



Shadows 1

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *Photographs by David Freeman*
Where: Blue Onion, 925 Dove Avenue, McAllen
When: Through January, daily from 11am–9pm.

The Landscape Transformed

A few weeks ago we saw landscape art depicting idyllic and unspoiled views of early South Texas. Now we are fast-forwarding into a transformed landscape with David Freeman's *Photographs*, now on display at the Blue Onion restaurant. His large format, darkly toned color images, capture afternoon shadows cast by the Border Wall/Fence as they fall into Rio Grande Valley backyards.

A photography instructor at STC, Freeman usually has his camera with him, and that was fortuitous on the particular afternoon that he noticed some ominous afternoon shadows. "I've been working on Border Wall imagery/implications for a year," Freeman said, "and I got there at that one certain time of day, where the sun hit the Fence just right, and the shadows fell across backyards." The shadows triggered a memory and a psychological reaction: the contrast of this backyard phenomenon with his own backyard childhood experiences. "I thought about when I was growing up in North Africa," he mused. "I would look for the sunniest place in my yard to find a spike-tailed lizard basking in the sun, and I'd play with him. Usually you go to the backyard to have fun, but when I saw these shadows lying across a backyard, it was depressing because the shadows seemed to turn into the bars of a cage; the Wall suddenly became an enclosure, not only to keep people out, but to keep you in at the same time. A lot of my friends see it as keeping us in. It could easily work both ways - like the Berlin Wall."

In these images, beyond the dark symbolic cage metaphor, we see a beautiful play of light and shadow. "Shadow 1" not only captures the long shadow of the Border Wall/Fence as it prints itself through a chain-link fence and across the yard, but also recognizes the rhythm of sunlight and shadow as it hits the chain links, creating a remarkable ephemeral structure on the smaller fence. These patterned bars materialize as dark shadows erase alternate sections of the backyard fence structure and create the illusion of bars perpendicular to the long horizontal shadows. In "Shadow 5", the sun's suggestion of vertical chain-link posts becomes an assertive psychological barrier as well as a physical yard boundary. Unexpected light shapes are captured in other images, which Freeman identifies as a crossover from his drawing habits. "I'm documenting, but I'm also able to create a photograph that has the elements that I like in my drawings. Along the fence line, there's a dot-dash pattern that I like in my drawings; it's a visual narrative that's really nice."

Freeman also displays three over-sized photographs from a social documentation series. Tightly displayed in the hallway to the restaurant's restrooms are portraits of local residents. These pictures project a positive view of humanity and offer a contrast in mood to the darker portents of the shadow photographs. We need to see these photos in a show of their own.

Visiting at mid-afternoon will allow the best art viewing at this venue.

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