

# ARTNEWS

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## NANCY GRAVES AT MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

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Nancy Graves, *Head on Spear*, 1969, steel, wax, marble dust, acrylic, animal skin, and oil paint, 96" x 24" x 12".

Nancy Graves—the youngest artist and fifth woman ever to have a solo exhibition at the Whitney—burst onto the scene in 1969 with three improbable handmade life-size camels that hovered between taxidermy and simulacra. Her work carried Post-Minimalism, conceptualism, and process art into unexpected maximal territory that extended from Paleolithic creatures and environmental issues to the very new science of hard data. [This astonishing exhibition](#) was not just a reminder of another neglected major woman artist, but an affirmation, on the 20th anniversary of her untimely death, that her work was so far ahead of its time, it is, even now, at the cutting edge.

*Inside-Outside* (1970), a dismantled camel skeleton constructed from steel, wax, acrylic, marble dust, fiberglass, animal skin, and paint, is a renegade scatter work on the floor, as are the bronze camel turds titled *Measure* (1978). *Izy Boukir* (1970), her hypnotic film study of a camel market in Morocco (sound by Philip Glass), defies categorization. And when she turned to painting in the early '70s, her high-key washy colors, dots, and scribbles absorbed stray fragments of Frankenthaler, Kusama, Twombly, and Australian aboriginal art, while her coded scribbles within them were based on hard science—early satellite maps of the Indian Ocean floor or orbiter images of the surface of the moon at the exact spot where the Apollo astronauts had recently landed. Also camouflaged within were camels, jellyfish, spiders, and frogs.

And her work absorbed something of her father, who worked in a natural-history museum.

A lifelike camel's head on a long pole, titled *Head on Spear* (1969), presided over this show with an enigmatic look of beatific satisfaction—as if to confirm Graves's startling, groundbreaking ambiguity. Crisscrossing the borders between art, life, reality, abstraction, natural science, and data from early satellite transmissions, her art encompassed an insatiable curiosity, a fierce poetics, and a defiant stance.

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