

ARTFORUM

“La Carte d’Après Nature”

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street

July 19–October 8

When, in 1951, René Magritte titled his self-published journal *La Carte d’après nature* (The Map After Nature), the name applied as much to its format—many issues consisted of one postcard apiece, printed with text and imagery from a coterie of contributors—as to the postindustrial estrangement from nature that it investigated. Borrowing this title for his group exhibition, in its second iteration after a debut at the Nouveau Musée Nationale de Monaco, artist-curator Thomas Demand maintains a focus not on flora and fauna but on the constructions and framing devices through which they are now experienced. Demand’s own work here—a trompe l’oeil wallpaper mimicking a red velvet curtain—sets the stage on which other selected artists play out a pastoral of what he calls “domesticated nature.”



View of “La Carte d’Après Nature,” 2011.

Under Demand’s curatorial hand, false landscapes unfold organically; motifs emerge less as an evolution than as related species with shared genetic material. The kelly green cones in William Kissiloff’s maquette for the Canadian Pulp and Paper Pavilion at the 1967 World’s Fair find immediate echoes in Martin Boyce’s *Through the Trees (I)*, 2011, an angular emerald-tinted window cut through the exhibition architecture. Luigi Ghirri’s images of foliage herald Sigmar Polke’s photographic faux palms from 1968, whose splayed forms are built from buttons (*KNOPFPALME*), flaccid balloons (*LUFTBALLOONPALME*), or a stack of upside-down juice glasses (*GLASPALME*). In a transparent case, the knotted forms of Chris Garofalo’s porcelain sculptures suggest barnacled sea creatures or amoeba amok, although every detail is explicitly inorganic and intentional. Another genus of works here replicates not nature but attempts to cheat it: Kudjoe Affutu’s wooden coffin, carved in the shape of a refrigerator, taps the vanity of using a device developed for the preservation of the living body to try to preserve that same body in death.

Indeed, the exhibition is at its most poignant when it seeks to preserve life itself, as in Rodney Graham’s acid-propelled bicycle ride through a city park. The artist pauses to contemplate the tiny stamp in his palm, trying to reconcile the distance between himself and the ferns lining the fountains in front of him. As a catalogue essay by Christy Lange points out, the format of a postcard posits “the idea that nature itself will always be ‘somewhere else.’ ” It would seem Graham’s antihero wishes he were there, too.

— Kate Sutton