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# JUDY PFAFF

## Real and Imaginary







JUDY PFAFF  
*Fine Dining: Glyndor BWO*  
*Chapel Street, 2024 (detail).*  
Courtesy of the artist.  
Photo: Stefan Hagen.

# JUDY PFAFF

## Real and Imaginary

AUGUST 31–DECEMBER 1, 2024

WAVE HILL  
GLYNDOR GALLERY





## Real and Imaginary

Judy Pfaff's room-filling sculptural works have been described as three-dimensional Abstract Expressionist paintings come to life with "brushstrokes" composed of organic and fabricated objects, repurposed materials, plastics, ceramics, metal rods, foam and LED lighting tubes. She is often hailed as a pioneer of installation art, an accolade that all too neatly fixes Pfaff's place in postwar art history but fails to encompass the remarkable scope of the artist's decades-long career. Since the 1970s, Pfaff has continued to develop her art while constantly experimenting with new techniques, processes, materials and modes of display. Her works typically inhabit the space in which they are shown, incorporating the room itself, from floor to ceiling and stretching off the walls. In this site-specific approach, she considers the interior architecture and the outdoors, the geographic features of the location and its history. Often inspired

by landscape and natural elements, Pfaff moved to the Hudson Valley more than 25 years ago, first to Kingston, NY, living directly on the Rondout Creek, which flows into the Hudson River. She now lives and works in Tivoli, NY.

*Real and Imaginary* presents Pfaff's recent sculptures, mixed-media drawings and works on paper, as well as site-specific installations created for Wave Hill that respond to its gardens and the historic architecture and former domestic interior of the building that now houses Glyndor Gallery. Rather than delineate the divide between the real and imaginary, the title suggests the presence of both, existing simultaneously. Live plants are shown alongside her sculptural ones. Representational forms based on nature are on view, along with shapes derived from the artist's imagination—and from recollections tied to real life imagery. There are white steel vines and leaves, painted roots and stumps, pigmented expanded foam and LED lighting that evoke light streaming through the landscape. Although Pfaff does not consider herself an environmental artist, the natural world can be felt throughout her practice, whether she is tending her own garden or making her work. Her interest lies beyond our visible surroundings. Indeed, the world

JUDY PFAFF

*Hopper Dredge*, 2024 (left) and *ma.jol.i.ca*, 2024 (above fireplace), installation view in *Real and Imaginary*, 2024, Wave Hill, Bronx, NY. Courtesy of the artist.

Photo: Stefan Hagen.



that Pfaff has built within Wave Hill's gallery extends further than the walls of the space, conjuring visions in the mind's eye and creating an entirely new space that is real, imaginary, and both at once.

In the entrance hall (p.6), Pfaff introduces the visual vocabulary that underscores the premise of the exhibition. She takes a cue from Joseph Kosuth's conceptual art piece *One and Three Chairs*, 1965, in which an actual chair is displayed between a life-size photograph of the chair and the dictionary definition of the word "chair," operating at the intersection of language, vision and meaning. In her version, Pfaff shows three varying portrayals of sunflowers or flora: a real sunflower, an artist-made sunflower, and an illustration of flowers. The real sunflower is one taken from her garden, then dried and spraypainted a chrome color; the artificial one is a painted metal sculpture that was originally part of her 1987 Whitney Biennial installation, *NYC BQE*; and the illustrated flowers are in a print that depicts flowering plants in a garden, using woodcut, silkscreen and ink drawing. All three works, including the "natural" sunflower have been manipulated by the artist to some extent through her creative techniques. Without text and only through visual means, Pfaff summarizes for the visitor her approach to the exhibition.

Pfaff creates a distinct installation in each of the three main gallery rooms, bestowing each with its own characteristics or "personality," as the artist puts it. In the south gallery (p.9), Pfaff has set up a moody and predominantly white space with a collapsing dinner table and chairs at the center of the scene, surrounded by white-painted steel vines and real (although dead) tree roots and branches.

JUDY PFAFF  
*Doctor Z*, 2022 (detail).  
Courtesy of the artist.  
Photo: Stefan Hagen.







Installation view of Judy Pfaff: *Real and Imaginary*, 2024, exhibition entrance, Wave Hill, Bronx, NY. Photo: Stefan Hagen.

Toppled candlesticks, wine glasses and spilled fruit suggest that a party or gathering took place here, but the attendants were forced to flee suddenly. The reason for the evacuation is unclear, perhaps caused by a cataclysmic event. The whole scene seems frozen in the past, and the overgrowth of vines suggests the extended passage of time and nature taking over. The leaves of the white vines are modeled after the rubber tree that Pfaff's friend, artist Ursula von Rydingsvard, has kept as a houseplant for many years. Pfaff imagines the plant growing out of proportion and filling the room. The blue lighting evokes dawn or twilight. Is this dramatic episode a dream or a distant memory, or could it be a foreshadowing of future events?

According to Pfaff, the installation in the center gallery (p. 10) exemplifies how she lives now, evoking the plants in her home displayed along with framed prints and works on paper. On view are many houseplants and succulents set in rectilinear shelving units made of steel frameworks, recalling a garden or greenhouse. There are also colored plastic panels with hanging plants behind them, and the whole room is lit with LED tubes in vibrant hues of pink, orange and yellow. In her home in Tivoli, her living and working spaces merge so that living things share the same space as her artwork.

In her installation, plants are treated like sculpture, displayed in vitrines like museum objects. Artificial plants are combined with organic ones. Pfaff describes this space in the center gallery as "decorative" but intentionally so. She started her career in the mid-1970s when Minimalism was beginning to wane, and artists

including Pfaff were inventing ways to challenge its reductive aesthetics. Here, as she has done throughout her career, Pfaff borrows the geometric forms of Minimalism, using the rectilinear framework to create order from what might become an overwhelming abundance of matter. However, she challenges the limitations of the minimal grid by breaching its boundaries, further breaking the austerity by using neon colors in the lighting and plexi panels and by mixing the organic with the handmade and the industrial. The floral prints above the fireplace in this room (p. 12) also involve the artist's hand to create drawn illustrations, but a machine creates the impression, transferring the ink medium to paper and allowing for repetition in the process.

In one section of the room, a hydroponic machine is set up, like a lab or clinic, nursing plant clippings or pieces that have broken off larger plants by providing a constant flow of lifegiving water. In a similar way to how houseplants and garden plants are cared for and cultivated by humans, Pfaff engenders care into the act of making her work, repurposing materials and broken parts to use in her sculptures. They grow and develop into their own organisms. There is also an element of control apparent in this work. Tending a garden is a way of making nature and plants conform to human standards, as well as an attempt to bring the vastness of the natural world to human scale so that we can understand it, interpret it. If the installation in the south gallery is about what happens when we lose control of nature, then the work in the center gallery is about what we do to try to contain it.

**JUDY PFAFF**

*Fine Dining: Glyndor BWO Chapel Street, 2024, installation view in Real and Imaginary, 2024, Wave Hill, Bronx, NY. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Stefan Hagen.*







Installation view of Judy Pfaff:  
*Real and Imaginary*, 2024,  
Room 2, Wave Hill, Bronx, NY.  
Photo: Stefan Hagen.



**JUDY PFAFF**

*Boutonniers 1 – 9, 2024, installation view in Real and Imaginary, 2024, Wave Hill, Bronx, NY. Courtesy of the artist.*

Photo: Stefan Hagen.

The north gallery presents a selection of recent artworks, but, because they are displayed in the context of the historic house and the surrounding garden, they interact with the site in a way that goes far beyond a neutral white box gallery. These works also combine elements and themes from the other installations used throughout the exhibition. *Hopper Dredge, 2024* (pp. 2 and 14), for example, is a sculptural piece in three sections, which was previously shown in an exhibition in 2022 (*smokkfiskur: a tale* at the Museum of New Art, Portsmouth, NH). However, she has altered it significantly to respond to Wave Hill's gardens and woodland. The work includes fake moss, live plants, rubber snakes, plastic insects and umbrella skeletons that resemble spiders. The artist was inspired by wildlife on the forest floor and the living things one might find when turning over a fallen log. The pigmented, expanded foam, which she has used frequently in her work, evokes geological layers and excavation of soil and rocks. It also recalls the flow of water or currents. Indeed, the artist has included suggestions of aquatic life, such as a puffer fish, seashells and an umbrella skeleton with clear plastic over it resembling a jellyfish.

As in much of Pfaff's art, the works in the north gallery are abstractions that recall natural elements. *Ground Wasp Mutation, 2020* (p. 20), for example, with its yellow and black concentric circles suggests movement or flight. Pfaff has said that she noticed many wasps and carpenter bees in her yard at home around the time she was making this and other related works. *Auris, 2020* (p. 16), on the other hand, recalls organs in the interior of the body, with a red





light inside, perhaps a beating heart. Both sculptures evoke mandalas or objects on which to focus or concentrate for meditative purposes, to find a sense of peace amidst the swirling compositions.

*Glazed and Confused: Rockin' Lobster Majolica* (on this page) is a new piece from 2024 that incorporates natural plants (eucalyptus from Pfaff's garden), artificial plants, packing material, expanded foam and umbrella skeletons. This work and *ma.jol.i.ca*, 2024 (p. 2), refer to a type of tin-glazed earthenware pottery decorated with scenes in vibrant colors. Their compositions are also reminiscent of layers of geological strata, or they could be views of a garden or a landscape. Pfaff perceives nature as having humanlike qualities, and, by the same token, she understands that human-made things are often informed by the natural world. If you trace back far enough, even the most artificial substances, like plastic, have origins sourced from nature. Fossil fuels are the product of millions of years of decayed prehistoric creatures and plant matter that have been processed through the intense heat and pressure below Earth's crust.

Underlying Pfaff's body of work is a warning about American consumption. Today's industrial scale of production and accumulation of discarded material waste has had detrimental effects on the planet. Throughout this exhibition, Pfaff juxtaposes and combines

JUDY PFAFF

LEFT: *Hopper Dredge*, 2024 (detail).

RIGHT: *Glazed and Confused: Rockin' Lobster Majolica*, 2024.

Courtesy of the artist.

Photo: Stefan Hagen.





the organic with the fabricated, yet much of the “natural” elements are representations made by the artist. In this way, the work reveals that what we perceive as natural is actually human-made. Perhaps Pfaff’s work ultimately suggests, like her hydroponic station, that we must practice care for all things, whether real or artificial, because the two are so inextricably linked that they can no longer be viewed as separate. This is crucial for ensuring our survival. If not, the earth will reclaim itself, and nature will persist with or without humans. It’s only natural.

— Gabriel de Guzman

*Judy Pfaff: Real and Imaginary* is organized by Gabriel de Guzman, Director of Arts and Chief Curator, with Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger, Curator of Visual Arts, and Afriti Bankwalla, Curatorial Administrative Assistant.

