

## Joshua Schwebel, *The Tenant*, Centre Clark, Montréal

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## Joshua Schwebel

### *The Tenant*

On any given weekday, the grey factory building at 5445-5455 de Gaspé buzzes with the sounds of young entrepreneurs, tech bros, and creative class workers. Straight out of a lifestyle photoshoot, the scene mirrors that in any metropolitan centre where the grubby postwar architecture of yesteryear's working class has given way to the upwardly mobile glitz and glam of post-industrial chic.

Joshua Schwebel's exhibition *The Tenant*, at Centre Clark, is both a testament to and an indictment of the economic, real estate, and social forces that have precipitated the transformation of Montréal into a cannibalistic developer's market. Documenting the 2001 purchase of 5445-5455 de Gaspé by Allied Properties Real Estate Investment Trust and the gradual pushing out of its tenants, the original pieces, ready-mades, and artful detritus on display tell a narrative of continued displacement. With the collaboration of artists and cultural workers, Schwebel's intentional uses and distortions of labour, storytelling, and the aesthetics of millennial creative capital are intellectually stimulating and alluringly beautiful.

Upon entering the gallery, the exterior sound of de Gaspé's productive worker bees gives way to the humming warehouse noise of an industrial sewing machine. Illuminated by a shop table lamp on a custom-fit wooden table with cast iron legs, the machine comes from the Chabanel studios, the new area to which many artists relocated following the Allied takeover of the de Gaspé building. Days before *The Tenant* opened, a motley crew of contemporary local artists participated in a procession from their new studios to Clark. They carried leftovers from garment shops that have now closed or moved away from Chabanel—cardboard boxes full of zippers, advertisements for custom alterations, a canvas basket truck, and a for sale sign—that gestured to the gentrification that haunts these communities. These found

objects, carefully assembled in the gallery, acknowledge how the cultural sector is itself a cog in a system of dislodgement. Facilitating the transition from culturally diverse, immigrant-rich, and affordable neighbourhoods to postmodern hubs of bland, white innovation, Schwebel's installation is a reminder of the arts sector's implication in this cycle.

*The Tenant* outlines the deals and dealings that led to Allied's purchase of the area and its simultaneous branding of itself as a "friend of the arts." Detailed descriptive texts of Schwebel's process in researching, conceiving of, and installing the project are displayed on seven blue aluminum engraved plaques. These pieces mimic the corporate ones found throughout the lobby of the building. Expensive-looking knockoffs, Schwebel's labels move between fact and anecdote, hijacking the hip design used to sell the Allied vision. We learn of an Allied branded Monopoly game; the creation of *Block Magazine*, which preyed on artists; and Schwebel's theft of a dustjacket from a book by Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, while visiting the Allied head offices in Toronto. The items themselves are displayed in the space on sewing tables, weaving into the exhibition the mainstream visual vocabulary of industrial design with its uncomfortable subtexts of labour, exploitation, real estate speculation, and rampant capitalism. Cutting through the smoke and mirrors with incisiveness, Schwebel's exhibition screams, here we are, agents and pawns in the deaths and lives of our own great cities.

**Didier Morelli**

**Joshua Schwebel**  
*The Tenant*, exhibition  
 views, 2021.  
 Photos : Paul Litherland

**Centre Clark, Montréal**  
 October 28—November 27, 2021