

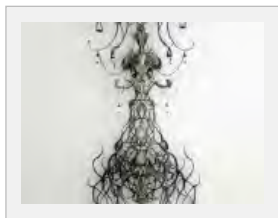
EDITOR'S CHOICE INTERVIEWS PHOTO FICTION MUSIC POETRY ART COMICS LETTERS

INTERVIEW: ARTIST LAURIE HASSOLD

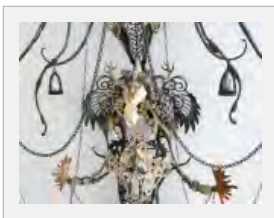
EDITOR CARRIE SEITZINGER, INTERVIEW, JULY 10TH, 2015



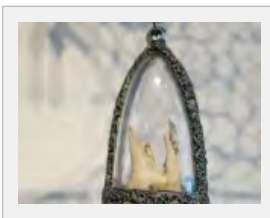
I came across Laurie Hassold's "Lady in Waiting" sculpture last year in a southern California gallery called Art Cube, and it immediately drew me in with its detailed, fragile intricacies. While it worked some strange beauty therapy on me, hanging on the wall like a huge piece of jewelry, there was also something dark and somewhat wicked about the work, as if this gorgeous totem was something that a cunning demon composed from a dead woman's organs.



Lady in Waiting



Lady in Waiting (detail)



Lady in Waiting (detail)

I stared at the piece for a long time before inquiring further about the artist and her work. I emailed Hassold on behalf of *NAILED*, and when I found out she'd done some performance art featuring her own blood, I asked for an interview. Below is my candid interview with Hassold (who is unbarred and creative even in her answers), as well as several small galleries of her sculptures, all truly remarkable pieces of art.

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NAILED MAGAZINE: How would you describe your personal and emotional relationships to the work you make? How do you feel while you are making it, and when it is finished?

LAURIE HASSOLD: I wish I could say that I sculpt in a sustained state of creative fury, but my process is fraught with highs and lows. Much of the time, I feel like I'm stumbling around in the dark, trying to get my eyes to adjust, feeling my way through the terrain, and often stubbing my toe in the process. Making

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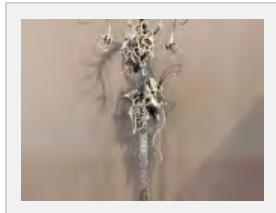
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DEATHWISH ANYONE?

decisions on how a form will evolve takes me a very long time... I temporarily attach things, then distance myself for awhile, before making the decision to go permanent. My process is fairly intuitive, therefore, there can be many incarnations before a sculpture is exhibited. Each time I say "no" to one direction, it feels like a little death for all the other possibilities. I've always been like this... listening to many sirens, immersing myself in endless research, potential and creative play.

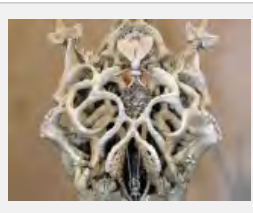
The most joy I feel when making a sculpture is when a certain curve or flourish takes hold, and I can almost hear it through my eyes... an audible movement, like music. This is when the piece starts to "yearn." I give it so much of my own eye juice—scrutinizing it in a full-length mirror—looking for any imperfection that corrupts the form and keeps it from being believable. I want the form to look back at me with a little recognition. I want it to mirror in a tangible way, all of the yearning I feel inside. Until it is able to see me with a sentience all its own, it can't possibly see inside itself—therefore, it isn't alive.



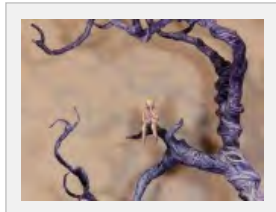
Empty Throne



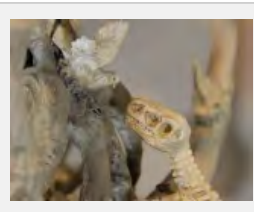
Empty Throne (detail)



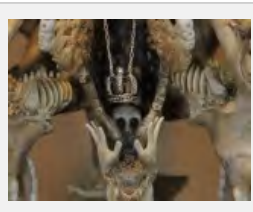
Empty Throne (detail)



Empty Throne (detail)

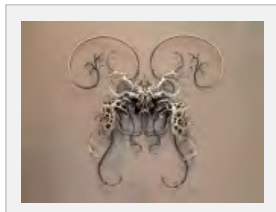


Empty Throne (detail)

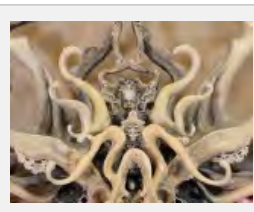


Empty Throne (detail)

When it does start to wake up, I have a potential playmate. We can whisper little secret jokes to one another... look for mementos of things that haunted us from childhood, and continue to color our reality. The sculptures are almost like lungs for my emotional, physical and psychological experience—it slowly inhales all of my thoughts, feelings, musings into itself while I work on it, and when it's full, exhales out freshly filtered visions of these experiences in tangible form. There are so many random associations that surface while I'm working on a piece, things that play through my mind like radio waves traveling through time... my childhood crush on Dave Bowman in the form of astronaut miniatures, little statuettes of Rococco courtesans that bring back bittersweet memories of failed relationships, and my parents divorce, and even schmaltzy Disney toys, like Stitch's ears from the movie *Lilo and Stitch*, a movie which never fails to put me right back to childhood abandonment issues. Of course the ubiquitous dinosaur skeletons and animal bones that for me are darkly satisfying memento mori. *As the dinosaurs went, so too shall we*, kind of thing. Being a rather romantic nihilist, I find comfort in ruminating about a world without humans. Feelings of nostalgia, loss, alienation—all remnants from my past, as well as the collective past. How can we exist knowing we will die?!



Mezmyr



Mezmyr (detail)



Mezmyr (detail)

My work makes me feel connected to something more complex than I am—something bigger. That sounds metaphysical, and I want it to be true—that we are star vessels and it all will make sense some day... It's some sort of language I'm trying to understand and translate that makes my brain and heart hurt—a language that could help me become part of something much larger than myself, but that I may never be able to decode.

I can't say if the work ever feels finished to me, even when its already been exhibited. A few early pieces have been cut apart—and some discarded altogether. This is painful, and freeing at the same time. For

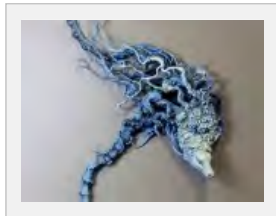
me the work is always striving to become, and never truly being. This is the paradox I have experienced most of my life, so I suppose, without sounding too trite I hope, that the sculptures are a way of making this state of flux and impermanence more tangible, in order for me to be able to hold still, transform and transcend my own emotional state.

FREEDOM, ANGST, SELF DOUBT/CRITICISM, DEPRESSION, ELATION, DISCOVERY.

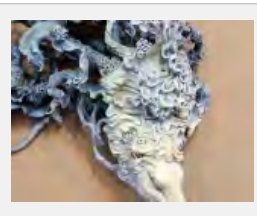
My process is riddled with highs and lows—punctuated by long periods of putting one foot in front of the other drudgery. Fear and Epiphany seem to come together with avoidance, myopic obsession, procrastination, and breaking point—usually brought on by deadlines!

NAILED: As a young girl, spending time with your father in his medical laboratory, you were encouraged to visually analyze parts of the internal body. Did seeing your own blood as a child make you feel alien to yourself or create a sense of understanding? How does that feeling compare to the performance art using your own blood that you've made as an adult?

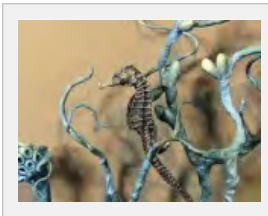
HASSOLD: I was so young when I first looked through a microscope at my own blood (and urine)—it's all very abstract to me now. The overarching feeling I get when I think about it, is one of shock, and maybe even a little repulsion. I thought I was a solid thing—a whole—and what I saw through that microscope made me feel fragmented. What I perceived my body to be was actually made up of tiny squirming things. I couldn't recognize myself anymore, and it made me feel permeable, less safe. I would say the experience definitely made me feel more alienation and less understanding.



Caretaker



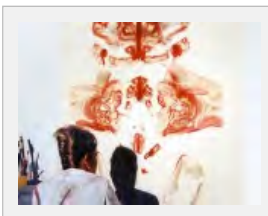
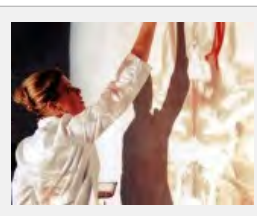
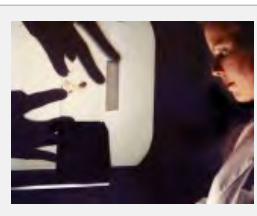
Caretaker (detail)

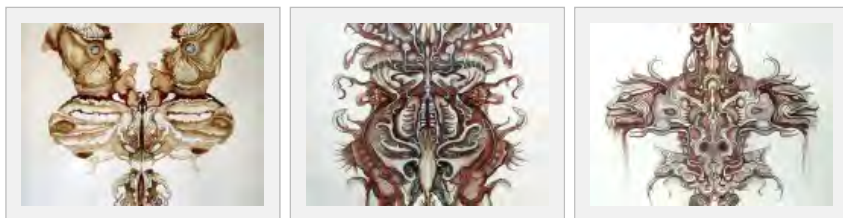


Caretaker (detail)

The real mind blower was watching the hysterectomy at age 11. Feeling organs as they were cut from a woman's belly. Watching the surgeon's hand go up inside and underneath the skin—move around to check the organs to see if any were enlarged. I never forgot the courtesy appendectomy he performed, and how the appendix looked like a squid. Nowadays this would not have been possible—too much liability to do a procedure that wasn't scheduled and consented to....

As an adult doing performance art, I felt liberated. Of course before and at the start of a performance, I am consumed by fear and anxiety—stage fright. The ego is ruling you at this stage—fear of boring the audience with navel gazing antics. Then as I get immersed in what I'm doing, time starts to slow down for me, and I become less aware of my surroundings—three hours can feel like 3 minutes!





The whole thing started as an accident—I cut myself working on a sculpture, and on a whim, squeezed some blood onto a piece of paper and folded it. It was like a gift seeing that Rorschach image appear! I kept doing it, and was gratified to see all the variety of insects, animals, plants, bones, dolls, warriors, goddesses—archetypes hiding in my blood. It was a way to make my fragmented view of my body whole again.

The symmetry gives an orderly structure for all the sub levels of anthropomorphic imagery to cling to. As humans, it's our nature to look for order in chaos—we want to understand, recognize, feel safe. It's wired into our limbic brains for survival. My singular non-linear nature feels constantly about to fragment into the stratosphere, and so I crave order and direction. It is a constant struggle for me to stay on one path and follow it to its logical conclusion without becoming distracted by numerous branching arteries along the way...symmetry provides me with an armature for safe exploration.

The Rorschachs' symmetrical nature provides an organizing influence, something that can be read as a whole, then peeled back to reveal all of the myriad layers and sub levels of just under the surface.

NAILED: How do you go about sourcing or choosing materials for the more intricate portions and details of your sculptures? What are some of your favorite processes and why?

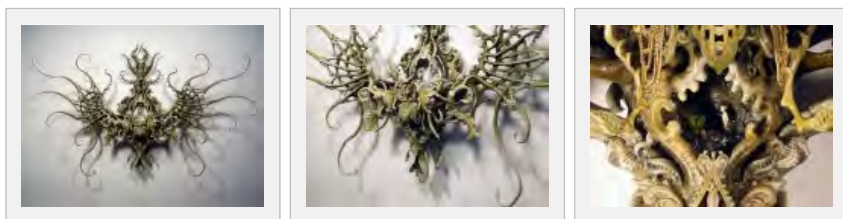
HASSOLD: I have collected a lot of random objects over the years—figurines, toys, jewelry, antique hardware, wash's nests, insect exoskeletons, snake, rat and bird bones, on up the food chain to raccoon,

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inspire me. The inherent intention is not usually important, but can sometimes add to the meaning of the work.

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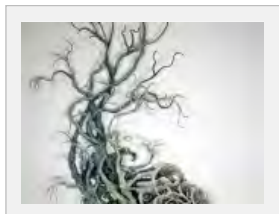
Lost Spring

Lost Spring (detail)

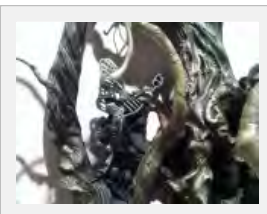
Lost Spring (detail)

Having a soup of all this stuff around allows me to try out different inhabitants for a developing structure. It can take weeks or months of digging around to find the right fit. In the meantime, I sculpt intricate matrices with wire and resin clay, striving to make sense out of a form as it intuitively evolves. In some ways it feels like all I'm really doing is making elaborate fossilized nests for smaller life forms to take up residence. This process is slow, and is a little like being lost, trying different paths over and over until you finally recognize familiar surroundings and realize you're home.

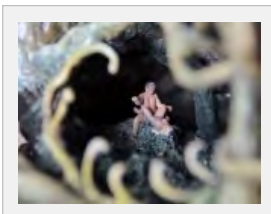
Even after decisions are made, there is the risk of an object getting swallowed by the claustrophobic sculpted layers, rendering it unrecognizable in the end. These hidden bits add history and DNA to the work, however, like the geological clocks of sedimentary layers to be excavated by some future species in a post human world. The congested nature of my work, at times makes me yearn for the clinical and scientific, which is why astronauts and lab coat sporting scientists started appearing in the forms. Artists and scientists are similar in that they seek answers to the big questions, where we come from, how we got here, and what our place is in the cosmos. My tiny assertions peeking out from the overwhelming matrix of existence are allusions to the fact that answers to these questions always seem to be just beyond the limits of the best and most brilliant human brains.



What the Tree Forgets



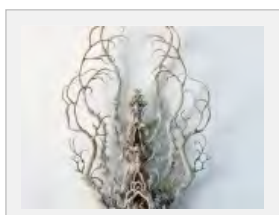
What the Tree Forgets (detail)



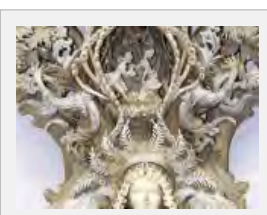
What the Tree Forgets (detail)

NAILED: When was the last time you NAILED it?

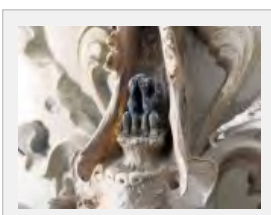
HASSOLD: Does any artist ever feel like they “nailed it”? The yearning for resolve and reaching a level of skill and insight previously not thought possible is always part of creating work; however, my personal criteria for that level of satisfaction constantly evolves and I keep changing the rules while I’m still playing the game. When I look back on previous work, I do see areas where I still think I “nailed it,” and there are pieces I wish I still owned, like *Lost Spring*, *What the Tree Remembers*, and *Explaining the Future to an Extinct Hare*. But if these works were still in my possession, the worm of my somewhat perverse creative process might turn, and they would run the risk of dismemberment and cannibalization into new forms.



What the Tree Remembers



What the Tree Remembers (detail)



What the Tree Remembers (detail)

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Laurie Hassold was born in Louisville, Kentucky, but has spent most of her life in southern California. She shares a home and studio with her husband, painter Jeff Gillette, and teaches art and design at Orange Coast College, Irvine Valley College and Cal State Fullerton University. Selected museum exhibitions that have featured her work include *Confronting Mortality with Art and Science*, at the Historic Halls of the Antwerp Zoo (Antwerp, Belgium), *The Shack Show* at Laguna Art Museum (Laguna Beach, CA), and *Extreme Materials II* at the Memorial Art Gallery (Rochester, NY). Past solo exhibitions that she is particularly proud of include *Exorb...and one day we didn't need to breathe* at Grand Central Art Gallery (Santa Ana, CA), *Supernature: A Post-Human Fairy Tale* at Track 16 Gallery (Santa Monica, CA), and *Nostalgia for the Future* at Art Cube Gallery (Laguna Beach, CA). She is currently working on an upcoming solo exhibition for Bert Green Fine Art in Chicago, Illinois that will open in autumn, 2016.



CARRIE SEITZINGER

Carrie Seitzinger is Editor-in-Cheif and Co-Publisher of NAILED. She is the author of the book, *Fall III Medicine*, which was named a 2013 Finalist for the Oregon Book Award. Seitzinger is also Co-Publisher of Small Doggies Press. Learn more about her at her official site.

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Laurie Hassold:

"Nostalgia for the Future" at Art Cube Gallery, Laguna Beach

Laurie Hassold takes a fresh look at natural life systems. Her highly imaginative sculptures could be gigantic cosmos in formation, minute living creatures, or beings of indeterminable size. Pondering the nature of the universe, her art populates a believable world of deep and thoughtful possibilities; either from the distant past or from a time far into the future.

Hassold's work explores her childhood interest in fairy tales and legends, which began with a book called "Wurzelkindern," or "Root Children." The handwritten translation by her grandfather tells a story of children sleeping underground, beneath the cold and compacted roots of winter, until they are awakened in spring to the wonder of bugs, beetles and the sparkle of life anew. Trees were always glorious for Hassold until she recently read about a couple in Griffith Park who were instantly killed by a tree that fell on them as they made love beneath its branches.

According to the legend, any park ranger who has attempted to remove the fallen tree has met with illness or death, and to this day, the fallen tree remains. *What the Tree Remembers* (2013) turns the archetype of star-crossed lovers and forbidden fruit into a graceful and curvilinear forest path fraught with historic references that date back to the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil itself.



"Explaining the Future to an Extinct Hare"
Mixed Media Wall Sculpture, 34" x 24" x 12"

Hassold layers wire, resin clay and found objects "until something makes sense and surprises her." Hidden niches, secret spaces, Rococo courtship all take shape. Touches of faces, jewels and half-stories ignite the imagination as we succumb to the enchantment Hassold's art exudes.

Explaining the Future to an Extinct Hare (2013) is a riff on Joseph Beuys' *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965). It posits an existential conundrum for the future: cross-species hybrids that evolve and proliferate after the human race has become extinct, only to become extinct themselves, a relentless cycle of growth, decay and renewal. In both works, Hassold transcends time, leading the past to the present and the present to the future, breaking through barriers as her sculptures move beyond conceptual and physical limitations. Each form is intricately conceived, skillfully executed, and cleverly original. Hassold pursues her themes by going deeply beneath surfaces to the hidden places where the essence of artistic experience is found. Her work is stimulating, original, and often extremely beautiful, but with a shudder that whispers just beneath its branches.



by Roberta Carasso
in art ltd. July-Aug 2013

laurie hassold

by daniella walsh

Oct 2008



Bones, droplets of blood, cigarette butts, burned cocktail napkins and an assortment of discarded objects ranging from empty pill containers to pieces of industrial detritus may not be everyone's embodiment of beauty, let alone art. But in the deft hands of Los Angeles artist Laurie Hassold, such objects become eerily compelling sculptures and assemblages, visual clues to worlds still unknown or yet to be invented. Hassold does not just rely on found objects to achieve her creative aims. If need be, she'll raid a toy chest or sculpt a human or animal limb, a sea creature or a shape suggesting any of the above using wire, epoxy clay and paint. For instance, Bent Fork: The Beginning of Hunger, features that utensil atop a mask-like composition replete with crustacean legs and tentacles, inspiring rumination on the physical and spiritual effect of deprivation or its opposite.

"My work blurs the boundaries between art and science, literature and psychology in a quest to explore how each of these disciplines negotiate the split between mind and body," Hassold says. A physician's daughter, by age 11 she had witnessed surgical procedures ranging from the removal of a mole to a hysterectomy and thus became completely inured to the sight of blood. "My father wanted me to follow in his footsteps, but I think my mother's artistic genes ultimately won over." But her fascination with science, science fiction, and the biological function of countless life forms has inspired her to create series of sculptures like Strange Attractors, composed of Rorschachian three-dimensional images blending plant, animal, human elements (hair/blood) and found objects.

Lurm: Family Trophy, is a dragon-like creature that has been shown in several Orange County and Los Angeles venues and that has undergone several subtle formative changes, depending on its creator's inspiration and the parameters of exhibition spaces. Currently, the piece is ensconced at the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art in Santa Ana as part of "Animal Magnetism," a show themed on the physical, spiritual and intellectual interactions between man and beast. Transformed from a motley gray/green during a previous show at the Grand Central Art Center, Lurm is in its most beautiful configuration yet, bronzed and sporting a long, delicate tail.

Nothing offers more evidence of Hassold's multi-faceted persona than her "project walls." Here one finds mostly two-dimensional work: cocktail napkins burned by nervous wielding of lit cigarettes, drawings in ink and blood, sculpted body parts, and several convoluted but highly readable allusions to female and, less frequently, male genitalia. (Note the strategically located fat coin purse in Strange Attractor III: Tuber.) These works also include objects such as tiny monkeys or mermaids, stream-of-consciousness doodles and writing snippets and, as she puts it, whatever got caught under her shoe. Other installations feature hands, arms, legs, torsos and wings made from a seemingly random fusion of bones that look oddly familiar: Over time, she has created countless permutations of that

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15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

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ubiquitous toy, and ideological lightning rod, the Barbie doll, which have appeared as beheaded bugs and other creepy crawlies. However, Hassold's chopped up versions are not the pricey Mattel versions but knock-offs whose bodies, made from thinner material, are easier to re-assemble into mind-boggling grafts. In Wreath (2005), arms and legs are intricately joined to form branches that are shaped into a twisted version of a Christmas wreath, while donut-shaped components in several assemblages have been crafted from severed Barbie faces.

