

Grand Nord invites us into a historical passageway between the past and the present of Montréal-Nord—a neighbourhood home to as many Québec-born families as new immigrants, as many elderly as young, as well as people of different social classes.¹ A series of diptychs place archival photographs in conversation with images produced in collaboration with residents of Montréal-Nord, encouraging the visitor to think through the demographic changes and urban transformations of recent decades.

In the 18th century, the des Prairies river—which marks the northern boundary of the borough—provided easy access for seafarers wanting to explore the island. Ever since, Montréal-Nord has continued to welcome new families and many communities. Beyond revealing the marks left by each of these communities, *Grand Nord* is interested in the social ties that connect the actors in this development. To capture the weaving of these ties, the artist organized workshops with different community groups in which they revisited stages in the construction of Montréal-Nord. Through this photographic dialogue, retirees, French-language learners, and youths in professional training internships dove into an encounter with their cultural and social heritage. Drawing inspiration from photo archives, participants were invited to reproduce daily scenes—at times formal, at times comical—giving rise to anachronistic images that are both striking and humorous. The new light these residents shed on their neighbourhood can be considered a situational analysis that enables a better understanding of the demographic changes and industrial development that shaped the identity of this place.

As in his previous project, *La fin de la terre* (The Ends of the Earth), which documented Canadian citizenship ceremonies, Mazataud here presents a vision of interculturalism and explores the strategies communities develop for effective

coexistence. The staging of the photographs signals the photographer's commitment to supporting citizen participation in his documentary process. In this way, the *Grand Nord* project stands out for its collaborative process between the multicultural and intergenerational community of Montréal-Nord and the artist, who, for the first time, takes on the role of the conductor in supervising the shots designed and executed with the participants. This co-creation is thereby able to develop a human cartography of the neighbourhood that is defined by the participants themselves. An assortment of audio accounts supports the idea of a dialogue—both visual and sonic—presented to the visitor.

This process, which gives the citizen an essential place in creating the final product, encourages us to question the static canons of documentary photography and to imagine a new approach. Not only does the photographer here no longer impose his point of view, he enlarges the fossilized lens of the documentary image by including the perspectives of the communities involved.

The exhibition is a continuation of the artist's *Grand Nord* project, begun in 2013, and underlines the tenth anniversary of Fredy Villanueva's death in 2008.

- Sophie Bertrand

Sophie Bertrand is an independent photographer and photo editor.

¹ See the statistics compiled by the City of Montreal in Profil sociodémographique, Recensement 2016, Arrondissement de Montréal-Nord, May 2018. Online. <http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/mtl_stats_fr/media/documents/profil_sociod%e9mo_montr%e9alnord%202016.pdf>montreal.qc.ca/pls/portal/docs/page/mtl_stats_fr/media/documents/profil_sociod%e9mo_montr%e9alnord%202016.pdf>

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SKOL

372, rue Sainte-Catherine Ouest, Espace 314,
Montréal, QC, H3B 1A2
www.skol.ca / skol@skol.ca / 514.398.9322



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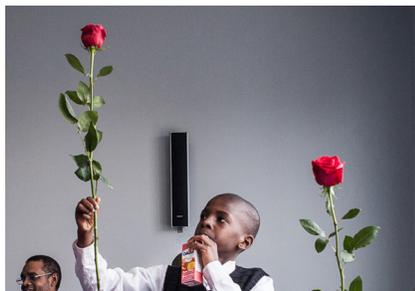
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VALÉRIAN MAZATAUD
(MONTREAL)

GRAND NORD

February 28th - April 6th, 2019
Photo - Sound



Valérian Mazataud is a journalist, photographer and artist deeply invested in exploring new strategies to engage the viewer in this age of media. Since July 2018, he has been working on *Grand Nord*, a project based on photography workshops offered to residents of Montréal-Nord.

During these workshops, retirees, adults and teenagers invited to revisit photo archives from their neighborhood discovered a rich image-based popular history: from community celebrations to romantic trysts; from turnip fields to shopping centres; from the village of Sainte-Gertrude in the 1940s to refugees from the Haitian earthquake of 2010. Through their aesthetic choices, research, role-playing, and collaborative work with the artist, workshop participants recreated these scenes to produce new images based on their own local history.

Mazataud's work embodies a reflection on documentary approaches in photography, and the relative nature of their objectivity. Having been struck by the strength of the social bond in Montréal-Nord, he committed himself to a collaborative process with members of the community. At Skol, he is presenting the photo series and sound recordings that emerged from these workshops.

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