

Matt Keegan: *Realia*

May 6–June 21, 2025

Level Two and Lower Level

Magenta Plains is pleased to present Matt Keegan's first solo exhibition with the gallery titled *Realia*, an exhibition of new paintings and mixed media sculpture. This presentation builds upon a body of work made from an archive of hundreds of English language-teaching flashcards handmade by his mother, a first-generation Cuban American and ESL (English as a second language) teacher. Mainly assembled throughout the 1990s from mass-market print materials such as clothing catalogues, magazines, union mailers, and other printed matter from within his family home, the cards were used in her classroom to introduce newly emigrated students to the English language via photos predominantly used for advertising. Keegan has appropriated this image archive for his work since 2010 to investigate the relationship between the medium of photography, the structure of language expression, and to probe how a photographic image can produce meaning.

Realia combines a variety of different strands of Keegan's practice such as a series of new oil paintings, a group of his idiosyncratic steel panel wall sculptures, and a tabletop sculpture commissioned for his recent solo exhibition at The Athenaeum at the University of Georgia. *Polar Bears to Laundry (Mom's cards)* (2024) is a conceptual starting point for this exhibition, featuring a grouping of five of his mother's ESL cards, re-contextualized on a steel backing in a visual "sentence". Keegan's paintings derive from a series of mass-produced English language flashcards as well as the artist's own photographs. Representing subject matter as disparate as a closed door, a close-up of a feasting mosquito, red ballet flats, or a porn still, these paintings use the deadpan context of his mother's teaching material to render their subject matter poignant and evocative—no longer exclusively denotative and literal.

In Keegan's sculpture, *A Table and Grid* (2024), a spray-finished and silkscreened steel tabletop becomes a ground for a series of every-day objects. These objects are cast in aqua-resin and painted, drawn on, and pigmented to emphasize their color and form, and arranged suggestively in a three-dimensional syntax. Keegan repeats this semiotic experiment across different media, forming a sort of equation through multiple interventions of his hand. As an artist who focuses on the intersection between meaning and language, this exhibition mobilizes the images as an ever-changing vessel of meaning. *Realia* is a series of visual phrases the viewer too can investigate and mine for meaning of their own.

Over the course of his career, Matt Keegan (b. 1976, Manhasset, NY) has worked fluidly across mediums, creating sculpture, photographs, videos, and text-based work that probe the myriad ways in which art and language mediate the personal experience of physical space as well as historical, social, and political events.

Keegan's artistic practice often parallels contemporaneous publishing projects, and at times a confluence of the two modes of production has compelled the artist to develop new arenas for artistic discourse and collaboration. In 2008 Keegan published *AMERICAMERICA*, an artist book commissioned and published by Printed Matter, NY, which focuses on the year 1986 and its correspondence with 2008. The book opens with documentation of a 2007 road trip, inspired by *Hands Across America*, in which Keegan cast the hands of mayors located between New York and New Mexico. In 2003 Keegan co-founded the annual publication *North Drive Press* with Lizzy Lee, a childhood friend. Numbering five issues between 2004 and 2010, the unconventional project operated as an alternative space for artist-to-artist interviews and art multiples. *North Drive Press* is included in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the New York Public Library, The Library at the Hessel Museum and Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, and the Beinecke Library at Yale University, among others.

Matt Keegan's work has been exhibited at museums such as the Athenaeum at the University of Georgia, Athens, GA; Museum of Modern Art, NY; Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, TX; Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, AT; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Bilbao, ES, and Berlin, DE; The Kitchen, New York, NY; The Art Institute of Chicago, IL; and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY.

Keegan's work is represented in numerous museum and private collections worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, NY; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY, among others. He received his MFA from Columbia University in 2004, attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2001, and his BFA from Carnegie Mellon University in 1998. Keegan is currently a Senior Critic in the Painting & Printmaking Department at Yale University, and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.