

THOMAS DUNCAN GALLERY

ARTFORUM

Valerie Snobeck

GALERIE CATHERINE BASTIDE
rue Vandenbrandenstraat 1
October 22–December 21



View of “Use Period,” 2013.

The life cycle of images—here, the enmeshment between their corrosion and the environment—and the sensuality of the archive are made explicit in Valerie Snobeck’s latest exhibition, “Use Period.” These images, which were culled from photographs of the Documerica project, commissioned by the Environmental Protection Agency to document the state of the environment and everyday life in the 1970s, are treated like layers of skin to be peeled apart.

Nonlocal (Subjects), 2013, comprises three prints that originated from a photograph of contaminated water. To create the work, Snobeck laminated an ink-jet print along with a piece of linen onto the wall; it was then peeled off to leave an imprint of the image and any stray fibers; these were affixed once again in another layer on which Snobeck scrawled with black marker the original photographer’s name and the text—ACCESS RESTRICTIONS: UNRESTRICTED / USE RESTRICTIONS: UNRESTRICTED—alluding to its archive status.

Go Down (Reproductions), 2013, another peeled print, this time with burlap, depicts a snorkeling scientist employed by the Shell Oil Company to study coral reef formations; its composition recalls a sexy pinup dripping with heroic glint. *Bill’s Flowers*, 2013, a peeled-print diptych, is placed behind mirrors and further veiled behind a wooden frame made of netting that the artist collects from construction sites, a recurring material in her oeuvre. Inducing in the viewer a sensation of being behind an image, Snobeck gleans these wayward shots of flowers along the Alaskan oil pipelines and polluted rivers as moments of grace and subterfuge. By peeling back the physical as well as the ontological layers of images, Snobeck takes the viewer as that snorkeler in the mess of an image stream. Like the remnant sheets of peeled plastic draped over a wall by the entrance, we teeter between witness and accomplice, dead skins and all.

— Jo-ey Tang

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