

# GUILD GALLERY

## MAGGIE WELLS: ON THE NATURE OF THINGS

February 9 – March 25, 2023



Maggie Wells at her home in New York City with her drawings.



Installation view, variable dimension.

Guild Gallery is pleased to present *Maggie Wells: On the Nature of Things*, the artist's first solo exhibition in New York. A New York City native, Wells (b. 1942) creates biomorphic, intimately scaled sculptures that are imbued with the human touch for an effect that is both whimsical and organic. Formerly trained as a painter, Wells has honed her creative process over the last six decades, experimenting across a range of mediums and materials. Grounded in abstraction, Wells's practice is a continuous evolution of composition and form. *On the Nature of Things* will feature over 60 new and recent clay sculptures alongside ink drawings that spotlight the artist's intuitive approach to materials and her fascination with the power of the shape to provoke an emotional response from the viewer. The result is a highly personal body of work that exudes warmth, rich surfaces, and wonder.

Wells graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design in the 1960s with a B.F.A in painting and then moved to San Francisco to pursue life as an artist. During this time, she became part of Project Artaud—an intergenerational enclave of pioneering artists and musicians who also established the Southern Exposure gallery, an alternative art space founded in 1974 in the city's Mission District. It was here that she befriended many artists, including photographer Judy Dater, who would go on to feature Wells on the cover of her seminal book "Women and Other Visions." After twelve years in the Bay Area, Wells returned to Manhattan in the late 1970s, moving into a loft off Canal Street where she became among the first wave of artists of her generation to settle in Tribeca. Throughout this time, Wells continued to nurture her creative spirit, always painting and drawing. Driven by a continuous search for new forms, Wells gradually began exploring ceramics and sculpture.

Whether it is her clay sculptures or her innumerable abstract drawings, Wells perceives shape through a cognitive response to the materials and their expressive qualities. Drawing inspiration from her natural surroundings, Wells begins each of her sculptural pieces with a sketch and then uses the coiling technique to morph her abstract compositions into three-dimensional shapes. For her distinctive surfaces, she chooses from two finishes: terra sigillata, which shrinks in the bisque fire and produces a crackled surface, and majolica with a shiny glazed finish. Her evocation of the language of abstraction is employed sensitively across all her work with a confident use of line and surface texture. Today, Wells continues to lead a creative life in Manhattan, making works out of her Greenwich Village studio.

For this installation, Wells has created pieces that invite viewers to experience a sense of delight as they move around the artwork. As Wells states, “I am constantly turning the piece to make a form that is interesting from all angles—thus the experience of looking at them can always be refreshed.” A selection of Wells’s ink and gouache drawings will also be displayed alongside her sculptures to further shed light on the artist’s dynamic practice. With her exhibition at Guild Gallery, located at 321 Canal, Wells makes a homecoming—a return to her early artistic roots on Canal Street.

## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Working in the medium of painting, drawing, and sculpture, Maggie Wells (b. 1942) is an artist of great breadth, immersed in creativity in both art and life. While she currently resides in Greenwich Village, New York, her adventures have taken her from the East Coast to San Francisco, flourishing her joyful artistic spirit.

From 1960-62 Wells attended Northwestern University in Chicago and studied theater with Alvina Krause. Discouraged by the competitiveness of acting, she quickly developed an interest in painting. She then transferred to the Rhode Island School of Design, where she was enrolled from 1962-65 and received a B.F.A in painting. After graduating, she moved to San Francisco, finding a community of musicians and artists at Project Artaud—an experimental arts space established in 1971—and even worked with a group of artists to found Southern Exposure, a grassroots gallery that displayed the work of Alice Neel, among other artists. By 1980, Wells returned to the East Coast, living in a loft in Tribeca, New York and mixing with the downtown artistic community, attending openings and parties in nearby Soho and the East Village. She was particularly taken with the Abstract Expressionist movement for its bold use of color and brushwork. By day, Wells worked as a scenic artist, collaborating with the artist Red Grooms, and showing her paintings and drawings in lofts and galleries at night. By the 1990s, Wells began working in ceramics through a serendipitous encounter with works displayed in a ceramics shop window in Greenwich Village. Around 1985, she very quickly began to sell her wares, including functional items like candlesticks as well as abstract sculptures in stores like deVera.

Today, Wells paints and draws, primarily in ink and gouache, in her apartment and makes ceramics at Greenwich House Pottery. Her forms are organic abstractions—limbs, heads, and torsos—emerging without conscious intention. Hand-building her sculptures, she forms and reforms a shape as it morphs from something arbitrary and complicated to a work that is simple and whole. In her ceramics, Wells does not emphasize technical expertise and keeps surfaces unassuming to make an emotional impact through the power of form.

## **ABOUT THE GALLERY**

Guild Gallery, founded by Robin Standefer and Stephen Alesch, and designed by Roman and Williams, is a natural extension of Roman and Williams Guild. The gallery celebrates the millennia-long legacy of the decorative arts through exhibitions of contemporary masters of their respective media. With a focus on natural material such as clay, wood, and stone, Guild Gallery celebrates artists and valuing utility in exquisite craftsmanship and form. Guild Gallery provides a platform to expertly showcase ideas and artists, creating a new dialogue between ancient and modern, fine art and design.

Website [rwguildgalleryny.com](http://rwguildgalleryny.com)

Instagram [@rwguildgallery](https://www.instagram.com/rwguildgallery)

## **PRESS INQUIRIES**

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