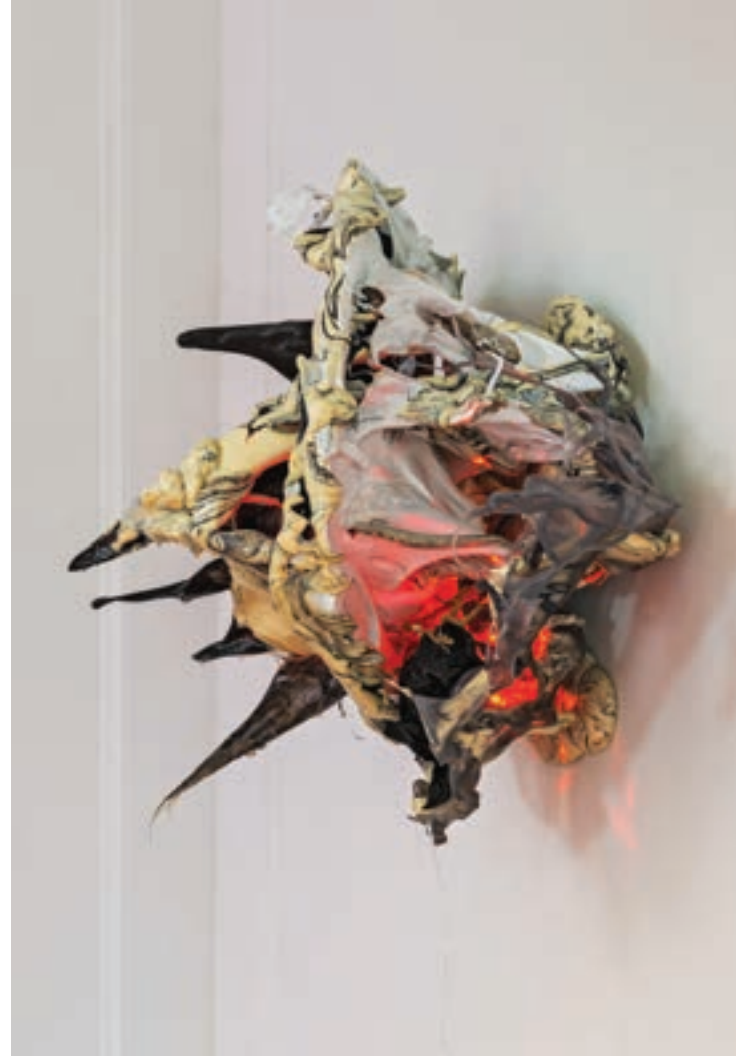
We extend our deep gratitude to those who have made this exhibition possible, starting with artist Judy Pfaff, for sharing her enthralling work with us. Thank you to Jennifer McGregor whose initial conversations with the artist planted the seed for this exhibition at Wave Hill. Many thanks to Edward Stapley-Brown, Judy Pfaff Studio Manager, and to the installation team: Jeffrey Kitchen, Christian McClean, Vera Hrab, Will Young, Jake Alfieri, Javier Maria and Henry McEachern.

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*Auris*, 2020

Courtesy of the artist.

Photo: Stefan Hagen.



## About the Artist

Often cited as a pioneer of installation art and contributor to the Pattern and Decoration Movement, Judy Pfaff has created work that spans disciplines from painting to printmaking and sculpture to installation. Born in London in 1946, Pfaff earned a BFA from Washington University Saint Louis (1971) and an MFA from Yale University (1973), where she studied with Al Held. She has exhibited her work in the Whitney Biennials of 1975, 1981 and 1987, and represented the United States in the 1998 São Paulo Bienal. Her pieces reside in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Tate Gallery, Brooklyn Museum and Detroit Institute of Arts, among others. Pfaff is currently represented by the Miles McEnery and Accola Griefen galleries in New York and has been previously represented by Holly Solomon, Carl Solway and Susanne Hilberry. She is the recipient of many awards, including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Sculpture Center (2014), the MacArthur Fellowship (2004), and the Guggenheim Fellowship (1983). Pfaff lives and works in Tivoli, New York.

[www.judypfaffstudio.com](http://www.judypfaffstudio.com)

*Judy Pfaff.*

Photo: Peter Aaron / OTTO





JUDY PFAFF  
View 3: weeping, 2024.  
Courtesy of the artist.



## Exhibition checklist

All works are by Judy Pfaff and  
courtesy of the artist.

