

Jim Hodges

American, born 1957

In Jim Hodges' *What's Left*, 1992, a delicate spider web of brass chain floats suspended above a pile of men's clothing on the floor: jeans, black T-shirt, underwear, socks, black shoes, studded black leather belt. The work's title suggests aftermath, perhaps death, a body that has failed and faded, and all that remains are material possessions seen through a web that represents the natural world and the cycles of life over which we have no control. The clothes, hastily discarded, also suggest an urgent sexual encounter, the web a symbol of instinct, need, desire. There's also an absurdity in the banality of a pair of men's white underwear on a gallery floor, pants dropped, shoes kicked off, the absurdity and beauty of life and need, sex and passion.

Hello, Again, 1994–2003 [Work 22], is one of the many spider web/chain works that Hodges produced after *What's Left*. *Hello, Again* is a self-conscious title, suggesting the artist welcoming back a symbol that continues to seek expression. However, in this iteration only the web remains. The discarded clothes have themselves been discarded, and yet their absence re-sounds; new works are haunted by older works. Indeed, in describing a new production of a destroyed piece, Hodges referred to the second as a "ghost of the first one."¹

Hodges' metal spider webs find ghostly form as doodled figurations in *Untitled*, 1992 [Work 21], a work on paper created by transferring an ink drawing from one page to another using his own saliva. Hodges has described his interest in using bodily fluids that are generally reviled² as an impulse to reframe or re-invest them with potent, positive meanings, variously magical, sensual, erotic, representing our own liquid nature, our connection with oceans and storms, the blurring and blending of saliva with ink on the paper's surface a parallel with the connection between two people, a conduit of intimacy, trust, desire.

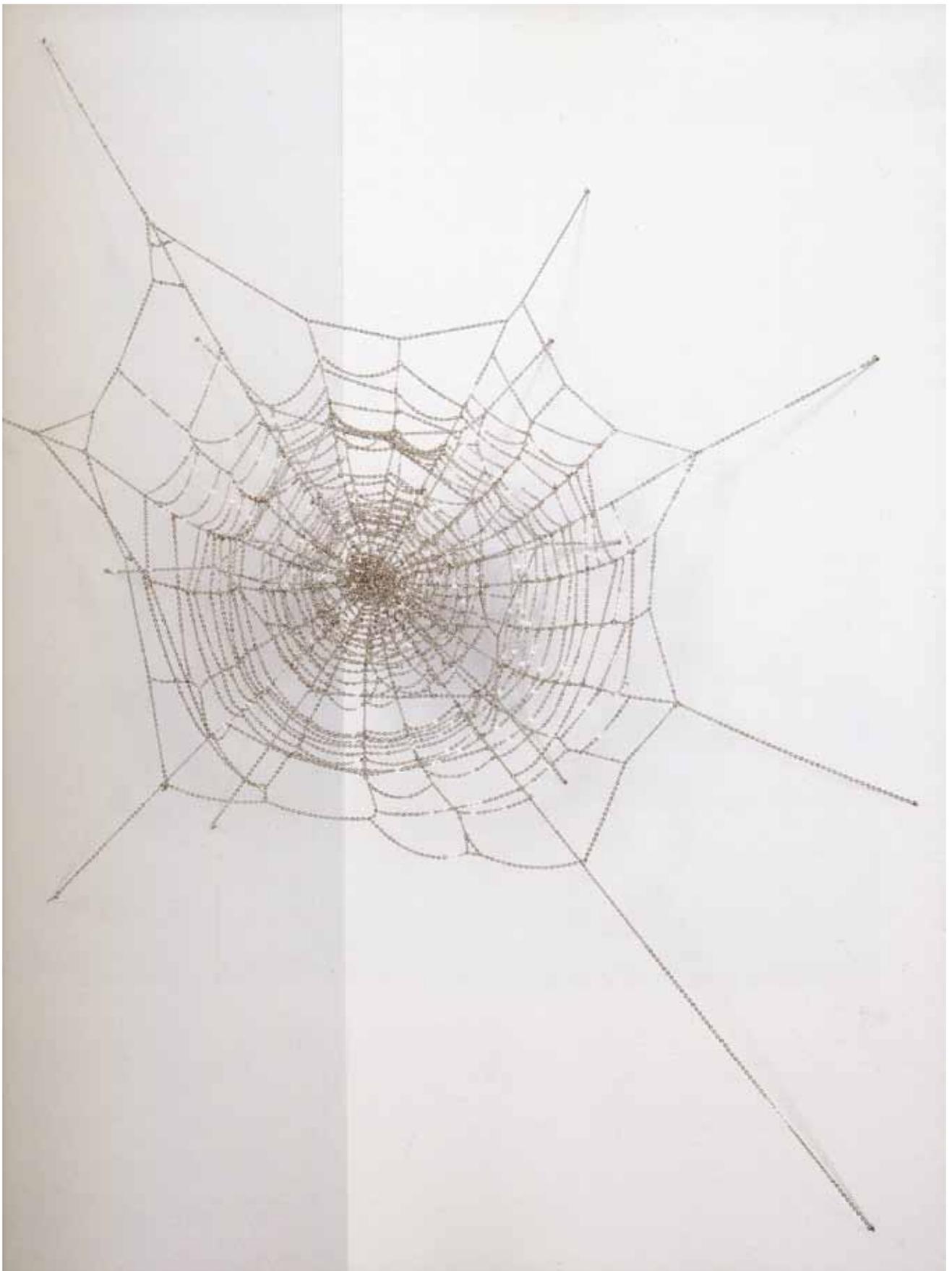
Also scrawled on *Untitled* are flowers, another of Hodges' recurring forms that appear in pieces such as

A Diary of Flowers, 1994, done over several years, about which Hodges has said, "Choosing a narrow range, such as flowers drawn on paper napkins, allowed me to explore my nature."³ Hodges' fluid and expansive exploration of "nature" ranges from the natural physical world to the qualities that imbue a living self. (This very expansiveness makes his work difficult to place—having been exhibited alongside James Turrell, Andy Warhol, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres.) Hodges' floral explorations culminate in *You*, 1997 [Work 23],⁴ from his series of curtains that overflow with artificial flowers, a plenitude that exposes the materiality of the work itself while sustaining a generative matrix of meanings around "nature," which paradoxically includes the polyester fabric and aniline dye used to produce fake flowers. Hodges conceives of the flower curtains as conduits that contain and emanate the consciousness of the factory workers who produced the silk flowers and the artisans who sewed and assembled them, imbuing the work with a tenuous but vital human presence.

The single great echo that resonates throughout Hodges' work, however, is the idea of love, seen in the image of a body overflowing with flowers (*Into Life*, 2001); in the phrase "We Become Everything We Love" superimposed in white stenciled anamorphic letters onto windows, a lens through which to see the world; and in public works, messages sent out to strangers, in commissioned work by the Aspen Art Museum, on lift tickets that tell us to "Give more than you take."

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1. Ian Berry and Ron Platt, *Jim Hodges: Opener 4*, 4th ed. (Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, 2003), 6.
2. Dorothy Spears, "Evidence of a Life Lived," *Art on Paper* (February 2006), 66.
3. Platt, *Jim Hodges*, 11.
4. Hodges created ten curtains with a variety of individuals including a light blue one for Felix Gonzalez-Torres made with Hodge's mother. The first, *Every Touch*, 1995, was produced after being invited for a residency with The Fabric Workshop. *You*, also produced with The Fabric Workshop, falls at number six or seven, says the artist.



Work 22
Jim Hodges
Hello, Again, 1994-2003
brass and pins
25 1/2 x 21 x 7 3/8 in.

Next Page Work 23
Jim Hodges
In collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia
You, 1997
silk flowers and thread
216 x 192 in.