

Ève K. Tremblay, *Postures scientifiques*, Galerie Donald Browne, Montreal, April 7-May 12, 2007

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Yan Giguère, *Choisir*, 2007 (vue d'installation), tirages argentiques, dimensions variables

Yan Giguère

Choisir, occurrence, espace d'art et d'essai contemporains, du 17 mars au 21 avril 2007

Choisir. Le titre n'est pas une coquetterie. On s'interroge tout de même quand on se rend compte que c'est un total de quelque 200 photos qui compose cette exposition. Exposition qui, sans en avoir l'air, fait le bilan de quelque 15 années de pratique assidue. Non que ce soit là une rétrospective à laquelle on est convié. Non, aucune des images n'est temporellement identifiée comme faisant partie d'un corpus antérieur remis en perspective dans cette sélection. Non, il ne s'agit pas de cela! La production de Yan Giguère ne doit pas être prise en coupe et comme un corpus.

Il s'agit plutôt d'un travail de longue haleine, du travail d'une vie, tiens! Du quotidien et de la pratique au jour le jour, et naturelle comme une respiration, d'un photographe, d'un artisan aussi.

Comprenons-nous bien, le terme ici n'est absolument pas péjoratif; il est à prendre dans son sens le plus noble. L'artisan est celui qui est au plus près de ses instruments de travail, celui qui les aime et qui en a une connaissance intime. D'ailleurs, Yan est un collectionneur d'appareils photo; tous sont pour lui sources d'émerveillement et outils

potentiels qu'il apprend à manier pour en tirer avantage et explorer les finis et textures différents d'images pouvant en résulter et dont il saura faire bon usage. En plus, cet artisan se double d'un artiste qui sait comment nous montrer ce que son attention tranquille et méditative lui a permis de découvrir au fil de sa vie. Ce sont des images de toutes factures: portraits, natures mortes, paysages en plan rapproché, détails dans le relief d'un mur, vues urbaines, images de son univers intime, de l'atelier de sa compagne, artiste comme lui; images d'elle, surtout, dans toutes les circonstances de cette vie qui les a réunis. Un regard amoureux, quoi, auquel rien n'échappe de ce qui forme le cours heureux des choses, des êtres et du temps qui les charrie!

Il y a aussi la logique de son accrochage. Dirions-nous que nous voyons là une disposition en arborescence ou en rhizome? L'une comme l'autre de ces figures supposent un enchevêtrement en provenance d'un tronc unique puis se disséminant en tous sens. Elles sont toutefois dissemblables en ceci que la première s'étend en élévation, progressant vers un faite unique alors que la seconde s'étend horizontalement, dans une complexité grandissante.

C'est encore la figure de la constellation qui peut le mieux traduire cette mise en forme. En effet, chaque image est unique et totale. Elle forme un bloc d'espace et de temps bien défini. Elle est réminiscence, rappel d'un moment, d'une visite, d'un voyage, d'une promenade dans Montréal, à la quête de quelques visions fugaces et signifiantes. C'est ensemble, toutefois, que l'effet est le plus vivace. Bien sûr, on pourrait dire quelle image est plus ancienne, laquelle fut prise en hiver, laquelle en été; les saisons, les moments et les lieux. Mais on préfère, et de loin, suivre le semblant d'ordre qui nous est proposé, un

cheminement sans parcours unique et défini. Les blocs d'images invitent bien à une lecture déterminée mais chacun englobe tout de même plusieurs associations possibles. Il y a aussi la taille, le chevauchement de certaines images, le fait que quelques-unes aient conservé une marge blanche et d'autres, non. Tout cela conditionne la lecture, la commande. Mais cela est effet si doux, si subtil qu'on ne se sent jamais guidé en ce labyrinthe. Ou qu'on l'éprouve juste assez pour apprécier de ne pas être laissé à nous-mêmes, en pauvres égarés. Mais nous sommes bien conduits au sein de la vision d'un artiste, de quelqu'un qui a posé les jalons de sa vision sur les choses mais d'une façon à la fois simple et sensible, tellement que cela pourrait être le spectacle de notre propre environnement, cela pourrait être une version de notre vie.

