artifacts.

The most spectacular work, occupying a large back gallery lit by footlights, is a trackway of hooves, pieced together out of latex and plaster casts. The front room contains four large, bestial-looking pieces; one of them—a concave form in latex, fur tufts stuck to the inside—suggests a sizable quadruped. Two shieldlike objects employ horsehair of different colors to create patterns resembling swirling water. Finally, there’s a resin-and-horsehair sculpture hanging from a rusted chain: While abstract, it evokes uncomfortable images of strung-up carcasses.

Jagger’s theatrical approach is not only radically nondiscriminatory with respect to class and gender, but to species as well. Her egalitarianism accounts for both the ferocity and the equanimity in her art, which offers a chance to contemplate both our commonality with—and our disastrous disconnection from—each other and the natural world.