

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

HUDSON, N.Y.

GILLIAN JAGGER

JOHN DAVIS

The British artist Gillian Jagger (b. 1930) has long lived and worked in the Hudson Valley, where she keeps a studio in the cavernous spaces of a former dairy barn in Ulster County. Retired since 2007 from Pratt Institute, Jagger taught sculpture for many years, emphasizing the personal, expressive, sometimes psychological aspects of art rather than its function as a mode of theoretical discourse. In recent years she has become best known for large-scale sculptures incorporating sections of fallen trees she finds on the land.

Reveal (2011), a stripped-down example of this kind of sculpture, was the centerpiece of her recent show. It was installed in a four-story-high elevator shaft in a 19th-century carriage house behind the gallery's main building. There, the 15 ½-foot-tall work, made of a three-branch tree trunk turned upside-down, metal hardware and a cascade of chains and hoists, hung from the wooden elevator platform at the top of the shaft so that it hovered a few feet above the ground. An odd, towering form, it recalled the massive columns prominent in ancient Buddhist temples in Japan.

The artist barely manipulated her plucked-from-nature material. She made a few cuts with a chainsaw down the length of the tree trunk. Then, using metal bolts, she fastened the long, thick slices back together, with about an inch of space between them and with one of the slices jutting out from its original alignment. Thus, Jagger allowed the color and texture of the dead tree's interior to reveal themselves. Into its altered—or violated—form, *Reveal* packed a sense of simultaneously captured and released energy.

Jagger also showed a few wall-mounted, mixed medium works, including *Whirl* (2010)—a fluffy swirl of horsehair and hemp fiber representing the pattern of hair found under a horse's neck—and *Eye Relief* (2010), a closely cropped re-creation of a horse's eye in materials such as Polyfoam, chicken wire and acrylic molding paste. Lastly, the artist exhibited a handful of pastel-



ARLENE
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View of Gillian Jagger's sculpture *Reveal*, 2011, wood and steel, 15½ by 5 by 3 feet overall; at John Davis.

on-paper drawings of cows and horses. These function more as portraits of specific animals than as generic images; indeed, Jagger had known each of her subjects personally.

The vulnerability conveyed in the portraits and the allusion of *Reveal's* exposed wood to the tender folds or delicate interior of an animal's body evoke the timeless cycle of life, death and rebirth that is found throughout nature. For many years, this has been Jagger's main theme, subtly expressed.

—Edward M. Gómez

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