Matthieu Brouillard and Donigan Cumming, *Coming through the Fog: Les rencontres de Matthieu Brouillard et de Donigan Cumming*, FOFA Gallery, Concordia University, Montreal, 19 March to 20 April 2012

Zoë Tousignant
The works, which were all printed in various large formats on identical paper, affixed directly to the walls with magnets, were conflated in salon-style clusters. Rather than being identified with individual labels, a schema supplied by the gallery and left on the bench in the middle of the space was the only key to determining each artist’s contribution. The most obvious attempt at blurring the line between Brouillard’s and Cumming’s practices was the audacious strategy in the art-history classroom, a method still used despite the changeover from analogue to digital slides. Within the context of exhibitions, it functions as a documentarian: a director who deftly coaxes out the idiosyncrasies of his subjects as the scene unfolds. There is a strong element of disarray in Cumming’s photographs—a sense that reality unbridled is being captured.

Yet, once this overriding sameness was acknowledged and conceded to, the differences between their works were given a chance to emerge. The greatest distinction revolves around the idea of control—the control that each photographer apparently has over his respective subjects and scenes. Speaking in filmic terms, Brouillard can be seen as an Alfred Hitchcock type: a director who meticulously storyboards his scenes before their execution. Brouillard’s images are beautiful lit and his subjects carefully positioned; he knows drama and isn’t afraid to use it. Cumming, conversely, can be likened to a Werner Herzog (in his guise as a documentarian): a director who deftly coaxes out the idiosyncrasies of his subjects as the scene unfolds. There is a strong element of disarray in Cumming’s photographs—a sense that reality unbridled is being captured.

Curated by Erin Silver, this bilingually titled exhibition juxtaposed works by Matthieu Brouillard and Donigan Cumming, two artists who, although they are separated by a generation and consequently possess different measures of experience, are both well known to the Montreal art scene. The act of juxtaposition is, in itself, a strong curatorial statement, and in this case it is especially worth drawing out its effects and implications.

Placing works side by side in order to compare and contrast them is a standard art-historical strategy—the ultimate paradigm is the double projection in the art-history classroom, a method still used despite the changeover from analogue to digital slides. Within the context of exhibitions, it functions in much the same way: viewers are invited to assess two bodies of work against each other, to see where and how they intersect or diverge. The driving force behind this strategy is the idea that viewers’ understanding of each corpus will be greater after such a meeting has taken place.

In “Coming through the Fog”, however, the nature of the juxtaposition went far beyond the mere positioning of works alongside one another. Brouillard’s and Cumming’s photographs are overwhelmingly similar on many levels, a fact that was reinforced by several astute curatorial techniques.