

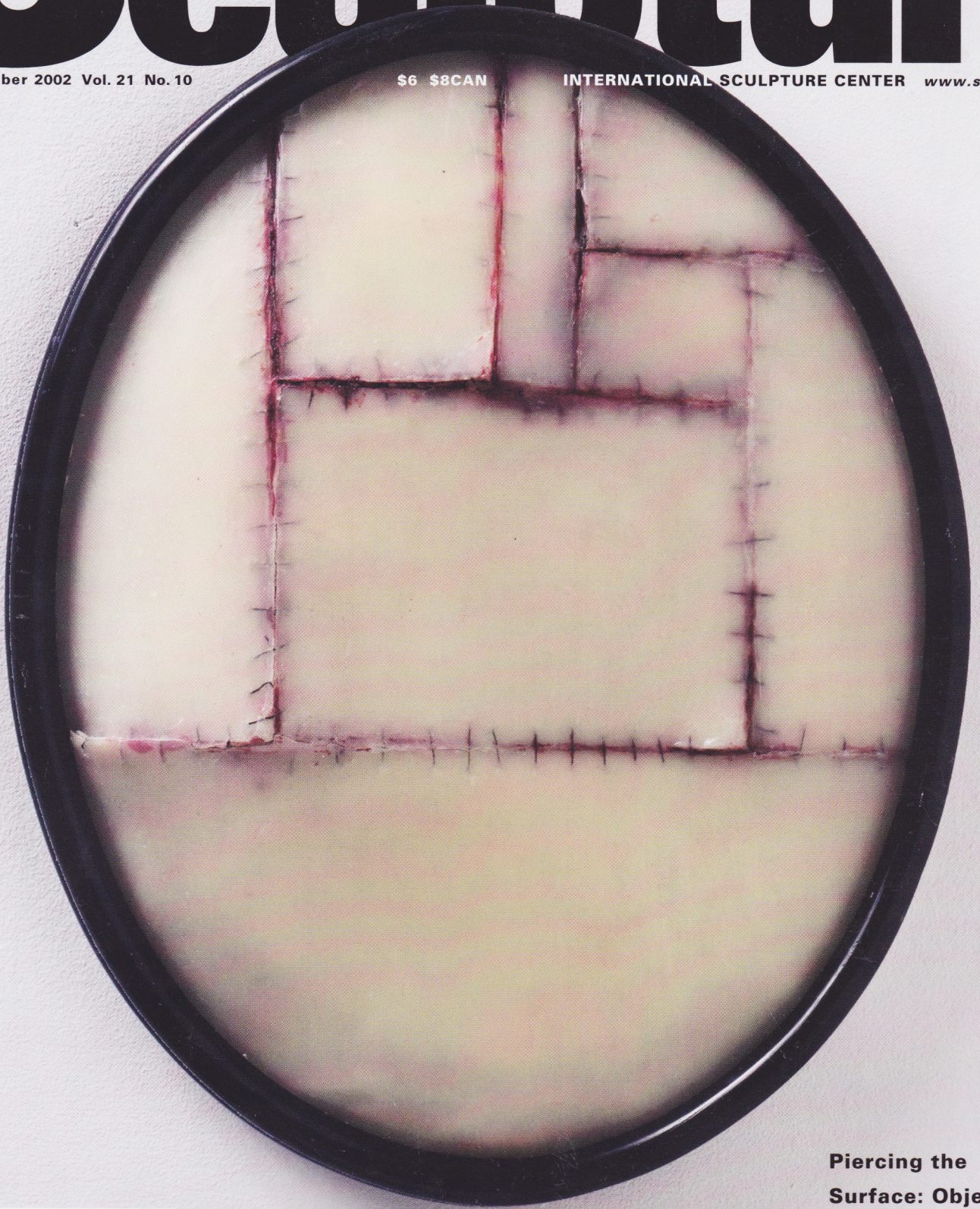
# Sculpture

20th Anniversary Year

December 2002 Vol. 21 No. 10

\$6 \$8CAN

INTERNATIONAL SCULPTURE CENTER [www.sculpture.org](http://www.sculpture.org)



**Piercing the  
Surface: Object,  
Body, Earth**





work belonged "to the culture as a whole," to serve as an instrument of healing for a nation in distress.

