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Nature in a positive way, putting to use the plainly subjective singularity of their experience. Jeane Fabb is among the women artists who sought to bring out the intensity of the relationship between woman and the Earth, in the 70s and 80s. Today, with great finesse, her works still look into the troubled space of Nature and the feminine.

Jeane Fabb has been exploring the dialogue between art and Nature for thirty years, through her own practice as well as by her involvement as co-founder of Boréal Art/Nature, where she acts as art director. Emigrating from England at the age of seven, Jeane Fabb settled in La Macaza in the Laurentians, a place where she creates works and art interventions that are shown and produced in Québec as well as abroad. It is impossible to fully relate the variety of her artistic mediums—she is into sculptures, performances, photography, video, ephemeral site-specific practices—nor the richness of the issues that drive them: the ecological, social, historical, sacred, economical, political and metaphorical aspects of Nature are all considered. Yet, a constant remains: the will to bear witness to a close and fundamental connection with natural places, and a strong interest in the experience of women with the Earth. Jeane Fabb's position, explicitly local and subjective, supposes a gentle reciprocal exchange between the artist and Nature. Far from projecting a conqueror attitude, these art interventions rely instead on a contemplative motif representing a Nature with which a dialogue is possible.

To Gather, to Collect, to Shelter

The Laurentians are well known for their forestry and tourism industries, but the underlying history that interests Jean Fabb is not as well known. It concerns the women of this region and their special bond with Nature. To achieve this, in 2003 Fabb undertook an *Intimate Journey*,² through which she invited nine women from La Macaza and the surrounding area to participate in an interview. In the privacy of a room, Fabb asked them to describe a place they felt an attachment to. As the interviews progress, cornerstones were identified in the Laurentian forest, places where often the women go to and simply exist, alone, on a rock, in a lake, by a tree. Some evoked the beauty of the area and its comforting effect, the feeling of security it induces; others claimed that the time spent at "their" spot allowed them to reconnect to an "inner space." Fabb added a dimension to these secrets by placing a Lady's Slipper at the heart of the *Intimate Journey* project. The Lady's Slipper is an indigenous and androgynous looking orchid, a fascinating flower with a peculiarly bulging third petal that is both translucent and covered with a network of purplish veins. Over a period of two years the artist went into the woods filming the flower, under different angles and lighting, ultimately creating a video of about fifty minutes in length. This video portrait of the Lady's Slipper constitutes an enigmatic and continuous framework onto which the sound of the interviews is superimposed. During the recording sessions, photographs of the flower were scattered on the walls. The flower sheltered the women's confidences, marking them with its feminine and masculine duplicity. The women then revealed why they were attached to a particular place, why they related to it. At the junction between positioning oneself in Nature and identity positioning, Jeane Fabb points to places that are fashioned from the inside by relationships, not boundaries. With *In Her Slippers*, she opens a space (physical and metaphorical) where the experiences of women and their places in the forest can be told. As Carol Bigwood reminds us, the term *place* supposes an opening: "*Chora, 'place,' is related to the Greek words chorea and choresomai, which means 'make room for,' 'give way to,' 'to fall back,' and 'withdraw.'*"³

To Gather, to Collect, to Harvest

In the wake of *Intimate Journey*, over the last two years at La Macaza, Jeane Fabb had been developing a video cycle entitled *Intimate Ground*. She enters the forest with her camera, reproducing the gestures so often repeated by women who go out picking. Attention and intention accompany this solitary ritual, where she presses on and out of the paths, gleaning medicinal herbs or seeds. A very simple context is put in place: a large sheet of fabric covering the body transforms the experience into an extraordinary one and isolates every gesture, as a large piece of cloth unfolded on the ground isolates roots, bones, foliage, flowers, pine nuts, plants. While she walks from one point to the next, she films her shadow; as she stops by to pick, the camera's objective closes in on her hands, hands that search, collect, uncover, pull up, and follow the gold seam of the *Goldthread*.

These gestures are not well-known; they have not been the object of a "picking tally," as others have been of a "hunting tally." Searching the ground, Jeane Fabb extracts elements from Nature, and she also lets tiny movements emerge, hidden from view, long-lost movements that were now part of History. The hands of women dealing with the fruit of the picking articulate a know-how forming in the camera's objective a repertoire of signs to decipher. Fabb acknowledges the

value of this experience and by trapping them in a single framework allows this long dialogue to unfold.

