

# ARTFORUM

## Gillian Jagger

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### GILLIAN JAGGER KATONAH MUSEUM OF ART

Sculptor Gillian Jagger has worked in large-scale plaster, stone, cast cement, and sheet lead. In all of these media, she has tracked and analyzed the passage of natural forces over the surface of matter in order to investigate the way meaning lodges in physical form, and to uncover the connections between the external shape of things and internal processes. In her most recent tree sculptures, Jagger brought to light the relations between the effects of wind, rain, ice, sun, predation, and age on the texture and shape of a tree and the internal functions served or transformed by these natural processes.

In all six of the works made from the gnarled, lacerated, scarified, and otherwise distressed hulks of dead trees, the trunks had been carved, clarified (a process in which rot is removed to reveal the skeletal structure of the tree), trussed up, suspended, and in some cases drawn on with oil stick, in ways that accentuated or played off of their anthropomorphic characteristics. Serving as a sentry at the museum's entrance was *Leacht (Monument)*, 1994, which resembled a tall female figure. Painted lines of red, orange, yellow, and pink ran up the legs, converged at the waist, and fanned out under the jutting chin, emphasizing the carnal energy of this feminized form, which seemed to strain forward, her complexly lined face turned skyward. Inside the museum sat *Croga II*, 1992, a massive, firmly grounded agonal figure whose torso showed the strain of trying to rise.

Jagger's tree sculptures, some of which appeared in the group show "The Garden of Sculptural Delights" at Exit Art held in the spring of '94, had a quite different effect when viewed in the museum's sculpture garden. Placed within a grove of stately, seven-story-tall Norwegian spruces, Jagger's tree hulks no longer spoke of untamed nature as they did in the white cube of the gallery, but of sculptural mediation and clarity.

Several of the pieces placed outside alluded to the fragility of the human form. *Leotha (With Them)*, 1995, was chained to one of the spruces, leaning precipitously and balanced on one thin, splintered leg. The two sides of *Cloim (Overcome)*, 1994, enclosed a uterine or glottal opening with proud flesh folds at the bottom and an exit tube at the top. Projecting into the opening from a side wall and suspended over the chasm hung an appendage that looked like a tiny human leg. The red oil stick Jagger had applied to the edges of the chasm deepened and extended the anatomical/allegorical quality of the piece.

The emotional resonance of these works was perhaps best exemplified by *Choinneahm (Meeting)*, 1995, which achieved a profound intimacy with the roughest of means. From the back it appeared to be one, or maybe two, tree trunks hollowed and opened out. From inside the opened tree emerged what looked like the lower half of a twinned female figure. A rough wall of scarred bark, festooned with heavy chains that were transformed into a delicate string of jewels when the sunlight struck them, faced this figure. From the center of this intimate juxtaposition of protected figure and bejeweled ground, another rough trunk rose straight up into the air, as if in aspiration.

What Jagger achieves in the best of these works is a sort of inverted anthropomorphism: instead of narcissistically projecting her (or

REVIEWS



Gillian Jagger, *Tri*, 1995,  
wood, steel, stone 11"x13"x6"

our) own emotions onto other (once) living things, she acknowledges her participation and collaboration in the passage of the material itself from one stage of being to another. That is, the point where sculptural object is differentiated from natural form is deliberately held in suspension and suffused with significance.

— David Levi Strauss