An amalgam of words and image, *The Golden River* consists of approximately 1,000 little boats, all folded from Hachiyonagi's own hand-crafted paper. Slightly different in configuration, texture, and hue—subtle beiges to pale greens—the miniature barques are each suspended by four lengths of barely visible monofilament. The aerial flotilla quivers gently on invisible currents of air, almost filling the intimate gallery space whose charcoal gray walls provide a shadowy foil. At staggered distances from the ceiling, the boats create an almost mesmerizing "floating world."

Basing her work on the archetypal symbol of the boat as a ferry for the soul into the next life, Hachiyonagi begins her poem with a quotation from D.H. Lawrence, exhorting the reader to "build the ship...to carry the soul on the longest journey." Her poem continues with an allusion to the Golden River, a legendary stream in Asian mythology joining time to eternity.

A concatenation of personal and cultural influences enriches Hachiyonagi's work: the recent death of a friend and fellow paper-maker, the pivotal role of paper and its fabrication in her native Japan, together with Buddhism's ideal of surrendering egocentric individuality.

Shortly before her friend, Gail Berkus, died of cancer, Hachiyonagi dreamed that the two were making paper together as they often did before Berkus's illness. Suddenly, the sheets began to float in the air; and soon the artists, too, were levitating. In another kind of waking dream, Hachiyonagi was standing on a bridge looking out at a river when she perceived the water not only coming toward her but passing "through" her as well.

Equally essential to understanding this work is the spiritual dimension of papermaking for the

Japanese. Laborious and time-consuming, the process involves progressive purification of the white, inner bark of specific plants, especially *kozo*, *gampi*, and *mitsumata*. After rinsing, then boiling the fibers in a mildly alkaline solution of filtered water, the artist picks over them with tweezers to remove specks, and finally beats them with a wooden mallet. Best executed under extremely cold

sels: that of making 1,000 origami cranes to have a wish fulfilled. When Berkus lost her first grandchild, she folded the requisite 1,000 cranes; her daughter-in-law conceived again. And, like a prayer for Berkus's healing, Hachiyonagi and other friends made over 3,000 paper cranes, hanging them all over her house. When the healing didn't come, however, Berkus announced:

## Indianapolis

**Sonya Y.S. Clark**

Indianapolis Museum of Art  
Africans brought forcibly to the Americas on slave ships arrived "empty handed but not empty headed," Sonya Clark said in an artist's talk. This traveling exhibition concentrates on Clark's sculptures, which use abstracted hairdos, hats, and headgear to represent the complex, transnational



conditions, this centuries-old procedure is, according to Hachiyonagi, "a marriage of nature and human industry," a kind of meditation.

Associated with purification, paper is a ritual substance in Shinto temples. Folded paper often hangs at entrances, and a priest shakes a stick to which paper is attached over worshippers. Food offerings, moreover, are frequently placed on paper. Most notable is the fact that paper shares its name with the Shinto god Kami. Though written as distinct characters, the two words are pronounced the same.

Yet another popular Japanese tradition informs the 1,000 ves-

"Don't worry; I'll be making paper out of clouds."

These complex personal and cultural factors all fed into the construction of the exquisitely spare airborne fleet. Soon after the World Trade Center catastrophe, the artist added a final, poignant line to her work: "May the ships of the Golden River comfort the souls that departed on September 11, 2001." She has exhibited the installation in various cities to continue its role in the national healing, including New York, to commemorate the first anniversary of the disaster.

—Dorothy M. Joiner

**Sonya Y.S. Clark, *Oya*, 2000.**

**Cloth, beads, coins, and ceramic, 10 x 12 x 8 in.**

mixtures of influences, ideas, and beliefs held by peoples of the African diaspora. The exhibition is a paean to the value of remembering, to holding onto culture despite adversity.

