

art (cont.)

— PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST



Dianna Frid

CLOUDS ARE "GODDESSES FOR IDLE MEN," DIANNA FRID SAYS TO ME, quoting Socrates. Frid has much to say on the subject of clouds, from the factual to the ponderous, for cloud-gazing is a practice that greatly informs her most recent body of sculpture. Frid notes she wasn't interested in how clouds or weather

could act as a great equalizer of men, providing equal footing as small talk. Rather, she has been looking to the skies as a way to ascribe an identity to the tufted masses in the air. Before the clouds were classified and named in 1802—cumulus, stratus, cirrus and so on—many Westerners thought there were thousands of incarnations. Now, the scientific names and ideas, Frid says, makes the clouds more real, and grounds them. Her sculptures, however, abstract the common cloud. Decorative properties and patterns mingle with billowy formlessness. The total effect is that each sculpture is a small monument to the myriad metaphors of Mother cloud.

Having variously resided in Mexico City, Vancouver and now Chicago, Frid's way of coping with the Midwest's particularly bland landscape is to look up into the biggest sky she's known. Frid has built unpredictable forms upon precise polygonal shapes using raw lumber, foil, plaster, wax, rubber tubing, cardboard, cloth, paint and more. They balance as if standing on one foot and reaching upward, and their associations are just as precarious: one is perhaps an oven that produces clouds or it's a tree stump, another could be some sort of sky pointing device or an obelisk grave marker. All connect the earthbound and the heavenward, and they are roughly the size of a body. "I hope I never know what the work is fully about," Frid says, granting the formal complexities room to grow in the viewers' mind. Our imagination is limited only by what we know, she continues. Perhaps, then, the names of the clouds are inadequate, and we should return to a manifold understanding of their shapes.

Although the sculptures range from four feet to over nine feet, there's a miniature quality to them, as if they were landscapes viewed from an airplane window. There's something about the bird's-eye perspective that is very much like seeing with an artist's eye, perhaps because it abstracts the world so crisply. Seeing cities and landscapes from a thousand feet in the air renews our curiosity for them. So, too, do Frid's sculptures awaken a child-like joy in looking. *(Jason Foumberg)*

Dianna Frid, "The Vertical Shadows," shows at Devening Projects + Editions, 3039 West Carroll, through May 7.