"Barbies are overused symbols, and I've often cringed at using them," she says. "But, if a material wants to be something, it wants to be somethingófrom the first time I picked up a Barbie with the intention of using her as art material, she just begged to be a spider."

"Trying Not to Tell," 2007, Wire, Apoxie clay, Found Objects, 29" x 37" x 7"

Photo: courtesy Bert Green Fine Art

This Spring, Hassold's work could be seen in Los Angeles at solo shows at Bert Green Fine Art, and at Track 16 Gallery in Bergamot Station. This Fall, she and her husband Jeff Gillette will be featured in a show of works by artists married to each other, at the Santora Building Gallery of Santa Ana College. Entitled "Couples," the exhibition runs December 11, 2008 through January 3, 2009.

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Mat Gleason

Art Critic from Coagula Art Journal

Posted: December 7, 2010 02:09 PM

Laurie Hassold: Interview With a Sculptural Vampire



Lady in Waiting (detail)

Laurie Hassold is a sculptor who creates what appear to be dark, brooding forms, part ominous 3-D Joel-Peter Witkin totems and part early 1970s YES album covers, but they reward the viewer by slowly revealing themselves as intricate set pieces of universes all their own. Her *Post-Extinction Fossil Grotto* was the hit of this summer's Laguna Art Museum's Art Shack exhibit where the name mavens of LowBrow were invited to create their versions of beach lore "surf shacks" in the museum. I have been a fan too long to ignore this opportunity to introduce you all to a great artist. Her work is terrifying beauty made manifest for you to either be pulled in by or repulsed away from (*and some people do run, but many more are entranced*). In conversation she possesses a fierce intellect and an insatiable curiosity, as revealed in her sculptural explorations in organic possibility.



Laurie Hassold *Post-Extinction Fossil Grotto*.

Mat Gleason: *Is your inspiration organic, from the natural world, based on the forms you create, or is it synthetic, which is how I look at the materials you use especially compared to most sculpture out there... yours is in the middle of so many other artists concerns, sort of an intersection of many layers.*



Laurie Hassold *Fertile Mort* (detail)

Laurie Hassold: I am definitely inspired by the natural world, as well as science fiction. It seems to me that most

alien life forms imagined by human minds in literature and cinema are not really invented, so much as derived from the endless variety and mind boggling permutations found in plants, animals and insects already existing on our planet. The Alien monster obviously relies on the strange anatomy and reproductive processes of insects. The stunning beauty and horror that co-exists in even the smallest of non-human creatures, as well as the elaborate mechanisms and rituals they use for attracting prey and mates, fascinates me. We humans are utterly boring by comparison. I guess at my core I'm a romantic nihilist -- I enjoy pondering a future where the fate of all human achievement is reduced to a dirty pink layer of sediment in the vast geological clock. On one level, my work is about a post-human extinction earth, and the sort of life that gets to thrive at the top of the food chain after we bow out.



Laurie Hassold *Fertile Mort*

MG: *You lost me for a minute when you started putting little critters on your pieces, but then I saw it as expanding the possibilities of your work from being objects to being universes all their own. Do I have a clue here at all or are you operating on some other level?*



Laurie Hassold *Green Frost* (detail)

LH: There have always been little "surprises" in my work that beckon the viewer to come closer with a promise of recognition or discovery. If left to my own devices, I could scratch around in some very dark and haunted spaces, so these critters help me swing the pendulum into the light and laugh at myself a little. I like the push and pull of

presenting an alien, slightly frightening object, that on closer inspection gives way to the more familiar and even humorous fragments embedded in its bone-like structures and tentacles. On one level, the large "parent/host" form is a fossilized dwelling whose nutrients were long ago ingested by the tiny "offspring" it supports.



Laurie Hassold *Green Frost*

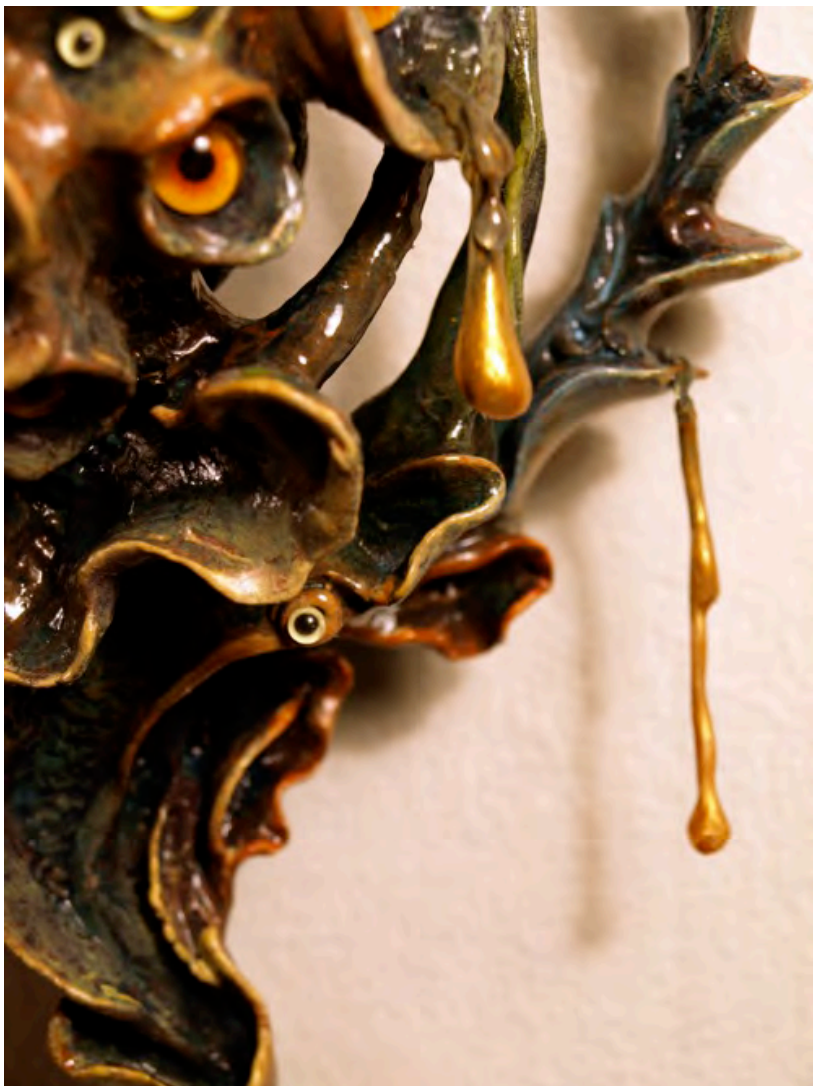
Dinosaur skeletons show up a lot, as well as monkeys and bears. The dinosaurs are a reminder that no species gets to reign at the top of the food chain forever, and the monkeys are a nod to Darwinian evolution and the resilience and adaptability of life. Bears are a recent and very personal addition, representing my relationship with my husband, and our home with three feline "children." Some works are more like stages for frozen tableau, as in *Green Frost*. This piece deals with issues of mortality and shows a tiny maiden perching at the mouth of a green ovarian cave. She tries to reason with the death head inside the cave, but the message she receives is that Death does not engage in dialogue.

MG: *Where do you see your work in the contemporary dialogue? I could see curating your work into a show of acolytes of HR Geiger or Eve Hesse... you have been in lots of shows with "LowBrow" themes, how did you break out of that circuit?*



Laurie Hassold *Nana Heart*

LH: I feel more kinship with Lee Bontecou, Eduardo Paolozzi and Germaine Richier. Except for a couple of LowBrow themed shows, I don't think I've ever really fit in that genre completely. My work is a little too abstract and open-ended to coincide with the representational narratives you find in LowBrow or Pop Surrealism. I do share an affinity with Surrealism, however, in that I'm interested in how the subconscious mind stores vast amounts of information, constantly editing what the conscious mind gets access to. Art is the best way I've found to access the subconscious. It is the one venture where you continuously learn something new about yourself.



Laurie Hassold *Nana Heart* (detail)

I did have a great experience in the LowBrow themed *Art Shack* show at Laguna Art Museum this year. Caves began showing up in my work about a year ago, and after reading about mammoth bone dwellings made by humans during the last ice age, I knew I wanted to make a post human-extinction cave out of bones. I wasn't sure the curator, Greg Escalante, would go for the idea, because it wasn't a true fit for the theme, and was thrilled when he said "yes."

Laurie's solo show is up now at Bert Green Fine Art in Downtown's Gallery Row and runs through December 24. She is in the group show 39Now at den contemporary gallery at the Pacific Design Center that is up until December 17. The Laguna Museum has coverage from its Art Shack up on its site.



Artist Laurie Hassold at the opening reception of her solo show at Bert Green Fine Art, November 2010. **Photo:** Harley.

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Laurie Hassold reanimates and reclaims a host of horrific life forms

By **STACY DAVIES** Thursday, Aug 12 2010

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If you ever meet Costa Mesa-based sculptor Laurie Hassold, you'll be struck by her stature and beach-blonde good looks. When she begins to speak, you'll realize she's friendly, upbeat and intelligent. And when you see her artwork, you'll realize that beneath the exterior, there's a darkly macabre soul screaming its way to the surface.

Hassold's sculptures—once referred to as “scary vaginas” by her artist husband, Jeff Gillette—can evoke thoughts of nightmarish creatures that scramble after you, baring fangs and wielding pincers. They are skeletal (exo- and internal); yes, vaginal; and also primordial, even though Hassold contends they are visions of things to come.



The Lovely Bones?

“I'm interested in ‘post-extinction forms,’” she says. “In other words, things that get to live at the top of the food chain after we bow out. They're a futuristic animal, the next step of evolution, and they get to gather themselves up from what we've left behind.”

What humanity has left behind, in Hassold's three-dimensional work, is mini-trash: cigarette butts, doll parts, monkey-shaped cocktail-glass garnishes, googly eyes and wedding-cake brides—all the tiny, processed specks of litter scattered across the planet and filling in the gaps between crumbling buildings and rotting automobiles. Hassold's creatures, survivalists that they are, have absorbed it all.

In *Radial Birth*, a gang of trolls dances along a vertebrae trail around a birth-control-pill case, which is mounted atop a real wasp's nest. In another sculpture, real bones surround a faux hornet's nest made from discarded cigarette filters. Mixing our manmade junk with nature is Hassold's prime

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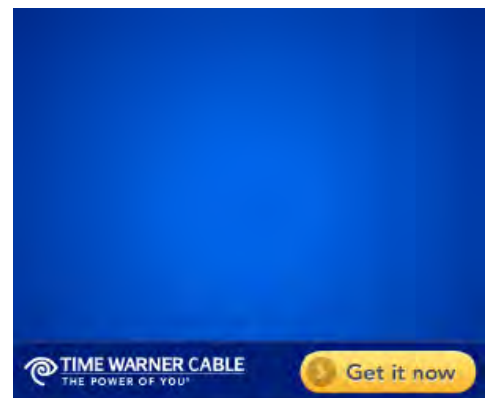
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...mimicking with wire, clay and florist's tape what naturally occurs in our world is her mission.

