

PHILADELPHIA

Eileen Neff  
LOCKS GALLERY

In this exhibition of recent photographs, Philadelphia-based artist Eileen Neff bespeaks her interest in modernist experiments with the medium by deploying a panoply of photographic techniques—many of them digital. She applied these methods with great subtlety to images that refer to landscape photography, her genre of preference for the past twenty-two years.

At first glance, the elegantly spaced C-prints presented here appear to take moments of quiet and solitude in nature as their theme. Neff's delicate manipulations of space and framing, however, submit photographic referents to doubt, so her argument, it seems, is that today such Romantic communion is elusive. Take, for example, the opening image, *Under the Summer Sky*, 2009, which features an empty cage at a zoo. The picturesque branches visible inside would pass for a patch of wild forest if not for the mesh constricting our view. Nearby, a photograph of a wholesome goat in a field insists on the medium's capacity to represent its subjects iconographically. The veracity of the image is put into question by the animal's strange sculptural quality. Slightly too large for its position in the scene, the goat has been pasted onto the background digitally, creating a spatial awkwardness and a cutout effect. (Elsewhere, the unmodified field appears in a print—another



Eileen Neff, *Horizon*, 2009, color photograph, 66 x 78".

iteration of a digital file Neff might one day use again as a backdrop for displacements, perceptual ponderings, and photographic tricks.) An animal also appears in the show's smallest work, *Two Deer*, 2009, a diptych that juxtaposes an image of a wooden deer with an image of a real one. Together, the photographs seem to belie their referents by commenting on the relationship between artifice in photography and the simulation of nature.

Two works—*The Winter Before* and *After the Winter Before*, both 2009—depict three of Neff's photographs inside a digitally rendered gallery space. In both, two of the digitally inserted images are partly cropped out, leaving fragments large enough that the viewer can still connect them to the "originals"—that is, the prints also on view here (themselves created from the same digital sources). These pieces allude self-reflexively to the partiality of vision and the camera, and to the arbitrariness of framing and cropping, all structural limitations of photography exacerbated and transformed today by the ease with which images can be manipulated using digital technology.

One of the "originals" placed inside *The Winter Before* is a work titled *Horizon*, 2009. It depicts a dense forest in winter, with blue skies intermittently piercing the mass of branches. On one edge of the print is a narrow vertical stripe divided into green and blue sections—a sliver of verdant landscape. Directly adjacent to *Horizon* the band appeared by itself as a 148-by-1-inch print. Titled *Slipping Glimpse*, 2006, this barely there photographic image alludes to the elusiveness of a glimpse as it figures forth, albeit abstractedly, horizon lines fleetingly visible between trees, the peripheral vision elided by the framing of the camera, the way photographs cut through the real, and thus, finally, the intertwining of apparatus and perception.

—Monica Amor