*Auris*, 2020  
Melted plastic, pigmented expanded foam,  
lightbulb, electrical components  
48 x 30 x 23 inches

*Boutonniere 1 – 9*, 2024  
Nine works: intaglio, shellac, acrylic paint,  
archival inkjet on Kozo paper in artist-made frames  
10 x 13 inches each

*Doctor Z*, 2022  
Steel table frame with casters, fiberglass, silver  
leaf faux fruit and vegetables, silver leaf plastic  
wine glasses  
Dimensions variable

*Fine Dining: Glyndor BWO Chapel Street*, 2024  
Painted and unpainted steel, fiberglass, acrylic,  
resin, fluorescent lighting  
Dimensions variable

*Glazed and Confused: Rockin' Lobster Majolica*, 2024  
Hexcomb cardboard, pigmented expanded foam, steel,  
wire, faux flowers, umbrella frames  
108 x 84 x 26 inches

*Ground Wasp Mutation*, 2020  
Pigmented expanded foam, melted plastic, acrylic,  
Chinese lantern, roots, wire  
32 x 40 x 33 inches

*Hopper Dredge*, 2024  
Wire mesh, steel, pigmented expanded foam,  
melted plastic, resin, ceramics, plants, umbrella  
frames, LED lighting  
Dimensions variable

*ma.jol.i.ca*, 2024  
Hexcomb cardboard, pigmented expanded foam,  
steel, wire, faux flowers, paper lanterns, rubber snakes  
48 x 50 x 18 inches

*Real and Imaginary, Room 2*, 2024  
Steel, plants, LED lighting, acrylic  
Dimensions variable

*View 1: the garden*, 2024  
Screenprint, woodcut, sumi ink and shellac on Kozo paper  
in artist-made frame  
92 1/4 x 45 1/4 inches

*View 3: weeping*, 2024  
Soft ground etching, woodcut, acrylic paint, screenprint  
and shellac on Kozo paper in artist-made frame  
93 1/2 x 45 1/4 inches



# Public Programs

## KIDS ON THE MOVE! THE ENERGY OF ART

**Saturday, September 21, 1-2PM, Glyndor Gallery**

Museum educator Corinne Flax leads a workshop for families to experience art and movement while exploring Judy Pfaff's energetic sculptures. *Recommended for ages 4 to 8.*

## FALL EXHIBITIONS RECEPTION

**Sunday, September 29, 2:30-4:30PM, Glyndor Gallery**

On view in Glyndor Gallery is *Judy Pfaff: Real and Imaginary*; in the Sunroom Project Space are *Soeun Bae: Liquid Arrangement* and *Jordany Genao: Espíritu de sabor*; in Glyndor Terrace Garden is *Dario Mohr: QuadroPod: Seeds of Kenya*; and in Wave Hill House is *Emilie L. Gossiaux: Nature from Bed*.

## MEET THE ARTIST

**Saturday, November 16, 2-3PM, Glyndor Gallery**

Exhibition walkthrough of *Real and Imaginary* with artist Judy Pfaff.

## PUBLIC GALLERY TOURS

**Thursdays & Saturdays at 2PM, Glyndor Gallery**

Learn about the artworks on view in this free 45-minute exhibition tour led by a Wave Hill Gallery Greeter.

## JUDY PFAFF

*Ground Wasp Mutation*, 2020, installation view in *Real and Imaginary*, 2024, Wave Hill, Bronx, NY. Courtesy of the artist.  
Photo: Stefan Hagen.



## Wave Hill

675 West 252nd Street  
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#wavehill

Wave Hill is a public garden and cultural center in the Bronx overlooking the Hudson River and Palisades. Its mission is to celebrate the artistry and legacy of its gardens and landscapes, to preserve its magnificent views and to explore human connections to the natural world through programs in horticulture, education and the arts.

Director of Arts and Chief Curator:  
Gabriel de Guzman  
Curator of Visual Arts: Rachel Raphaela Gugelberger  
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## COVER

JUDY PFAFF  
*Glazed and Confused:  
Rockin' Lobster Majolica*, 2024  
(detail). Courtesy of the artist.  
Photo: Stefan Hagen.

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