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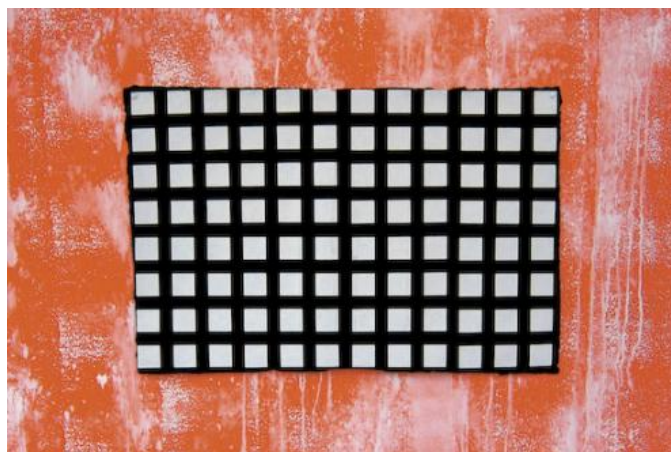
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What's My Line at Roots and Culture Contemporary Arts Center

Justin Thomas Schaefer curates an anonymous group exhibition *By Laura Pearson*



What's My Line?

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In the classic 1950s game show *What's My Line?*, celebrity panelists tried to determine a contestant's occupation by asking yes-no questions. The jobs were often unusual: "rainmaker," "sells 'eyeglasses' for chickens," "operates skirt-blowing machine at amusement park," etc. A similar intrigue permeates this anonymous group show at Roots & Culture, yet unlike with the popular panel game, the appeal derives from questioning, not some big reveal.

L.A.-based artist [Justin Thomas Schaefer](#) organized the multimedia exhibition, featuring untitled works by secret artists. What's lacking in information is made up for in atmosphere. Schaefer is skilled at creating environments, and here gallery-goers are greeted by wafting incense and a chimey electronic version of Bach's *Air* by '60s musique concrète composer [Delia Derbyshire](#). Maybe it's the Nag Champa, but the small room painted black feels shrine-like, with various arrangements of four-leaf clovers adorning the walls. Set apart in this room and pressed between glass, the lucky leaves seem as valuable as the crown jewels, and one can't help but ponder the identity of the prolific clover collector—though here, as elsewhere, anonymity adds an appealing air of mystery.

On a watery blue wall, Schaefer has displayed black-and-white images of *What's My Line?* contestants and their revealed occupation: "pajama model," "clown," even Salvador Dalí—a mystery guest on a surreal 1957 episode of the show. It's a clever gesture to include a wall of "answers" in an exhibition that inspires questions, to furnish labels in an otherwise unlabeled show. Spare yet layered, "What's My Line?" embraces the game of concealing identity but not revealing. The investigation's the thing.

June 29, 2011

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