

Mantis Mei

Field of Vision

Stride Gallery, Calgary AB



Field of Vision installation view. Photo Courtesy: Mantis Mei

What happens when the white cube is stripped of its paint? You get a plywood box; a gallery space that reveals the faux neutrality present beneath the white paint. Such is the Main Space of Stride Gallery, where Mantis Mei has *Field of Vision* July 11 – September 19, 2025. The gallery walls and floors are an untreated plywood; a window across the back wall provides natural light. This act of stripping away to reveal process and mechanisms of establishment reflects the work Mei has created for *Field of Vision*, an exhibition consisting of nine sculptural works.

The exhibition is centered around Mei's disassembly of the COEXIST logo. Familiarity of visual culture is questioned; signs and symbols are broken down to critique the relationship between the signifier (a sign or a physical form) and signified (the concept behind the sign). Mei uses site specificity and techniques such as rubbing, casting, and printing to investigate and dissect the visual language used in advertising and popular culture. During a time when most visual culture we are exposed to is separated from us by a screen and delivered in rapid, short form content,

Mei's tactile experiments with wood, metal and paper shift visual language from the 2D plane to the 3D, offering a tangible reconsideration of the information we are exposed to.

Mei focuses their attention on the COEXIST logo (commonly found on bumper stickers) through a series of works that separate the individual symbols from the whole slogan. In *A Rubbing of a Landscape Through a Window (Coexist letter "s")*, Mei has disassembled the Yin-Yang symbol through a chart of possible permutations, printed on a sheet of steel. *Nodes Extrema in Vector Space (Coexist letter "o")* is a small piece of plywood cut square and painted white with a pattern of circles and squares on its surface that seem to reference a digital space. In *Futura (Coexist letter "e")* sits on the floor, a row of neatly stacked wooden pieces with newsprint draped over them and the "e" from COEXIST printed in bold black lettering. These works are each an act of distilling an image or symbol until almost all representation is lost; they are a reordering of information; the artist contending with the status quo.

Like the bare plywood walls, context is further removed in the works where Mei responds to the construction of the gallery. *Field* consists of matte vinyl stretched across the window of the gallery, done so that air bubbles of varying sizes are trapped between the glass and the vinyl. The effect is that the view into the street below is blurred; the artist is now literally altering our perception of the world outside the gallery. Touching the vinyl is encouraged (the air bubbles are reminiscent of a topographic map), and as the work slips between a 2D and 3D plane, the viewer might wonder: what does it mean to "feel" a view? Mei is once again suggesting an alternative way of accessing information. The blurry scene of traffic and pedestrians outside the gallery is a reminder of the greater context of this exhibition, that of a world where information is constantly on the move.

Rubbing is a technique used throughout the exhibition that adds a layer of physicality to accessing information. Using our hands to access and decipher objects and information is a rare action in our modern-day society of screens. An ancient technique, rubbing is the practice of capturing an image or texture onto an impressionable surface, such as paper or a soft metal, by applying pressure repeatedly. Mei references this technique throughout the exhibition and uses it in *Kwan Yum*, where they've taken a rubbing of a photograph, an action that removes the image completely and leaves the viewer to consider a photograph as an object independent from the image. The work is installed so that the rubbing hangs in front of the original photograph, thus revealing the source material. The markings on the rubbing are frantic, and there is something wistful about them, as if disclosing the artist's desire for further information to be revealed instead of removed; translation instead of reduction. There is a futile act happening in this work, an impossible means of translation that reveals the fruitlessness of using our hands to access information now.

The exhibition's aim to question and redefine familiar objects and symbols in visual culture reveals the artist grappling with control; imparting dissatisfaction with the current order of the

world. This negotiation for control is contended through an examination of the relationships between physical objects, images, and information. The exhibition provides a means to question the form in which information comes to us. Mei takes the rapid delivery of visual culture – a glimpse of a slogan on a bumper sticker – and slows it down, takes it apart, and rebuilds it as a physical object that one can stand before and confront.