

CULTURED

IN FOCUS: NANCY GRAVES

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Nancy Graves, *Evol*, 1978

Last week, Mitchell-Innes & Nash gallery in Chelsea presented “Nancy Graves,” a solo show of works by the prolific painter who came to prominence in the late 60s, following her solo show at the Whitney in 1969. With the continuous buzz surrounding MoMA’s “Forever Now” and a resurgence in the medium among contemporary artists, Graves’ influence continues to surface—even two decades after her passing.

Following the opening of the show, we caught up with Christina Hunter, Director of the Nancy Graves Foundation.

You chose to focus on the first half of Nancy’s career for this exhibition. What sets this period apart in particular?

Graves’ conceptual, process-oriented and seemingly objective approach to art making emerged during this earlier period. Many of these works recall natural history museum objects, and she presented them in mounted, and arrayed displays. In media as varied as sculpture, painting, watercolor and film, this exhibition re-introduces an artist, a woman, inventing an independent vocabulary, one that she would further develop in daring bronzes in the ensuing decade.

Her solo show at the Whitney in 1969 must have caused a sensation at the time. How do you think it would be received today?

If the Camels from that 1969 exhibition were presented today, the show would be equally startling: three very large, imposing yet alluringly textured beasts, crowded into a relatively small gallery!?! The effect would be incredible, and open all sorts of questions still explored today: Are they real? Are they specimens? Are they art? How were they fabricated? They require a second and third look, and raise some of the issues about verisimilitude reexamined forty years later by Jeff Koons’ sculptures.

Which artists would you say have been influenced by Graves?

Many artists adopting assemblage techniques in sculpture owe a debt to Nancy Graves. Artists such as Frank Stella, Judy Pfaff, Jessica Stockholder, Julie Mehretu, and Sarah Sze are those that come immediately to mind. Graves’ map based work, and especially her research-based work is particularly relevant to artists in the digital era.



Nancy Graves, *Lixit*, 1979

Do you think Graves marriage to Richard Serra influenced her work—and in particular, any works included in this show?

Nancy Graves and Richard Serra met as students at Yale where they, along with their classmates, including Robert and Sylvia Mangold, Rackstraw Downes, Janet Fish, Stephen Posen, Brice Marden, and Chuck Close all earned MFAs in *painting*! All went on to develop singular personal styles.

Have you been to “Forever Now” at MoMA? What are your impressions?

It is so interesting that you would mention that exhibition! Those ideas were central to Graves. In the course of the 70s and 80s she relied less on representing outside material and increasingly reprocessed forms from her own earlier work to create a layered atemporal archaeology of her own visual production. Graves moved easily between pre-history and NASA computational systems, and between cultures and periods from the world over, and in her work freely overlays and combines formal motifs and styles in a way that is completely unpedantic, yet visually exciting and intelligent.



Nancy Graves, *Kloe*, 1977

“Nancy Graves” is on view through March 7 at [Mitchell-Innes & Nash](#), 534 West 26th Street, New York.

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