To Collect Oneself, to Receive, to Meditate

The Nature to which Jeane Fabb refers and speaks seems to be endowed with subjectivity, and it brings to mind the philosophical works of Merleau-Ponty. In *The Visible and the Invisible*,⁴ he invites us to consider a Nature that is neither objective, nor inert, nor silent. Even better, it is at the core of Nature's invisible and enigmatic structures, perceived by the sensitive experience, that thought and language draw their motivation. In a way, everything is part of language, which in turn is not humanity's prerogative anymore. Each and every inflection of the mind, every articulation of the intellect is nothing but the extension and expansion, through us, of polymorphic and moving elements concealed in Nature.

A large part of Jeane Fabb's work (what she calls her *actions* in the Nature) seems to cultivate this kind of presence and attention to the world, where the boundaries of the subject—resolutely tuned in to its surroundings—become porous. This was the case in Wales with *Crywdro/Wander* (2003), the Chiapas with *Imagen Negra* (2002), and Iceland with the expedition *Sans Traces* (1999). Most of the actions include a very simple constant in their storylines: dressed in black, the artist paces the ground of an often remote site. In specific locations, where she experiences a distinct feeling or emotion, Fabb asks to be photographed, sometimes captured hurriedly as she rushes through the landscape, sometimes staying still as a rock. Whether in a forest, a moor or a valley, the artist sets up the proper conditions for an encounter, dedicated to the observation of the quality and the variations of a dialogue with a specific place. She says: "*I chose simple dark clothing as a shifting boundary between inner and outer. [...] An invitation to an intimate narrative between myself and the land.*"⁵

Jeane Fabb acknowledges the association of women with the landscape by substituting the hegemony of an objectivizing and eroticizing gaze for the subjective and sensory experience of the body. He or she who is capturing the landscape is no longer behind the camera, but enveloped in the image. In the same frame: a patch of sky, a woman, the land. Strangely, about it reminds me of two images: Caspar David Friedrich's *Woman in Front of the Setting Sun* (1918) and Jeff Wall's *Stereo* (1980). The former shows a woman in front of a landscape, turning her back turned to the viewer, acting as a relay for the gaze; the latter frames the naked spread out body of a young male wearing headphones, the depth of field running through the channels of *inner experience*.

A comparison between these three works may seem odd, yet they share a representation of absorption or of *interlace*. Photography is more than documentation here. It allows the artist to deal with the issue of the gaze while displaying an interlocking play: absorption of the landscape, personal absorption, and absorption by the camera. Actions in Nature allow for a contemplative collection of thoughts, giving rise to an underlying conversation that the artist tries to make visible.

Other Narratives

For Jeane Fabb, the expression of women's intimate experiences with Nature is *gripping*. The artist strives to account for positioning, gesture, and dialogue that are hardly visible or translatable and that, if not the preserve of women, indicate a way of *being and doing*: a way of *collecting, gathering, picking, meditating or absorbing oneself* in a Nature considered as a "subjective body," which gets entangled in the mesh of actions and videos. This is also put forward by Christine Ross in an essay on the feminine subject: "A body is at work, but so is the ecosystem; between them is a fragile exchange whose outcome is unpredictable."⁶ This is also, for Fabb, a necessary and fruitful exchange where the supposed obscurity of woman and Nature feed the language and the story of its narratives, without mystification.

Caroline Loncol Daigneault

Notes

¹ Boréal Art/Nature is an artist-run centre founded in 1988 and located in the Upper Laurentians. Its mission is to explore new relations between ephemeral experimental art and Nature by organizing artist residencies and expeditions.

² This project gathers together all the stages of a project that has led to the video installation *Dans ses sabots à elle*, which was presented in 2005 at La Centrale (Montréal), at the Arte X Arte gallery (Buenos Aires), as well as at the Centre d'exposition de la Gare (L'Annonciation).

³ Carol Bigwood, *Earth Muse: Feminism, Nature, and Art*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1993, p. 291.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Tel », 2007 [1964], 359 p. English translation: *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968.

⁵ Jeane Fabb, quoted from her website: <http://jeanefabb.ca/>.

⁶ Christine Ross, « Le féminisme et l'instabilité de son sujet », *Instabili, La question du sujet*, Montréal, La Centrale et Artexes, 1990, p. 18. (In French)

ERRATA

- We inform that the article "Yvonne Rainer: From Choreo-graphy to Cinemato-graphy", published by Chantal Pontbriand, in *ETC* 83, p. 20-23, was initially given as a lecture, in English, in the symposium *Women and the Avant-garde/Les femmes et l'avant-garde*, University of Florida/Sorbonne, Paris, 2007.
- Nous prions nos lecteurs de noter que dans la livraison 83 de *ETC*, dans l'article de Michèle Cohen Hadria, intitulé « La stratégie des Iraniennes », p. 25, le crédit des œuvres *In Love with a Red Wall*, ne doit être attribué qu'à Maria Kheirkhah. Toutes nos excuses à l'artiste.