

## "Mathieu Grenier: Expanded Nomenclature" at grayDUCK Gallery

In his first solo show in Austin, this Montreal photographer blurs language and lines

REVIEWED BY BARBARA PURCELL, FRI., JULY 5, 2019



Montreal native Mathieu Grenier has beautifully, willfully stripped image from photograph in "Expanded Nomenclature," his first solo show in Austin. Currently an MFA candidate at UT-Austin, Grenier embraces an interdisciplinary approach – something he learned while studying photography, video, and sculpture as an undergraduate in his home city. "I work like a sculptor, and I enjoy the possibilities of how an image is framed, how it hangs in space," he explains. "I am not necessarily interested in correct techniques; the photo can be blurry, you don't really have to know what you're seeing."

Grenier's work exudes a Zen-like tidiness from a distance, though upon closer inspection, the materials he has chosen to work with – metal, vinyl, cotton – serve to disrupt these images, which are often cropped or tightly zoomed-in. "These photos don't show much, they don't tell much. I'm deconstructing myself in order to reconstruct language," he says with a good-natured laugh.



The main gallery space features several large-scale deconstructed photographs framed by black metal bars, which form clean lines that tend to cut right through the images. The back area features his Field Works series, a collection of deep cyanotypes – blueprints – saturating large cotton sheets that hang on the walls like abstract flags. Three thin, black, floor-to-ceiling poles reminiscent of those meticulous metal frames are strategically installed in the center of the room, slightly obstructing the art, but also sculpting the space itself.

The most conventional photograph in the show is a Polaroid perched on a shelf next to another smallish black-and-white photo; both pictures include an open laptop in an empty space, though the Polaroid's eerie apparition of an older man glowing from its screen is far more eye-catching. (Larger versions of this picture appear in the show, yet the teeny Polaroid surprisingly packs the most punch.) I ask Grenier if the photographic process – be it chemical or digital – is more important to him than the photo itself. "I am trying to broaden the understanding of an image," he responds, "And I want to make the medium of photography as malleable as ceramics or woodworking."

Grenier grew up in a rural mining community in Quebec known as the "Asbestos Triangle" before moving to Montreal for his BFA. He lived and worked for over a decade in that city, a place as intertwined with language as his own art. (English and French are both spoken there.) He points out how Austin is like Montreal – a dual-language city, albeit with Spanish. Perhaps the overlapping cultural differences which make the Quebecois identity so unique have translated into Grenier's new work here in Austin: The 33-year-old grad student clearly enjoys mixing mediums and blurring lines when it comes to discovering a new language for his photography.

"Mathieu Grenier: Expanded Nomenclature"  
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[www.grayduckgallery.com](http://www.grayduckgallery.com)  
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