

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICK

June 17, 2011

“New Wilderness”

M+B Gallery
612 North Almont Drive
May 21 – July 1, 2011

Anthony Lepore’s photographs, on view here in concurrent solo shows at two venues, are up-front about their trickiness and deceptions. Visiting national parks and official wildlife areas around the country, Lepore captures the strange and jarring unintended juxtapositions generated by visitors centers’ low-budget dramatizations of natural landscape. Photographing (and rephotographing) large multipaneled photographic murals, wallpaper, and dioramas of regional vistas that characterize the centers’ presentational conventions, Lepore homes in on places of rupture that break and undermine photographic illusion.

Forest Light, 2009, on view at M+B, depicts a black-and-white photo mural of a stand of tall pine trees that is weirdly punctured at multiple points by the incongruous flat geometries of several black panels of light switches, a thermostat, and a red fire alarm box. This spatially destabilizing effect, so striking and abrupt, is that of collage (i.e., surreal). Exploiting and then unsettling photography’s trompe l’oeil power, Lepore focuses on visual moments where one notices the banal architectural context in which nature is artificially packaged for visitors as picturesque landscape. This is, as the title of his present solo shows suggests, the “New Wilderness”: a nationalistic terrain, not of nature, but of representations of it; a reifying mediation of the natural world as poster and pedagogical display; an updated, digitized, and socially digestible version of that mythic product called wilderness.



— Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer