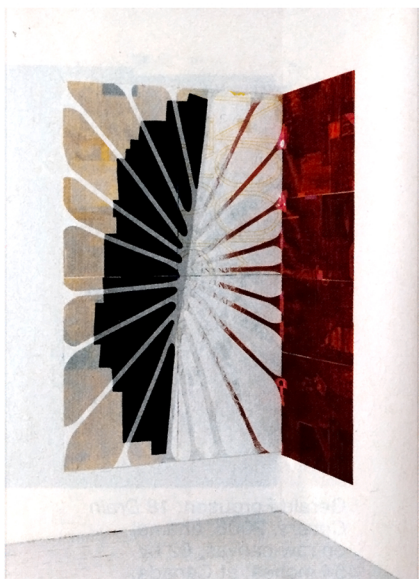


# Art in America

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Dianna Frid: *The Fourth Word Spoken on the Moon*, 2011, paper, acrylic, colored pencil, cloth and mixed mediums, 77 by 78 inches; at Devening.

CHICAGO

## DIANNA FRID DEVENING

Dianna Frid constructs sculptures, artist's books and wall-based assemblages that attempt to give new form to natural phenomena, whether earthly or celestial, concrete or ethereal, as suggested by the title of her recent solo exhibition "Evidence of the Material World." Rejecting notions of Romanticism or the sublime, the artist looks to sources both scientific and literary as a means for reinterpreting occurrences such as asteroids, waves and clouds, and for building a visual vocabulary that, while spawned by systems of language or astronomy, remains highly personal and expressive.

The 10 works on view (all 2011) evolved from what the artist terms "trigger-texts," words or phrases lifted from sources as diverse as poetry, mythology and the obituary page. Each text, as with Proust's madeleine, elicited a plethora of images and associations, which the artist transcribed through painting, drawing, sewing and other hand-based processes into an abstract iconography that retains little evidence of its origins. These mixed-medium objects, then, are personal manifestations of various natural events as well as the words used to describe them, filtered through the artist's quest for understanding.

Two white totems crafted from cardboard and plaster—their surfaces lightly dusted with chalky pigments and wrapped in thin strips of graphite-marked paper—point upward to the heavens. The height of each (approx. 70 inches) was determined, as stated in the work's lengthy title, by two lines from Homer's *The Odyssey* describing Odysseus's escape from the Sirens. A large silvery starburst suggests something cosmological in *The Fourth Word Spoken on the Moon*, a 77-by-78-inch collage pieced together from small squares of hand-painted paper embellished with aluminum, colored pencil and bits of sewn cloth and then adhered to the wall in two large fields that meet in a corner. The title (taken, we discover in a related work, from an unidentified obituary), evokes the historic Apollo 11 lunar landing, although the artist never reveals the word famously, or rather not so famously, spoken.

The star form is a recurring motif throughout much of the artist's work; so are patterns of small orbs, as in *On the Modification of Clouds (After L.H.)*, a suite of four lithographs based on the research of 19th-century chemist and meteorologist Luke Howard. Frid's intimate, handmade books, some of which were on view, more strongly connect to the literary texts that inspired them than do the other works, although they also use a symbolic visual language. Like her large-scale assemblages, they emerge from a subjective, material-based process both structured and intuitive.

—Susan Snodgrass