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"I really go nuts over nature," she says. "It's just unbelievable to me. I like being awed; I'm a wonder junkie, and I'm really attracted to the edge between beauty and the beast—the horror going on in your own back yard and the beauty at the same time."

What's going on in the back yard of her modest OC home these days is mostly just an irritated cat on a leash (he'd jump the fence and end up certain roadkill otherwise), but Hassold's childhood home was something other than status quo because it also housed her general-practitioner father's office. Hassold spent hours in the office—her version of a playhouse or tree fort—looking through microscopes and sitting in the room with patients while her father cut moles out of their backs. She did not vomit.

"Once, he took me into a hysterectomy, and they were cutting out this woman's uterus and ovaries and performing a courtesy appendectomy. They put it all into dishes and handed them to me so I could feel them. I remember my dad saying, 'If you get dizzy or nauseated, we can't help you, so just go lay down.' He thought he had a little doctor on his hands!"

It could have gone that way. Watching the cutting and blood-letting of hacking through skin desensitized Hassold to gore and later prompted her controversial 2003 performance piece at Crazy Space. A nurse drew pints of Hassold's own blood, which the artist used to paint an enormous, beastly Rorschach blot on the wall. Onlookers stood in awed silence.

"It was on watercolor paper, too," she says with a laugh. "Do you know how that paper smells when it's wet? I can only imagine what the people thought—I have stinky blood!"

In her new series, less blood and more burrowing is the mantra. She absent-mindedly refers to her studio as a *cave*, but the term is potent: Her latest pieces are swampy, oozing caves. In *Green Frost*, a maniacal skull burrowed inside a slime cave beckons to a maiden who stands on the edge of her own ominous fate.

"I've been getting into this cave thing lately, dripping things—different states of liquid—and there are probably a whole lot of personal 'change of life' reasons for it. This idea was also the inspiration for the piece at Laguna, which is based on mammoth bones from the Ice Age—a *future* ice age."

The piece she refers to—*Reading the Bones*, part of Laguna Art Museum's "Art Shack" exhibit—is notable both for its archaeological bent and because it's *not* a shack, at least not the kind we've come to recognize. One could contend it's an *animal* shack, an encasement and home for organs, emotions and life force. But it might also be a shack to some newly resident spiders—like the one Hassold delicately removed from the famous "scary vagina" piece hanging on the wall of her home when our conversation segued into literature and, finally, zombie movies.

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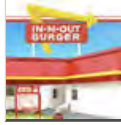


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"It has a great ambiance and always has a pretty eccentric crowd. It's a great place to people watch and hang out with great friends. The best part is... it is another great bar!" - Alana W.

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...continued from page 1

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As I recalled my favorite cannibalism films, starring both the undead and the still very much alive and very much hungry for college-girl flesh, Hassold squealed and shuddered. She also promised to rent *Terror at the Red Wolf Inn*. Apparently, there are still some things that creep even *her* out.

Laurie Hassold exhibits as part of "Art Shack" at the Laguna Art Museum, 307 Cliff Dr., Laguna Beach, (949) 494-8971; www.lagunaartmuseum.org. Open daily, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Through Oct. 3. \$15; students/seniors, \$12; children under 12 and museum members, free.

This profile appeared in print as "Creepy Crawly Creatures: Costa Mesa artist Laurie Hassold reanimates and reclaims a host of horrific life forms."



