

NANCY GRAVES

Archaea

Feb 6 - March 28, 2026

LOCKS GALLERY



Evolute, 1981, oil on canvas, 44 x 66 inches



Locks Gallery is pleased to present *Archaea*, an exhibition of paintings and sculptures by Nancy Graves (1939-1995). This marks the artist's seventh solo exhibition with the gallery since 1991.

Focusing on the artist's works from the 1980s, *Archaea* features black-ground oil paintings with layered and diagrammatic patterns paired with freestanding sculptures of cast bronze and welded industrial metals. Graves' work from this period embraces a spontaneity that allows for unexpected visual relationships among contrasting forms and references to emerge.

The artist has said, "What enriches me is to translate the discoveries I make in one area into another medium and then from that experience to push it even further. Given the fact that I [often work] simultaneously in both two and three dimensions, there is a constant cross-pollination."



Insight Out, 1989, iron, stainless steel, aluminum, leather, bronze with polychrome patina, 52 x 70 x 49.5 inches

Graves' earlier paintings from the 1970s (one of which is featured in the exhibition) contain the germinations of a freeform and layered process that came to define her subsequent work. This process involves a loose mapping and esoteric mark-making that combines symbols into an iconography that is both mysterious and familiar. These ideas are further articulated through works that employ actual artifactual references spanning history and cultures. For example, in the painting *Evolute* (1981), a pointillist profile of the ancient Egyptian queen Nefertiti appears interlaced with coral-shaped configurations and radiographic patterns. In this floating arrangement of marks, Graves creates a visual topography that could also suggest the compression of time and scale as seen through a microscope or telescope.

This method of combining cultural microbiota is explored more directly in her sculptures, which embody surreal amalgamations of the quotidian and the idiosyncratic, merging earthly and mechanical forms. Graves embraced the lost-wax casting process to convert miscellaneous objects, such as vegetables, rope, and flora, into bronze. Combining these elements with industrial metal readymades like tractor seats, tools, and rebar, as well as whimsical shapes made from cut sheet metal and freeform liquid bronze drawings, she precariously unifies them into brightly-painted compositions that stand as both graceful and impossibly awkward.

The artist has said, "My sculptures aren't evenly balanced in the obvious, visual way. They're balanced by imbalance. None of them defy gravity physically. But they do defy it visually."

Emphasizing Nancy Graves' cross-disciplinary approach, this exhibition unearths the material and thematic principles that guided the artist throughout her career, including her penchant for linguistics, paleontology, and biology. The intersections of natural history, ancient and modern culture, and the arts and sciences, more broadly, were fundamental to her work and continue to inspire today.