Voilà pourquoi il est si difficile de choisir. Cent quatre-vingt-deux photos ne peuvent suffire à un tel projet. On imagine sans peine que ce travail est et restera toujours en pleine et constante extension, que des chapitres et des chapitres s'ajouteront encore et encore à ce que nous voyons aujourd'hui. Et qu'on y viendra et reviendra pour découvrir, en un prochain épisode, où la vie a bien pu mener Yan Giguère. Car, en ce lieu qu'il nous montrera, on sera bien sûr d'être nous aussi, d'y habiter tout comme lui mais sans avoir, comme lui, le don de le voir et de le décrire aussi bien!

Sylvain Campeau collabore à de nombreuses revues, tant canadiennes qu'européennes (ETC Montréal, CV ciel variable, PhotoVision et Papel Alpha). Il est également l'auteur d'un essai, *Chambres obscures: photographie et installation*, et de quatre recueils de poésie.

Ève K. Tremblay

Postures scientifiques, Galerie Donald Browne, Montreal, April 7 – May 12, 2007

The photographic speculative fictions that Ève K. Tremblay exhibited at Galerie Donald Browne bore the same enigmatic hallmark as has all her earlier work. Set in some day-after-tomorrow but finally in an indeterminate tense, these works challenge the viewer, who must interpret what exactly is happening there. And Tremblay is brilliant at upping the ante by imbuing these elliptical, restless, and seductively fey narratives with an emotional nimbus that invites us in and holds us there.

Indeed, it is a claim so strong that it is often hard to shake off its effects. Her work is delectably, seductively cinematographic. There is a compact inscribed in both retina and lived-body as we grow acquainted with her unlikely protagonists and her beautifully lit and consummately ambiguous scenarios.

The clarity, beauty, and formal rigour of these images are simply breathtaking. But there are no easy answers to the ontological and psychological questions that they pose – just as in the life-world, it is a truism that there are seldom any easy answers. The “meaning” of a given image informs it as a fore-edge water-colour painting does the closed book, waiting



Ève K. Tremblay, *Scène de chasse*, 2006, chromogenic print, 100 x 125 cm, courtesy of the Donald Browne Gallery

to be unfurled when the book is fanned out, its narrative treasure revealed like a talisman in the palm of one's hand. So, too, Tremblay's luminous images hide their true subject matter in plain sight. Meaning here is not fugitive but in flight – and requires our imaginative engagement to tether it through interpretation.

As we examine works in her recent *Postures Scientifiques* series, we find that the works suggest narratives that must be completed inside our own minds, and this relates to “reading” them as if they were captivating narrative fictions the plots of which we grow inside our own heads.

In works such as *Semence d'archive* (2006), *Introspection* (2005), and *Lab Squatter* (2006), Tremblay offers what seem like film stills but are really apertures that open out on an utopian or dystopian reality beyond our immediate ken, an *Alphaville* of the mind's eye. Her crisp and deft handling of cineastic atmospherics remind me of Winterbottom's film *Code 46* and indicate she has a real future in film anytime she wants to make the transition. In *Code 46*, set in a near future, privileged classes live and work “inside” walled cities, while non-citizens remain “outside” in a hopelessly closed situation of perennial impoverishment. The business of making “papelles” – identity papers necessary for travel between cities – bears an eerie familiarity to these photographs of hydroponic farming routines and anonymous laboratory situations in which you are either the consummate insider – the dubious protagonist – or an outsider looking in, clueless at first but increasingly caught up in the enigmatic scenario, unwilling to let go.

In these large-scale colour (and now occasionally black-and-white) photographs, Tremblay works nimbly to span the worlds of interiority – the psyche within – and exteriority – the world outside – reminding us of our engagement in the unending human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet irremediably wed. She courageously births thought spaces for the expression of subjective ontology, even while recognizing that those spaces-

and their transitional objects are always already intersubjectively shareable – habitable – and not without a measure of angst and uncertainty.

As we enter from the wings into her elliptical narratives, such as *Pause* (2006), *Scène de Chasse* (2006), and the marvellously suggestive *Scène de Pêche* (2006) (this latter executed near the Institut de Génétique et de Biologie Moléculaire et Cellulaire at Illkirch in Strasbourg, with workers there “acting out” her scenarios, adding a weird authenticity to the images), we become complicit in the play of shifting psychic states, mutable identities, and emotional potentialities, and we ask ourselves

if Tremblay is doubling herself here. Wilfully? Knowingly? Is she the oft-poised protagonist of these mystery – plays – or is it an actress in her place? We may never know the real truth of it.

As we linger long in her cosmogony, we ask ourselves: is she simply being playful? Mischievous, even? No. Is this a masque that we are being invited to participate in? Yes. It seems we are far off the beaten track, in unknown territory, in the grip of the artist’s remarkable vision, and only her gnomic, if radiant, signposts are on view to help us negotiate a way through to identifiable territory. Perhaps that’s how it should be, for those signposts

lead us into the heart of her labyrinth, where we are likely to meet a Minotaur that bears an eerie resemblance to both Tremblay’s theatrical identity and our own private Other.

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James D. Campbell is a writer on art and an independent curator based in Montreal. He is the author of over a hundred books and catalogues on art and artists.
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Documenta 12

Kassel, Germany, June 16 – September 23, 2007

IN ORDER

Allan Sekula

Shipwreck, 2007

Photographic installation

Photo: Rene Price

Zoe Leonard

Analogue, 1998–2007, Cologne

Courtesy Zoe Leonard; Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York; Galerie Gisela Capitant,

Luis Jacob

A Dance for Those of Us Whose Hearts Have Turned to Ice, Based on the Choreography of Françoise Sullivan and the Sculpture of Barbara Hepworth (With Sign-Language Supplement), 2007

Photo: Chris Curreri

Zofia Kulik

The Splendour of Myself (II), 1997

Courtesy Zofia Kulik

George Osodi

Oil Rich Niger Delta, 2003–2007

Series of digital photographs

CK Rajan

Untitled, 1992–1996

Paper collage

Courtesy Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerpen

“The big exhibition has no form.” This statement, the first sentence of a preface to the catalogue by curators Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, set the tone for this year’s Documenta. This exhibition was indeed formless, sprawling from the heights of the Cascades at Park Wilhelmshöhe to an enormous, tent-like temporary building, the Aue Pavilion, that was erected on the vast lawn of the Orangerie. On its path it filled the Museum Fredericianum, the Documenta Halle, and the Neue Galerie and permeated several other venues. It spread out in time as well; a large historical component to the exhibition reached back as far as the fifteenth century. A matching formlessness was found in the exhibition’s three leitmotifs, which were so broad as to become near meaningless: “Is modernity our antiquity?” “What is bare life?” and “Education: What is to be done?”

The curators’ insistence on “no form” could be read as an honourable attempt to avoid a partial, biased view, but what kind of exhibition does formlessness generate? An exhibition, if Documenta 12 was any indication, that in the absence of strong curatorial interpretations reflects the confusion and complicatedness of everyday life “as is.” Interventions in everyday life and in-situ installations, however, were noticeably few and far between. Life “as is” was not so much infiltrated as it was simulated. Documenta 12 presented a virtual world, like the World Wide Web (but without search engines). The formlessness of this year’s exhibition can be compared to the current eruption of vernacular photography and video that, absorbed by the computer, creates a vast and formless overlay of real life, millions of points of view that are accessible to all.

Suppressing the authorial view in a large exhibition presumably opens the field for the personal poetics of the viewers. As we do on the Web, we are free to draw our own connections, make our own discoveries in a sea of images. But it is easy to get lost in uncharted waters.

Canadian artist Luis Jacob’s installation *Album III* (2004) reflected the formlessness of the exhibition on a small scale. Hundreds of photographs from mass-media sources, many of them portraying works of art, were displayed around the walls of a large gallery space in the Fredericianum. They formed an open archive, without beginning end, making



poetic associations that depended largely on what viewers could bring to it. Obviously, this anarchic structure works better on a small scale than in the exhibition at large, but even here, the effect of the barrage of images was one of bewilderment rather than of pleasure or insight.

Other photographers brought more structure to their collections. Zoe Leonard’s *Analogue* (1998–2007), with a focus on specific objects and thematic organization, showed more of an

authorial input. Taking shop windows and streets in her native New York and other cities in the world as a starting point, she registered the transformation of urban landscapes in the face of globalization and followed trajectories of consumer goods, marked by brand logos, all over the world. Leonard’s rows of C-prints and gelatin-silver prints provided a nostalgic view not only of a threatened vernacular aesthetic of privately owned shops, but of analogue