Clark herself is a prime example of a diasporic artist. She is a first-generation American whose parents emigrated to the United States from the Caribbean. Although her knowledge and influences are wide-ranging, the canon with which Clark is most closely



engaged is African, a connection underscored in this exhibition by the inclusion of nine mid-20th-century African hats and headdresses from the collection of the University of Iowa Museum of Art (organizer of the show). A reading of Clark's work in terms of African influences was further encouraged in Indianapolis by the show's installation in a gallery in the middle of IMA's African collection. In fact, Clark has extensively researched the importance of the head among African peoples, such as the Yoruba of Nigeria, the Kuba of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Bamana of Mali, all of whom view the head as the container

of the soul and the center of intelligence and moral strength. She has also learned about ways in which hairstyles and headgear are employed throughout the world as markers of status, occupation, and gender.

Whereas African objects in museums are divorced from their original functional contexts, Clark's works are created self-consciously for exactly the kind of interpretive context a museum provides. She does not intend her intimate sculptures to function as wearable art; instead she means to represent cultural memory, transformation, and hybridity metaphorically. Her headdresses embody

a successful diasporic culture, one that honors ancestral links, remembers displacement, and thrives on syncretism. For instance, *Oya* (2000) refers in its title to a Yoruba warrior goddess; the surface of the cloth form is decorated with beads and metal coins, and copper tacks bristle outward from the tips of two protrusions of the headdress, evoking some of the intensity of a Kongo *nkisi nkondi* "nail fetish" figure. Yet the headdress is not literally copied from any African precedent. (Indeed, to some viewers, the two "horns" might even evoke the unusual hats sometimes seen in medieval European paintings of aristocratic women.) It is a representation of African ancestry in an American present.

About one-third of the pieces in the show cross the blurred boundary between headdress and coiffure to celebrate black hairdos, many vividly translating the parts and radiating the braids young black girls often wear. Like other diasporic artists and critics (Sonia Boyce, Joyce Scott, Bill Gaskins), Clark claims hair as a fundamental fiber and hairdressing as a populist textile art, one used to articulate ethnic difference and potentially to assert blackness as a positive attribute (for instance, with "dreadlocks" literally suggesting hair to hold in awe).

Clark demonstrates an impressive command of a range of fiber techniques, including embroidery, weaving, plaiting, dyeing, and beading. The best of her works meld sophisticated technique with forms and materials that evoke historical ideas and the rich syncretism of diasporic cultures. The form of *Well* (1997) evokes the pointed crowns of Yoruba kings; the copper pennies adorning its surface refer simultaneously to the high value of copper (metaphysically, economically, and socially) in traditional African

cultures and the low value of copper in U.S. currency (with copper simultaneously standing in for people of color). The head of Abraham Lincoln on the coin can be interpreted as a symbol of emancipation. Like Clark's other headdresses, *Well* is not a simulated African object; it is authentic African American art.

—Jean Robertson

## New York

### Gillian Jagger

Phyllis Kind

Pathos has long been a determining factor in the art of Gillian Jagger. She has worked with dead animals for years, installing them as a kind of emotional center in her compositions of hanging pieces of wood and farm tools. Her use of space is particularly strong; in the installations, in which such things as boards and rusted saws hang from the ceiling, there is a wonderful sense of openness, as well as a highly considered spatial relationship between the objects. But the true heart of her work lies in her treatment of the lifeless creatures she places among the other components. In *Matrice* (1997), the focus of attention was a dead deer Jagger had come upon at the edge of the road; it showcased her involvement with nature and mortality while at the same time impartially rendering the facts of death. In *Rift* (1998), she salvaged the bodies of a number of animals, including cats, deer, cows, even a zebra, from a Catskill killing farm.

Jagger lives in the midst of nature, outside New Paltz in upstate New York. Her home is filled with animals—dogs, cats, and several horses—and her studio is an abandoned barn, so she is always close to the outside world. For her recent show, "The Absence of Faith," she cast the body of her horse Faith. Jagger recalls the details of the horse's death as follows: "At 9:45, February 16, 2000, Faith died. The vet took 45 minutes to find a vein. She had apparently impaled herself on a



Gillian Jagger, *The White Doe and Twins*, 2002. Plaster, wire, and mixed media, 12.75 x 7 x 7 ft.