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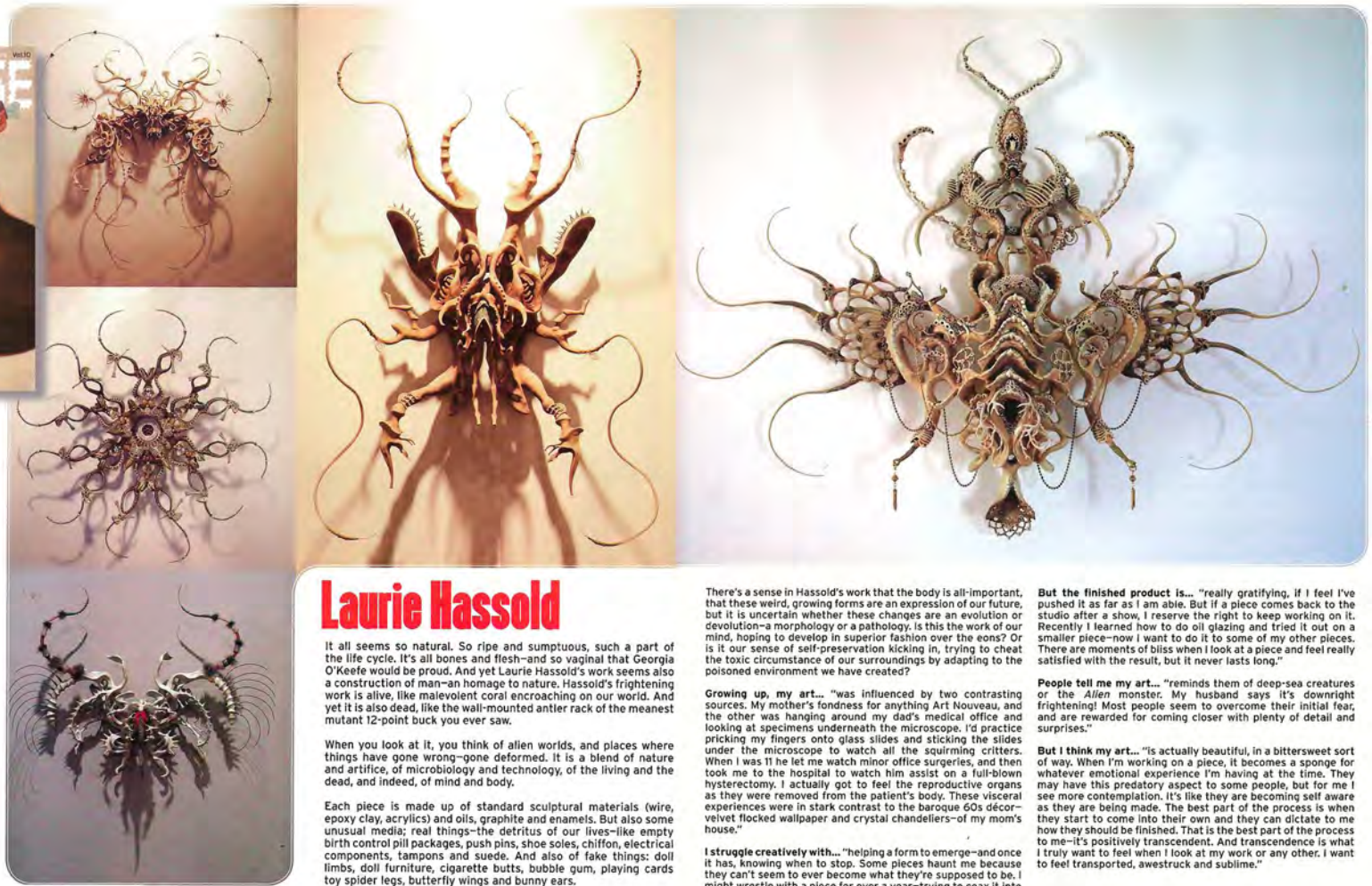
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Volume 10
January 2009



Laurie Hassold

It all seems so natural. So ripe and sumptuous, such a part of the life cycle. It's all bones and flesh—and so vaginal that Georgia O'Keeffe would be proud. And yet Laurie Hassold's work seems also a construction of man—an homage to nature. Hassold's frightening work is alive, like malevolent coral encroaching on our world. And yet it is also dead, like the wall-mounted antler rack of the meanest mutant 12-point buck you ever saw.

When you look at it, you think of alien worlds, and places where things have gone wrong—gone deformed. It is a blend of nature and artifice, of microbiology and technology, of the living and the dead, and indeed, of mind and body.

Each piece is made up of standard sculptural materials (wire, epoxy clay, acrylics) and oils, graphite and enamels. But also some unusual media; real things—the detritus of our lives—like empty birth control pill packages, push pins, shoe soles, chiffon, electrical components, tampons and suede. And also of fake things: doll limbs, doll furniture, cigarette butts, bubble gum, playing cards toy spider legs, butterfly wings and bunny ears.

There's a sense in Hassold's work that the body is all-important, that these weird, growing forms are an expression of our future, but it is uncertain whether these changes are an evolution or devolution—a morphology or a pathology. Is this the work of our mind, hoping to develop in superior fashion over the eons? Or is it our sense of self-preservation kicking in, trying to cheat the toxic circumstance of our surroundings by adapting to the poisoned environment we have created?

Growing up, my art... "was influenced by two contrasting sources. My mother's fondness for anything Art Nouveau, and the other was hanging around my dad's medical office and looking at specimens underneath the microscope. I'd practice pricking my fingers onto glass slides and sticking the slides under the microscope to watch all the squirming critters. When I was 11 he let me watch minor office surgeries, and then took me to the hospital to watch him assist on a full-blown hysterectomy. I actually got to feel the reproductive organs as they were removed from the patient's body. These visceral experiences were in stark contrast to the baroque 60s décor—velvet flocked wallpaper and crystal chandeliers—of my mom's house."

I struggle creatively with... "helping a form to emerge—and once it has, knowing when to stop. Some pieces haunt me because they can't seem to ever become what they're supposed to be. I might wrestle with a piece for over a year—trying to coax it into a more finished state, only to tear it apart and cannibalize the parts into other forms."

But the finished product is... "really gratifying. If I feel I've pushed it as far as I am able. But if a piece comes back to the studio after a show, I reserve the right to keep working on it. Recently I learned how to do oil glazing and tried it out on a smaller piece—now I want to do it to some of my other pieces. There are moments of bliss when I look at a piece and feel really satisfied with the result, but it never lasts long."

People tell me my art... "reminds them of deep-sea creatures or the Alien monster. My husband says it's downright frightening! Most people seem to overcome their initial fear, and are rewarded for coming closer with plenty of detail and surprises."

But I think my art... "is actually beautiful, in a bittersweet sort of way. When I'm working on a piece, it becomes a sponge for whatever emotional experience I'm having at the time. They may have this predatory aspect to some people, but for me I see more contemplation. It's like they are becoming self aware as they are being made. The best part of the process is when they start to come into their own and they can dictate to me how they should be finished. That is the best part of the process to me—it's positively transcendent. And transcendence is what I truly want to feel when I look at my work or any other. I want to feel transported, awestruck and sublime."