

# ARTFORUM

## Gillian Jagger

by Donald Kuspit  
November 1991

### GILLIAN JAGGER

ANITA SHAPOLSKY  
GALLERY

Gillian Jagger's lead forms—marvels of raw, proliferating texture—hang like flayed carcasses or sit like creatures freshly mutated from the earth. Yet none of these metaphors are adequate to the horrendous physicality of Jagger's sculptural objects. Speaking of the derivation of her work from natural surface, Jagger remarks: "All things in nature . . . resemble each other in their folding, tearing, cracking, wrinkling kind of way, and in this way humans and animals resemble trees and rocks." The crumbling of our skin, in other words, reminds us of our kinship with nature, asserts its eternal, primordial rule over us. Jagger has in effect captured spontaneous flow—petrified magma, without losing the sense that it is fresh from a recent eruption. Death and Eros blend indistinguishably in one grand sculptural gesture.

The variation and irregularity of surface Jagger is obsessed with—the sense of surface as a formless flow reluctant to take specific form—also has metaphoric meaning for her, it represents the complex currents of an inner life: "Rivers flowing and minds thinking have an identifiable form in common." Jagger, then, in searching for unity between nature and humanity, but also

for the intransigence of the elemental as such, which is what the massiveness and leadenness of her sculptural shapes convey. Lead, that ultimate entropic material—in a sense, Jagger has reversed alchemical process, turning the gold of heaven into the lead of the underworld—is instantly portentous and ironic in our world of synthetic light materials. It is the natural material that defeats, with its density, our pretension that we can "see through" every material by reason of our knowledge of its atomic constitution. Jagger suggests that every natural material has its own body language, as it were, which makes an altogether different kind of sense than the intellectual language we translate it into, and which speaks more readily, if unconsciously, to us.

Jagger's sculptures require great space to see their inherent as well as overt grandeur and expressivity. They remind us that nature and the abstract converge, in that nature spontaneously takes abstract shape, and that the consistency of its irregularity implies a certain regularity, as chaos theory indicates. Jagger's works seem to embody chaos, but they tend to have a conspicuous, emphatic verticality. No doubt this comes from the way they are made—by literally hanging lead from chains, and articulating its slumps and bulges—but the verticality seems inseparable from it. This uprightness resists the heaviness of the material itself, setting up a tension that gives a kind of rationale to the



Gillian Jagger, *Fior*, 1989-91  
lead, epoxy, and paint.  
10'2"x68"x44"

expressive contractions and expansions of the surface. The verticality is finally emblematic of the uprightness of the figure, suggesting that these works are the imprints of some imaginary body—are projections of bodiliness, restoring us to a sense of our immanence in our bodies, always in danger of being lost in the modern, concept-oriented, manufactured world. This is why the grotesque quality of Jagger's sculptures is consoling, for there is no way of being emphatically bodily in our high-minded world without seeming grotesque.

— Donald Kuspit