

## Judy Pfaff

Ameringer/McEnergy/Yohe

Here, framed mixed-media works on paper mingled with exuberant assemblages that burst from the walls, amounting to a Judy Pfaff mini-retrospective, with work from 1979 to the present. The exhibition revealed an artist gloriously attuned to material possibilities, whether working in wire, steel, wood, or paper.

A pioneer in installation art, Pfaff brings qualities of painting, sculpture, and architecture to her works, establishing a dynamic push-pull relation with the wall. A 1984 piece titled *Frio* (From *Badlands Series*) suggests a sculptural rendition of Wifredo Lam's 1943 painting *The Jungle*. Pfaff constructed the dense thicket of black and white painted vertical cylinders from steel and poplar, which she juxtaposed with cheap planks of wood painted with an exaggerated grain pattern. In *Los Voces* (1992), she cantilevered rods from the wall, suspending from them tumbleweeds of copper and silver wire and the steel skeleton of an umbrella. The piece suggests both chaos and stasis.

A grouping of framed collages on paper from 1999 to 2002 catalogued Pfaff's engagement with nature and its underlying structure. In one piece, she set architectural plans and sepia photographs of forests against images of brains, turtles, leaves, birds, and butterflies, all systematically laid out like scien-



Judy Pfaff, *Frio* (From *Badlands Series*), 1984, painted wood, poplar, and steel, 132" x 108" x 72". Ameringer/McEnergy/Yohe.

tific specimens. Her assemblages from recent years extravagantly riff on this theme of nature, with inventively cut and layered paper lending volume to her botanical shapes. A new monumental wall relief titled *Said the Spider to the Fly* (2010) consists of black paper lampshades that resemble coquettish fans intertwining with artificial flowers, wires, and rods. As the title indicates, the dark, seductive work seems to promise nature's dance with death.

—Hilarie M. Sheets

## Morris Graves

Michael Rosenfeld

This show, celebrating the centenary of Morris Graves's birth, spanned 40 years, with work ranging from watercolors and gouaches on paper to granite, brass, marble, and crystal sculptures.

While nature is central to Graves's work, it is a nature filtered through a surrealistic sensibility. In *Alter* (ca. 1940), for example, an animal that could have been plucked from a Mirō painting sits atop a roughly sketched rock. The bird in *Bird in the Moonlight* (ca. 1942) perches on an abstract form, the moonlight represented by a trail of white paint snaking across the sky.

The idea of the natural world at war with itself persists throughout his work. There's the *Bird Trying to Get Back*



Morris Graves, *Bird in the Moonlight*, ca. 1942, tempera and watercolor on paperboard, 12 1/2" x 9 1/2". Michael Rosenfeld.

into *Its Shell* (ca. 1945) as well as the striking *Bird, Snake, and Moon* (1940), in which a bird and snake face off like two otherworldly ninjas. And in *Surf Birds* (1940), a geometrically patterned body of water appears to be swallowing up some birds peeking out from the maelstrom.

But nature's more contemplative side was also in evidence. The drawing *Mes-sage* (ca. 1940) suggests the imprint of two leaves in the sand. And *Plover in the Mist* (ca. 1941), *Young Duck on a Delta* (1953), and *Sea Bird* (1954) are pictures relatively free of the tensions that underscore so many of Graves's images. The artist's palette lightened up in three paintings from the '70s and '80s, with yellows, blues, and pinks added to the earth tones dominating earlier works.

Also on display were three sculptures that looked as if they might be scientific devices, an impression that was corroborated by their titles—*Instrument for a New Navigation #1* (ca. 1962), *Sentinel* (1962/1999), and *A Small Visual-Voice to Celebrate the End of the Twentieth Century Machine* (1962/1999).

This exhibition ably showed that while Graves was not a trailblazer, he drew from many artistic sources to achieve a synthesis that was all his own.

—Steve Barnes