



Eileen Neff: *After the Winter Before*, 2009, C-print on aluminum, 32 by 38¾ inches; at Locks.

PHILADELPHIA
EILEEN NEFF
LOCKS

Eileen Neff's latest exhibition of new photography, "Things counter, original, spare," featured eight C-prints, ranging from 30 to 80 inches on a side, and a ninth work that is discreet but unmissable: a one-inch-wide laminated Mimaki print running from top to bottom of a wall. Repetition of imagery from photograph to photograph sends the eye across the gallery space from one to another. An image of a goat in an open field calls over to an image of the identical landscape, goat-free, on the opposite wall. A large shot of a wooden cage in an animal preserve, closely cropped and handsomely near-abstract, hangs next to another view of the cage, inserted digitally into a photograph of another field. Two large prints are, seemingly, installation shots of the artist's works—all but one hanging in the show—leaning against the walls and placed around the gallery. Close examination reveals these two pieces to be digital fantasies, renderings of installations that never existed.

The works seem at first to pose a simple game of "spot the difference," determining what's original and what's been fudged on a computer, but the artist's compositional tweaks are so

subtle that one's obliged to abandon such a literal hunt for answers. There's really no telling if the goat was inserted or removed. So if one can't see the difference between natural and synthetic, and both the images are beautiful, the artist seems to ask, why bother figuring out which belongs to the real world? Why can't a 12-foot-tall and 1-inch-wide stripe of a photograph with a horizon line *feel* like a landscape? If a gallery setting is artificial, is there any more artificiality to a photographic tableau of a gallery setting that's a digital folly?

Neff's dignified fluency with hysterically powerful digital tools ultimately makes this exhibition an object lesson in observation, a visual argument that needn't rest on questions of authenticity. This body of work proposes that an unmediated relationship with the visual world starts when one is pricked by the mystery of what one sees. Neff's precisely weighted technological sleights make us open our eyes wide, and prime them first to look and then to relish the time it takes to make sense of what we see.

[*"Eileen Neff: Between Us"* is at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, N.C., through Aug. 16.]

—William Pym