

Maryse Larivière, *Wild is the Wind*, Galerie Clark, Montreal, March 9 - April 22, 2006

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Maryse Larivière

Wild is the Wind

Galerie Clark, Montreal

March 9 – April 22, 2006

The rhythmic sound of waves lapping against the shore pervades the small back room of Galerie Clark in Montreal. It accompanies a wall-size video projection of a couple embracing tightly at the water's edge. Only the young woman's pale face is visible as she stares silently out to sea (it is, in fact, the artist, Maryse Larivière). After a prolonged, almost static several minutes, she takes her long hair in hand and tucks it into her companion's shirt pocket. This quirky gesture seems intended to convey her desire to be even closer to him, and afterward they momentarily clutch each other tighter with an unspoken air of accomplishment. The display conjures up a timeless utopia that only these two occupy.

Maryse Larivière is a young artist based in Montreal and Paris. Of the five pieces in her installation *Wild is the Wind*, *La Mer* (The sea) is by far the largest work, setting a romantic yet aloof tone for the show. It also points to the recurring motif of gesture used significantly throughout. In his commentary on the work of Victor Alimpiev, Viktor Misiano asks, "What is a gesture if not a prime element of society? Behind each gesture one senses fundamental ontological questions about love and jealousy, friendship and loneliness, multiplicity and uniqueness etc."¹ The same line of inquiry slides easily onto *Wild is the Wind*, although Larivière focuses on how gesture operates as a mechanism within intimate relationships, becoming a private tool for both conveying and decoding circumstance and emotion. The prevalence of young, hip, dark-featured, Parisian subjects suggests that the artist is tapping into her personal experience and fetishizing it by twinning this archetypal couple, of which she is one half, and inserting the duo into various situations of her own creation.

La Valse (The waltz) depicts a couple lying on their back in bed, arms outstretched in front as if they are about to dance out of the frame. The blue bed sheets, along with their sombre expressions and seemingly floating hair, create the illusion of an agreeable drowning. The scenario offers an analogy to the amalgamation of two people's lives when they are entwined in a relationship, visually articulating the demise of individuality in exchange for consensual union, for better or worse, until death do us part, and so on.

Pop Interview plays on a mini-dv deck only a foot and a half above the floor and is the strongest and most complex video in the ensemble. It is the only work in which the subjects address viewers directly. *Pop Interview* speaks to the cyclic and elusive search for self-affirmation through partnering. Two short loops alternate. The first shows a handsome young man speaking in French. He says, "Recently single, the idea came to me to shake things up a little, get a change of scene and I immediately thought of Chloë Sevigny and the possibility of meeting her." Almost immediately after, a plain-looking woman with her hair pulled into a bun appears on screen. She is sitting in a room with pots and pans on the wall and says quite sadly, "It's turned out that marriage and my pregnancy have really permitted me to empower myself as a woman." The statement is a tabloid quote from Britney Spears and shines a spotlight on the perverse currents of absurdity and sincerity that permeate the quest for true love.



La Mer, video projection, 1 min 51 sec (loop)
Ventimiglia (Italy), 2005

Distorted undertones are also manifest in *Le Baise-Main* (The hand-kissing). The intensity with which a pimply young man sucks, slurps, and pulls on the oversized diamond candy ring worn by his unseen female counterpart transforms sexual innuendo into unsavoury desperation. His posture mirrors that of a man proposing marriage, and once again Larivière's imagery encompasses a matrimonial discourse.

Rachel Harrison's series *Brides and Bases* (2002) illustrates how even traditional wedding photographs, when taken out of their realm as a functional social apparatus and placed on the gallery wall, can reflect the bleak connotations that are conjured up in *Wild is the Wind*. In Harrison's series, the posturing, preening, anxiety, consumption, and overt joy illustrated by careful combinations of clichéd and verité wedding imagery begin to reveal themselves as rather odious spectacles bordering on the ridiculous. John Marriot wrote, in his essay "I Now Pronounce You . . . Weddings, Photography and Sexual Regulation," "Weddings may be, for some people, the most significant public ritual they participate in. Being married – and visibly marked as married – entitles couples to a new social respectability."²

Public displays of affection as claims to social status appear in the photograph *Les mains gluantes* (Sticky hands), but here the couple holding hands appear to be doing a kind of zombie march across the courtyard. Their affected behaviour expands on the altered states evident in other parts of the show, such as the isolated bliss in *La Mer* and the self-destructive ambivalence in *La Valse*. In Ginger Wolfe-Suarez's review of the exhibition *Ecstasy: In and About Altered States*, she asks, "In an era of informational and emotional consumption, how far can the need to be thrilled, scared or mesmerized take the public?"³ It seems that Larivière is asking the same question of her and her peers' relationships. The resulting imagery alludes to a cynical yet honest assessment that beyond a certain amount of internal euphoria, very little of the truly electrifying is to be found in the outward expression of pairing up.

The distinct lack of any dynamic "wildness" within Larivière's scenarios lays bare the seductive devices of this false promise and yet generously forgives, and perhaps even elevates, the enduring human will to believe in it anyway.

SB Edwards

1. Viktor Misiano, "Victor Alimpiev," *Contemporary Magazine*, 2006 annual issue, p. 25.

2. John Marriot, "I Now Pronounce You . . . Weddings, Photography and Sexual Regulation," *Prefix Photo*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (November 2003): 34–35.

3. Ginger Wolfe-Suarez, "Ecstasy: In and About Altered States," *Art Papers Magazine*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (March–April 2006): 51.

SB Edwards is a writer, photographer, producer, and optimist at large. Her work has been published in various magazines including *Flux* (UK), *NEO2* (Madrid), *H* (Barcelona), *Art Papers* (US), *Backlash*, *Esse*, and *CV ciel variable*.