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REVIEWS

PHILADELPHIA

Eileen Neff

Bridgette Mayer Gallery // October 3–27, 2012

Eileen Neff *The Ordinary Day*, 2012. C-print mounted on Plexiglas, 50 x 47 in.

EILEEN NEFF AND BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY, PHILADELPHIA

IN "THREE OR FOUR CLOUDS," Neff frees herself from the land and foliage of her earlier photographic works, focusing primarily on the sky itself. Yet there is whimsy in these works as well. For instance, *Birdwatching*, 2012, features a plastic rendition of a yellow-throated warbler. This mechanical bird sits on the sill inside the artist's studio, seeming to peer through an open sliding glass window. The bird shows up again, partially visible in *One and Three Birds*, 2012, Photoshopped above a cluster of autumn trees. These works are a playful nod to how framing can change the context in which a work is read.

The most poetic of the photos presented here are the romantic manipulated skies. *Twin Peaks*, 2012, is an elongated image of billowing storm clouds that belies their actual weight. The light of the sky and its coloration are reminiscent of the American landscapes of Frederic Church and Albert Bierstadt. Also of note is a work installed right before the opening of the exhibition, *Here and There*, 2012, a mural-size photo of the gallery space itself, infused with objects gathered from Neff's studio; on the wall are images of several of her photographs, a replica of a full moon, a black orb, and a fire alarm. This trompe l'oeil plays havoc with the viewer's sense of space.

Evidently enthralled with nature and its power, Neff captures the dramatic scenery of light, clouds, and evening sunsets witnessed from her studio window. It is refreshing to see such quiet, reflective works in a world bombarded by too much information. She is serious about poetry and poetics, which are reflected in the sentiment of the work. *In My Room*, 2012, is a white vinyl text hung high on the wall. The text is the first stanza of Wallace Stevens's poem "Of the Surface of Things:" "In my room, the world is beyond my understanding/But when I walk, I see that it consists of three or four hills and a cloud." **—A.M. Weaver**

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