

# Tying herself up in knots

Dancer Jill Sigman '89 \*98 challenges audiences to think

For Jill Sigman '89 \*98, the world is literally a stage. The multitalented, New York-based professional dancer, performance artist, choreographer, and teacher has danced on mussel shells on the bottom of a drained outdoor swimming pool in Manhattan. She has dangled from the lower branches of a very prickly tree in the Bronx, wearing fatigues and carrying a fluorescent plastic water gun. And she has performed in an abandoned socialist printing house in Belgium. "Dance can happen anywhere," says Sigman. "It is not about place or form but about bringing to people something they need. . . . I want to bring people dance that makes them think."

Sigman arrived at Princeton a self-professed "bun head," having studied classical ballet for 11 years at the Ballet Center of Brooklyn and the Joffrey Ballet School. A Brooklyn native, Sigman had no intention of studying modern dance in the Program in Theater and Dance, but she signed up when she couldn't find any ballet classes. Ultimately she experienced an "aesthetic revolution," crediting her professors Ze'eva Cohen and James May with "changing the way I looked at dance. Ballet didn't sustain me" anymore, Sigman explains. "I shaped my artistic voice and being at Princeton allowed me to do that."

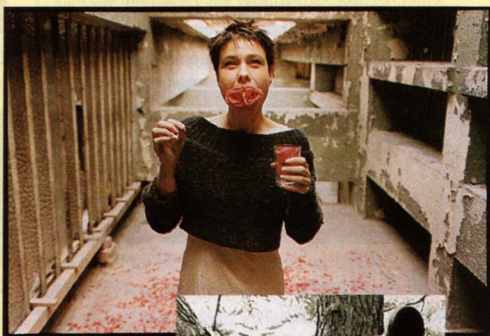
Sigman's diverse interests and life experiences have further shaped and refined her expression. The undergraduate and graduate philosophy major has supported herself at various points in her career as an art conservationist, a tour guide in Belgium, and a tutor in Croatia. She lived in Belgium for a year and has traveled and performed extensively throughout Europe, including the Netherlands, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovenia. She founded her own company, jill sigman/thinkdance, in 1998, the year she completed her Ph.D.

Since then Sigman has been performing and teaching consistently. She describes her performance style as being informed by European dance theater. "I'm interested in dances with emotional impact, dances with edge . . . and ways that ordinary objects can be transformed into the unusual or surreal," says Sigman. She relies on bold images, props, and lots of movement metaphors to convey her message. "I do tie myself up in knots a lot," she says, laughing. Sigman prefers to work solo, although she has choreographed numerous group pieces. Above all, her work is thought-provoking. "I believe in making dances that challenge audiences to question and interpret," she explains. "My dances are not just pretty or decorative but are almost always about something."

Sigman has returned on numerous occasions to Princeton's Hagan Dance Studio in the building at 185 Nassau Street. Last November, at the invitation of her teacher and mentor Ze'eva Cohen, she showcased her work, including a preview of her latest project, entitled "Vision Begins," an ambitious, multimedia, semiautobiographical interpretation of the legacy of the feminist movement. It includes, among other things, the theme from the Mary Tyler Moore television show, audio footage of the Roe v. Wade trial, and a black and white video of suffragettes. Of her student, Cohen says, "She is truly an original artist." By Kathryn Levy Feldman '78

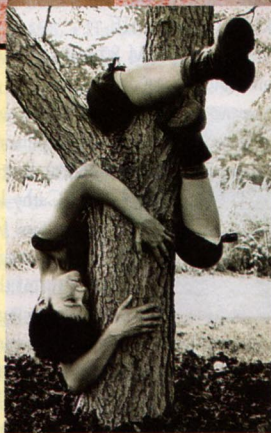
Kathryn Levy Feldman is a freelance writer in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

[www.thinkdance.org](http://www.thinkdance.org)



NICOLAS DELOEY

Top, Jill Sigman in "Fragile" (1997); right, in "Gun Shy" (1999)



BROWNE GILBERT