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There's a lot to see in this cloud

By Leah Ollman

Liza Ryan's absorbing installation of 180 photographs billows like a prolonged exhalation across a 35-foot span at Kayne Griffin Corcoran. The images, most in color, vary in size. They are mounted on panels that thicken to more than 3 inches toward the middle of the spread so the whole, titled "Rare Bloom," seems to swell with a kind of vivid urgency. This hallucinatory cloud of impressionistic fragments evokes a dense, syncopated simultaneity – that of the final breath, perhaps, but also of every living moment.

An open mouth; a single eye; a curl of hair. A dandelion. Legs standing in shallow water. Thistles. Clouds. A hand holding on ostrich egg; a hand holding a bird. Ryan, who lives in Los Angeles, composes her images with poetic facility, attuned to repetition, rhythm and rhyme. The loose, non-narrative structure is shot through with themes of tenuousness, fragility, radiance.

Picture of what look to be explosions introduce notes of violent discord among the affirmative beauty. Near the center of the installation, the torso of a woman wearing a jacket that pulls tightly across her chest sums up an overarching sense of bursting fullness.

A group of large individual photographs (and one diptych) hangs in a separate gallery. Most of the pictures also appear in smaller form within the installation, where they play lesser roles but with greater cumulative effect. Here, as in the past, Ryan's strongest work involves images in combination, their friction generating the most compelling metaphorical heat.