

# HEROES GALLERY studio e

Heroes Gallery in residence at studio e gallery  
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## **Ardent Mystic: Morris Graves, Mariah Robertson and Letha Wilson**

January 4th - February 24th, 2024  
Opening Saturday, January 6th 3-5pm

Heroes Gallery is pleased to present works by Mariah Robertson and Letha Wilson in conversation with historical paintings by Pacific Northwest luminary Morris Graves. As the first exhibition of Heroes' curatorial residency at Seattle's studio e gallery, this show pairs Graves with contemporary artists exploring landscape, the passage of time, nature's ephemerality, and materiality.



It's easy to argue that all artists are mystics; contemplation, self-surrender, seeking a unifying absolute and bringing form to the immaterial are all required, at some level, for an individual to make art. But Morris Graves was truly a mystic in its most traditional sense, going so far as to solidify an artistic movement defined by a 1953 Life Magazine article as the "Mystic Painters of the Northwest." Isolating himself from the noise of the modern world and heavily influenced by Hinduism, Daoism and Zen Buddhism, Graves found solace from the suffering of the Second World War in the plants, animals and vistas of western Washington.

The two pieces in this exhibition, both painted within months of his release from a military prison for declaring himself a pacifist, depict a waterfall's riotous white spray and glistening black rocks. Formal meditations on the enlightening and cleansing powers of nature, they express his desire to, "plumb or explode (his) belief that the spirit and content, as well as the form, painting contains—not only sustains but renews the inner meaning of living."<sup>1</sup>

Mariah Robertson is both a mystic and anarchist. Breaking every rule of photography, from removing the camera entirely to the dissolution of subject and gaze, Robertson's photochemical galaxy-like works capture the ephemerality of a solitary darkroom performance. Working without light and in personal

<sup>1</sup> Handwritten letter from Morris Graves to Betty Willis April 30, 1944, Vicki Halper & Lawrence Fong, Morris Graves: Selected Letters, 270.  
Image: Morris Graves, *Waterfall (Dark)*, 1943, tempera on paper, 30 x 26 inches

protective equipment, Robertson hand cuts rolls of paper and treats them with dizzying arrays of chemicals. Inspired by conceptual performance work of the 1970s and traditions of drag, persona and improvisation, her works aim to express an intangible energy in physical form. Forever a rule breaker, Robertson's opal cosmos is more dark matter than galaxy.

Initially frustrated by the photograph's inertness, Letha Wilson aims to synthesize landscape photography with sculptural form. The tradition of landscape photography in the United States has built our national identity; reinforcing a Manifest Destiny ethos with steadfast demand for control, dominance and frame. On top of this complicated history, Wilson folds into her work a visceral, occasionally spiritual, relationship we each have with the natural world. She describes her works as "capturing atmosphere" and "recognizing fleeting moments," a meditation on form, texture and structure very similar to Graves' quiet moments with the waterfalls of the Pacific Northwest.

**Mariah Robertson** (b. 1975) grew up in California and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She received an MFA from Yale University in 2005 and a BA from UC Berkeley in 1997. Select solo exhibitions include Van Doren Waxter, New York, NY; 11R, New York, NY; Green Gallery, Milwaukee, WI; M+B, Los Angeles, CA. She has been included in exhibitions at institutions such as MoMA PS1, New York; International Center of Photography, New York; and Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit.

Her work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California, Whitney Museum of American Art; among others. Her work is currently included in museum shows at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC and the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh NC. Robertson recently had a solo show entitled Everything counts & local reality at Van Doren Waxter, and is represented by the gallery in New York, NY.

**Letha Wilson** (b. 1976) was born in Honolulu, HI and raised in Greeley, CO. She currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY and Hudson, NY, earning her BFA from Syracuse University, NY in 1998, and an MFA from Hunter College, NY in 2003. Residencies include The MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, NH, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Madison, ME, The Yaddo Foundation, NY, Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, NE, and Headlands Center for the Arts in Sausalito, CA.

Wilson's work has been featured in recent solo exhibitions at GRIMM in their gallery locations in London, United Kingdom, Amsterdam, Netherlands and New York, NY; Higher Pictures Generation, Brooklyn, NY; Anderson Ranch, Aspen, CO; the Center for Contemporary Art and Culture, Portland, OR; and the DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA. Wilson has recently participated in group exhibitions at the The Henie Onstad Triennial for Photography and New Media, Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, Høvikodden, Norway; MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA; MACRO Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome, Italy; Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg, Austria; Bemis Center for Contemporary Art in Omaha, NE; Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY; NY; and the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT.