CV Photo

Marc Audette. *Écran.* Pierre-Francois Ouellette Art Contemporain, Montreal, 12 Jan.–16 Feb. 2002

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Marc Audette
Écran
Pierre-Francois Ouellette Art Contemporain, Montreal
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Marc Audette's video and photography installation *Écran* is a unique juncture of various incompossibilities: the electronic media sphere of the video, digitally generated compositions, mechanically produced photographs, and the artist's hands that were involved in the print development process. All vie for the viewer's attention and claim primary importance.

The first images a viewer is confronted with head-on upon entering the small foyer that leads into the gallery are gigantic pixels on huge black-and-white photographs (silver-print). Numerous more such photographic "billboards" adorn the gallery walls, fastened on top by metal bars to hang loose like ancient scrolls. Notably, they do not feature the usual writing or advertisement fare that would befit their large size. Rather, screen dots, pixels, occupy the surfaces. In *Écran*, the pixels are grossly magnified and appear sculptural, almost aggressive. Their dimension breaks down the pictorial totality of a composition, leaving the viewer with fragments.

In *Écran*, the digital isolation and enlargement of screen dots become the surface for a video projection. The electronic image is in part superimposed onto the photographs as well as onto empty wall space, emphasizing a grainy and opaque surface, which thus exposes spectators to tensions of seeing and perceiving. The video-projected picture shows the head and shoulders of an individual to over life-size proportions, but the face remains blurred. As we observe the layered display in pastel chromatics, we wait in vain for a clearly focused picture that would allow us to bestow an identity upon it. We are faced with pixels, the process of electronic image making, and thus become aware of the forces that are acting on us whenever we place ourselves before the electronic screens. The insistence on the blurred image is an attempt to extract a figure of thought. A figure of thought *wrought* within the installation's images, which is neither abstract nor figurative, but one of intellectual sensation.[1] Wrapped in a formidable beauty, the sensation of the figure of thought as it tries to emerge in order to seduce and confront us is *Écran's* theoretical strength.

Marc Audette
Écran
installation photo-vidéo
2002

Identity/Mediasphere

Images are always bound up with identity. Throughout history, pictures have functioned as tools for identity, where an image would fit into a larger cycle and circumscribed meaning linked the beholder to mythology, religion, nationhood, and belonging. These were images reflected upon and contemplated to provide the viewer with a narrative of existence. Today, we encounter visuals largely as fragments of moving pictures but cannot constitute an imaginary totality. In our ever-expanding universe of images in pieces, we flip, zap, channel-surf, and challenge the flow of electronically presented tales, in search of a coherent whole. The grand narratives that once guided the Western world are now constituted largely through technically and electronically mediated tales. Victor Burgin suggests that individual scenes excerpted from "telemediatic tales" provide a platform for identity where "memory, desire and personal narrative merge."[2] Film theorist Laura Mulvey, by contrast, locates the potential of identity formation not in the narratives themselves but in the arrested fragments, in those isolated moments in time during which the viewer excavates through freeze-framing – through intervention.[3] Video and digital technology has turned viewers into pensive, decisive spectators. It allows us to find a new magic by reducing movement (cinema's illusion and triumph) to stillness to isolate and magnify. In fact, we can now discover the secret spaces – like pixels – and thus come closer to breaking the riddle, the enigma, that the (cinematic) screen held for so long. In this unique constellation of the manual, mechanical, electronic, and conceptual, Mulvey's argument of the reduction of movement is taken one step further: not only is the image halted, it is broken down through magnification. The installation is thus comparable to an excavation into the screen in order to undo its physical flatness.

Dangerous Supplement

The visibility of pixels is most dramatic in four photographic scrolls covering the left wall. Together they represent one gigantic human eye, literally blown into pieces – almost too large to be perceived as an eye. While the pixels indicate that a digital projector was used for the composition, the photographs also show the traces of manual labour. Surface discolourations left by the artist's hands are visible. They point to a handmade print-development process (in a huge tub, I was told) and serve as a reminder of the era when photography was battling with painting for recognition as art – a battle that is now extended to digital photography, the dangerous supplement to the photograph? With the advent of digital imaging, photography's legacy as "recorder of fact," as witness, to capture actuality to which the negative print served as proof, is now under erasure. Digital photos are now built, structured, and manipulated with software but have no negatives. Indeed, the Platonian *techne* resides, as I contend, in *Écran's* sublimely playful incompossibilities, in which the return of the photographic medium to an artistic practice emphasizes the artist's hands alongside electronic and digital technologies. The three form junctures and layers but cannot entirely merge. The installation is pointing to this strange zone where art, technology, and thinking discover unpredictable relations with one another but where the art, in its activity, defies canonical classification.

Maria Zimmermann Brendel

1. John Rajchman, "Jean-François Lyotard's Underground Aesthetic," *October* 86 (Fall, 1998): 7.

2. Victor Burgin, "The Images in Pieces: Digital Photography and the Location of Cultural Experiences," in Hubertus von Amelunxen, ed., *Photography after Photography: Memory and Representation in the Digital Age* (Munich: Siemens, 1996), p. 30.

3. Laura Mulvey, "Criticism and Technology: Changing Approaches to the Analysis of Film," conference paper presented at Concordia University, March, 2001.