

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

EMMA WILCOX

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THE PRINT CENTER

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PHILADELPHIA



"Where it Falls" presents 15 black-and-white photographs that Emma Wilcox shot in Newark, N.J., between 2006 and 2012. These subtle but haunting images, all measuring 20 by 24 inches and taken with a 4x5 camera, document the current state of an American city and its decay in two ongoing series. Displaying the pictures in a single row that wraps around the walls of the Print Center's second-floor galleries, the deliberate and restrained installation permits viewers to witness the artist's movement through and above the cityscape.

"Eminent Domain" (2006–) features aerial views from a helicopter that show texts Wilcox painted in giant letters on rooftops and across empty lots. The artist, born in 1980 in Cambridge, Mass., started this project when she was about to lose her Newark home to eminent domain. The sentences and phrases she uses are drawn

from a variety of sources, including interviews with local residents, legal documents, signage and poetry. *Eminent Domain No. 3* (2006) depicts the top of Wilcox's former apartment building, with the painted message "MY MEMORY GETS IN THE WAY YOUR HISTORY"-a personal and political cry from a home that has since been torn down. Wilcox's missives firmly resist the havoc wreaked by developers on the physical and emotional topography of the city.

In "Forensic Landscapes" (2002–), we see intimate glimpses of the city at street level. The moody and eerie photos-of disused movie theaters, old cars, unplugged neon bar signage, abandoned grocery carts, shoes partially buried in dirt-were taken with long exposures at nightfall. They acknowledge the city's past as well as its struggles to survive amid the challenges of the present.

Also on view are five peculiar sentence fragments appropriated from the original 1713 survey of the city. Printed in dark gray vinyl low on the wall, the lines-for example, "A BLACK CHERRY TREE MARKD WITH Y LETTERS N ON THE ONE SIDE & E ON THE OTHER"-supply physical descriptions of Newark in its preindustrial state. But they read like beautiful snippets of poetry and provide a counterweight to the dense photographs, which echo the atmosphere and sets of 1950s B movies. Another installation plots the GPS coordinates of the texts that Wilcox has installed or plans to install on rooftops. They are arranged across a single gallery wall in their relative locations, creating a rough map of downtown Newark.

Wilcox oscillates between past and present in her exploration of Newark's postindustrial archeology, and her resulting project conjures Robert Smithson's 1967 treatment of Passaic. (The Passaic River also runs through Newark.) This quiet and controlled work offers a personally driven yet universally relevant meditation on the fate of countless American cities.

Photo: Emma Wilcox: Eminent Domain No. 3, 2006, gelatin silver print, 20 by 24 inches; at the Print Center.