

Elizabeth Houston Gallery

Grey Matter, INTERVIEW: ANDY MATTERN

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2013 AT 11:18PM

This week we interviewed Andy Mattern. Andy's work is featured in the upcoming three person exhibition **Trace**, which opens April 19th. Stay tuned for interviews with the other two artists, Leigh Merrill and Pavel Romaniko.



Andy Mattern *Driven Snow #8457, 22x17", archival pigment print*

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How did all of you meet and what made all of you want to do a collaborative exhibition?

Leigh Merrill and I met as undergraduate art students at the University of New Mexico. Pavel Romaniko and Leigh Merrill are both photography professors in the Dallas / Fort Worth area. Merrill had the idea to bring all three artists together because of overlapping ideas in the work.

Can you tell us a little about who and/or what influences your work?

Walking in the city is a source of inspiration for me. I love taking new routes and discovering places I have never been. Whether I'm photographing in the world or in the studio, much of my subject matter consists of commonplace objects and sites that say something about our time. In photography, I'm inspired by the history of scientific and typological image-making like Karl Blossfeldt and Bernd and Hilla Becher, but I also love the poetics and formalism of artists like Hiroshi Sugimoto and Thomas Demand.

Tell us a little about your background and what impact that has on your work.

My step-father was an amateur photographer and residential designer. My mom has had a long interest in the arts including painting and graphic design. My father is a musician and educator. So I have always had a variety of creative directions to emulate. Growing up, my family did a lot of backpacking and traveling, which taught me a lot about the human relationship to nature. In some ways, I see that awareness bubble up in my work, but in an urban context. I'm interested in the unconscious impact we have on our surroundings.

What types of processes do you use in your work and how do they relate to your conception of place?

My process involves both a studio practice and a regular exploration of my immediate surroundings. These days, I capture almost exclusively digitally, but I work in a way that resembles large format photography. With some exceptions, I usually use a tripod and special lenses designed for architecture, so I can compose very deliberately and make multiple images of a single subject, which I later combine seamlessly. This very controlled way of photographing

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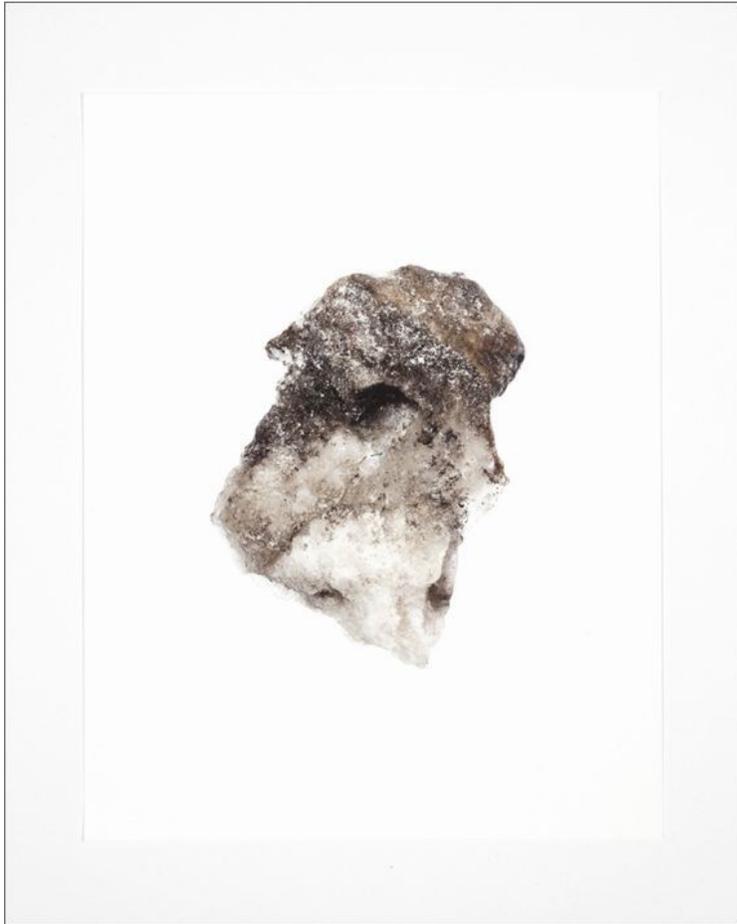
results in extremely detailed images. My goal, in part, is to make uncanny images of everyday subjects that harness something distinctive the human relationship to place.

How do you see photography in the 21st century as differing from previous times?

It's amazing. Even in my brief lifetime and experience with photography, things have changed so much. Obviously, there's the analog to digital transition, but beyond that there is an explosion of image-making by a much larger group of people. I'm still smitten with traditional ideas of formal aesthetics and the individual artist developing a singular vision, but there is an undeniable revolution going on in terms of data art, pixel mining, and appropriation because of the Internet. Photography is more democratic now than it ever was, and the audience as well as the authors are growing.

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Specifically what unique conceptual concerns do you think photography deals with today?



Andy Mattern *Driven Snow #8649*, 22x17", archival pigment print

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I am interested in photography's complicated relationship with representation. I've been reading a lot lately about "concrete photography" as opposed to "abstract photography," the distinction being that the former is a direct piece of photographic evidence of a process such as crumpling up a piece of light sensitive paper and shining light on it, versus taking a conventional photograph and somehow obscuring the subject. These are both legitimate pursuits, as is documentary photography, however, I'm interested in where they collide.

How do these issues manifest in your work?

In my work, I am looking for a grey area where representation meets abstraction. In *Driven Snow*, the subjects are printed actual size, so the photograph is approximately the same physical size as the subject it depicts. Because the subject is removed from its original context, however, it is abstracted. So there are elements of both hyperrealism and abstraction in these works. I'm curious how this problematizes the document and comments on photography's inherent struggle with being simultaneously a reflection of something from the world as well as an object itself.

Speaking of place, if you could visit any place at any specific moment in history, when and where would you go?

Provided that I would not disturb the space/time continuum or start bleeding from my ears... I would like to visit the future in about 500 years. Say, anywhere on Earth, or if we've found a suitable exoplanet and figured out how to get there and back, I'd go there.