

## EMILY SILVER

*Naked View of Our Mistakes*, 2010  
watercolor on paper, 72 x 45 in



courtesy: Conrad Wilde gallery

## CATHERINE FREELING

### Oak Flat

to Alan

*Why are you taking so many pictures of the same branch?*

I wonder,  
as I walk back from the outhouse to our campsite. By now,  
I should know better. I should be asking, *What does he see  
that I don't?*

You say, *There's a nest*. Here? I look between the leaves,  
and, at first, the thing you're pointing to seems merely  
a small lichen ball. Then, gradually, I make out the delicate  
woven pouch, color of spider webs and dry grass,

that hangs between  
forked twigs, the gray bird returning, carrying something  
in her beak.

You stand on the red and white cooler, camera mounted  
on a tripod. *But how many pictures can you take of a nest?*  
Between clicks, you say, *There's a chick inside*. We stare  
as the mother bird stuffs food into the tiny beak, then hops  
to another branch. Soon, the beak reappears above the rim  
of the pouch,

revealing the red inside. The mother comes back, feeds it again,  
flies away. The chick raises its bald head. Dark eyes meet ours.

Later, I look through the bird guide, consider  
Pygmy Nuthatch, Townsend's Solitaire, the Blue-gray  
Gnatcatcher.

*Maybe it's a Bushtit*, I say, finally, because it's a small  
grayish bird

that makes a hanging nest, and trills. But you turn to  
Cassin's Vireo,

tap a finger on the dark, hook-tipped bill. *This is the beak*,  
you say,

*and here are the white spectacles*. I read that the Cassin's Vireo  
is a fearless nest builder, unafraid of humans. *But our bird  
doesn't have wing bars*, I argue. You search images in your  
camera,

turn the screen toward me. Two thin white stripes mark the  
upper wing.

*I got lucky with the light*, you say. I think about  
the years we've been together, all I wouldn't have seen, and  
watch you.

The way you balance gracefully on the cooler, lean  
forward, look through the eyepiece, then pull back, gently turn  
the camera with both hands. Your few days' beard  
rough and gray, like bark. You seem so familiar and yet not.

As if, all this time, you're the one I've been learning to identify.

**Catherine Freeling** has poetry that has appeared or is forthcoming in *Rattle*, *Nimrod*, *New Ohio Review*, *Chautauqua*, *Hunger Mountain*, and other journals. She was a finalist for the 2012 *Rattle* and *Nimrod* poetry prizes.