Artists Space is pleased to present THE MOUNTAIN, A BED AND A CHAIR by Edwin Neff. This work, part of Gerson's Dream, a new installation by the artist recently presented, with the assistance of the Art Workshop in Philadelphia, consists of multiple layers of mirrors and constantly shifting perspectives, providing the viewer with interesting glances of each artist’s viewing situation (Neff) or another artist’s Gerson's dream—this in turn, generates the idea of the metaphor of the dream state. The mystery of the profound, yet transient, relationship which Neff presents in with an underlying of her use of multiple dimensions and shifting perspectives. These, in turn, come together to create a rich interior place, one that enhances the mystery of Gerson’s vision, and Neff’s recognition of that vision as integral to her work.

Over the last few years, Artists Space has invited colleagues from across the country to select artists in their area to develop projects for our gallery. Our thanks go to Judith Tannenbaum, Associate Director at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, for choosing Edwin Neff, and for her persevering encouraged ideas. I also would like to thank Edwin Neff for a challenging and insightful installation. As with any project at this magnitude, many people besides the artist, who creates the work, are responsible for executing its proper presentation. In this regard, I am indebted to Charles A. Wright, Jr., Artists Space’s Program Coordinator, for masterfully guiding all aspects of the project to fruition. To Robert Younger for a sensitively designed brochure; and to Ken Bahler and his crew, Steven Ford and Tony Petrosky, for installing the work.

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Carlos Galarza-Schiano Executive Director

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Eileen Neff April 9 - May 23, 1992 Artists Space
The Mountain ± 100 Years

Most artists working today are steeped in the achievements of their artistic historical ancestors. Influences run the gamut from classical to Renaissance to modern masters as well as non-European sources. But living highly educated about and regarding the important culture forms and particular artists is not the same as truly "discovering" or understanding the abstractions of another artist. As a direct result of a residency at La Napoule, near Provence, in the winter of 1991, Ellen Neff was moved to and began to focus on Cézanne in a way she had not before.

Neff had studied Cézanne's paintings and even taught his works to her students. But it was the reality of being in Cézanne's mountain—Mont Sainte-Victoire—that truly prompted the artist to immerse herself in his work and ultimately to react through a new creation. In the installation for A Wonderful Place, entitled 4 BOW, 1 GREEN, 1 RED AND 1 CAR, Neff focused on Cézanne's five paintings used to represent and negate Mont Sainte-Victoire, and the awareness Cézanne's work provides to control the slope of objects, which she also explored in her own work for a number of years. The仅, form, and inspiration of Neff's pieces, however, was significantly different from that of the Postimpressionist master working one hundred years earlier. The installation features several discrete parts that are linked by their direct references to the life and work of Cézanne. Frequently, Neff anthropomorphizes Cézanne's mountain, yet it may be a body in the middle of a landscape (Cézanne's Dawn) or seen down at from the wall when close up, mirror image details are transformed into eyes. The bird embodies Cézanne's obsession with Mont Sainte-Victoire, in particular, as well as playfully emphasizing the artmaking process in general.

In Cézanne's Dawn, the mountain, which is centered by the bowl frame (rather than a picture frame), symbolizes the artist's dreams and fantasies, and suggests that his subject, the mountain, fully expresses his deep appreciation of the space in which he stood. Projecting forward from the wall at the top of the hill in a framed view, it is out of perspective and only looks "true" from a specific angle. A sequence of cotton sheets forming a sequence of images of the mountain also allows viewers over the edge of the sheet. By overlapping and repeating this image and by shifting perspectives, Neff plays with six- and threedimensional spaces—moving back and forth between reality and illusion. Here, in previous furniture pieces, Neff has used three-dimensional photographs of three-dimensional objects to create new multidimensional objects. Similarly, the blended image of nature (the mountain) with manufactured components (the bird and cloth) and juxtaposes interior design space with the experience of the subject's landscape.

In another section of the room, a decorat ed armoire faces a life size on the gray-green wall—standing silent and enveloping transparent images of Mont Sainte-Victoire. In this piece, Cézanne's Chair, Neff captures the artist's complete absorption in his subject matter as well as the lifelong process of self-examination and intense scrutiny of specific objects that transforms them and generates broader ideas. Cézanne is no longer present in the work as a physical being, yet his empty chair exists like a body whose skeletal structure remains even though its flesh has disintegrated.

The MOUNTAIN A BED AND A CHAIR incorporates a number of other elements that link the artist's life and work: an actual model (another of Cézanne's painting subjects), which sits on a partial shelf, a reproduction of Le Penseur, a painting of a standing female nude by Durerach, which Cézanne kept in his studio; a detail of a late-Cézanne Still Life and another from his painting Old Woman with a Rosey (1905-1906), a framed photograph that Neff found in France and has titled Ance Cézanne: The Artist's Mother; a horizontal photograph of greenhouses that were at the foot of the mountain, and a child's chair with drawings of the mountain, which Neff uses to carry back Cézanne's childhood with Mont Sainte-Victoire in his head.

Her work is informed by a poetic impetus that moves between two- and three-dimensional experiences, between photographic, painting, and sculptural forms. Her first installation of this hybrid practice was Furniture Music: An Installation at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Since then she has had several solo and group exhibitions including Three River Town at the Center for Museum of Art Gallery in Pittsburgh, and The History of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Neff has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Prince/Chautauqua Council on the Arts, and Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation. In 1991, she was awarded a Post Charitable Trust residency grant for a week stay at La Napoule Foundation in the south of France. We were during that time that she traveled to Mont Sainte-Victoire and became involved with Cézanne and his obsessional relationship with the mountain. Part of the work generated by that experience is exhibited at A Wonderful Place. The pieced abstract Cézanne's Dawn was produced at The Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia, where she currently resides. Neff teaches at Drexel University and the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. She has been writing art criticism since 1984 and has seen two novels, notably to Artfeatures.

Ellen Neff lives and works in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Works in the Exhibition

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width with proceeds.

Cézanne's Dawn, 1991, 122 x 28
Black and white photograph, silk/cotton screen print on fiberglass and cotton, percale, wood, French soil, and human skull

Cézanne's Chair, 1991
98 x 48 x 73
Wooden chair frame, picture frames, and lithographs

Early Fires, 1992
31 x 36 x 24
Child's chair and drawings, French soil, and limestone rocks

Cézanne's Eyes, 1992
29 x 81
Black and white photograph on wood construction

Paul Cézanne, Still Life: Apples, Pears and Pot (The Kitchen Table), 1900-1904, (detail).

Deirdre Toman Smith: Associate Director/Center for Contemporary Art, Philadelphia