

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 something from 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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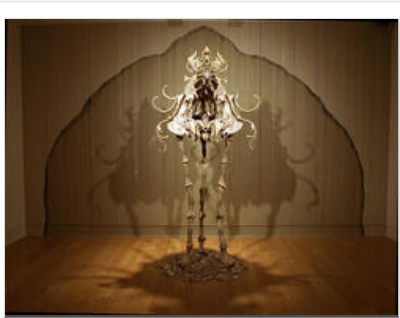
Laurie Hassold reanimates and reclaims a host of horrific life forms

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-blond 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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"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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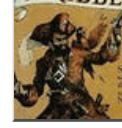
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As I recalled my favorite cannibalism films, starring both the undead and the still very much alive and very much hungry for college-girl flesh, Hassold squealed and shuddered. She also promised to rent *Terror at the Red Wolf Inn*. Apparently, there 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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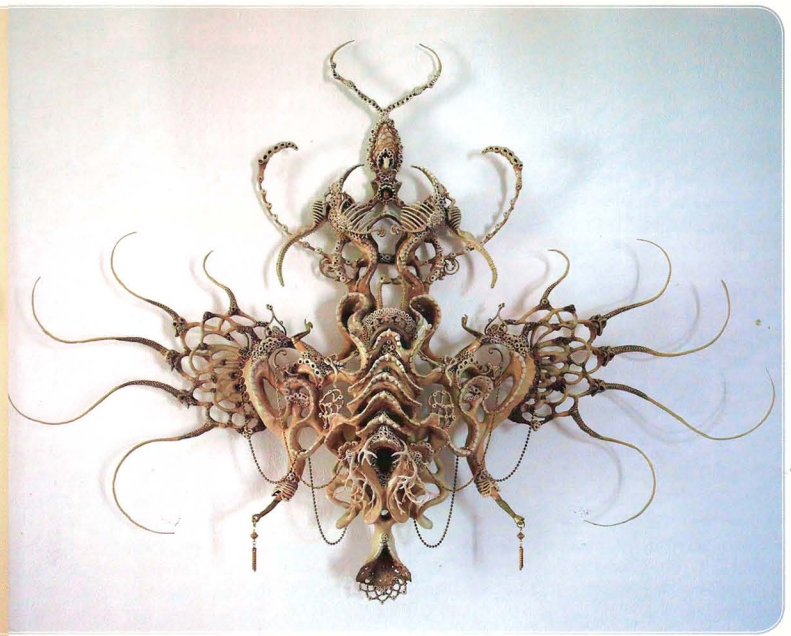
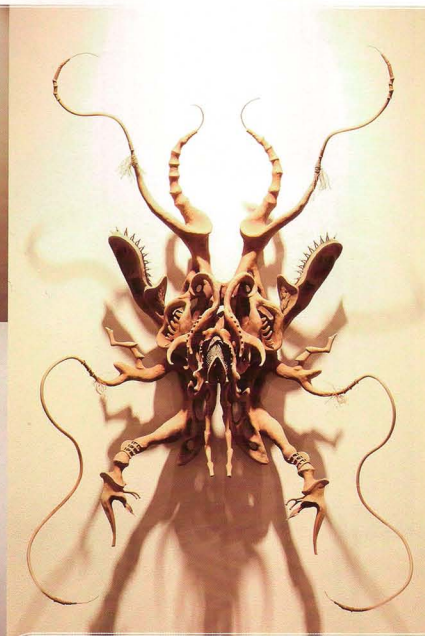
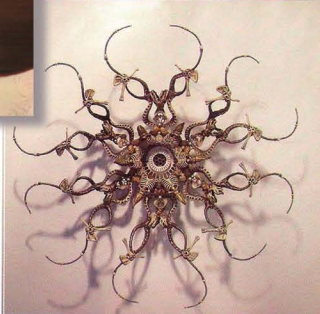
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Laurie Hassold

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'Keefe 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 flocced 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.”