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Gillian Jagger -- 'The Absence of Faith'

by Holland Cotter

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For several years, Gillian Jagger has been making sculptures from casts of the bodies of animals destroyed in pounds or killed by cars or hunters near her upstate New York home. In a 1998 exhibition at Kind, the casts were the color of dried blood and strung up by ropes in an installation that had the atmosphere of a slaughterhouse and the expressive heat of a political protest.

The current show is visually more austere but feels even more personal. Faith was the name of a horse Ms. Jagger owned for several years. When the animal died in an accident two winters ago, the artist made a multipart cast of the body, where it fell in the snow. In the gallery, she has suspended the various sections of the fragmented cast by wires so that they float independently but form two complete images of the horse.

The effect is striking. The great white animal looks at once frozen and animated, ruined and ethereal. The installation has the theatrical punch of a re-enacted disaster, but also the elegiac gravity of a tribute to a loved one, infused with the complicated feeling usually reserved for human subjects.

Don't miss the video clip from an interview with the artist that is playing downstairs. It helps to illuminate a formally direct, emotionally fierce and oddly classical sculpture -- Ms. Jagger's subjects are fate and survival -- of a kind almost no one else seems able or willing to risk doing these days.