

***Le Contrat*, by Gisele Poupart, Editions Carnages et Mondanites, Montreal 2008**

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LE CONTRAT



Le Contrat

By Gisele Poupart,
Editions Carnages et
Mondanites, Montreal,
2008

Better known for working in video and film in the 1990s, Gisele Poupart has also published her comics in fanzines, and exhibited her paintings and drawing. An early interactive video collaboration with Claude Pare at Galerie Skol involved storytelling sequences mixed with texts by Claude Pare, the first interactive video ever produced in Quebec where viewers played a situationist role. The viewer could modify the video sequencing and the text likewise changed. Each potential narrative, originating from one "story", altered by the audience, was then printed into a "book" at Skol. Other early 1990s videos by Gisele Poupart with their minimalist performative aesthetic included one with a door that opened, with a mirror image from the "Inside" where a

scenario with faux décor – a real banquet – produced decades before trash culture built a double entendre worthy of Duchamp. Like novellas or mini-stories, Gisele Poupart's early videos expanded the definition of interactivity in what was not yet new media. The decors, compositions and moving effects were stripped down with a clear sense of the moment in time, and of the language of images that move.

Le Contrat, Gisele Poupart's debut comic book is very unusual, and closer to the raw language of punk or grunge but the scenic narratives capture atmosphere, and the characters have a colloquial feel to them. Poupart has a rare capacity to capture the faces and the human expressions of the characters in her story down to the detail. As a dedication reads in the book, one of these characters is based on a close friend who passed away. Immortality influenced Poupart throughout her work, precisely because life itself is fragile state. Le Contrat takes place on a fictional island and the main protagonist is an accountant.

While most Manga and contemporary comic book artists seek perfection and a certain predictable repetitiveness with their comic book imagery, Poupart's Le Contrat (an English version will soon be available at www.lulu.com) glorifies the rough and raw. There is no pretense here. Poupart leaves the image open, at a point of tension, closer to art than the art of the comic book. If you were to remove the caption frames, these works would be paintings, with their relative nuances, jokey colloquialisms, gestural moments, quirky and resplendent scenes. Sometimes awkward, these images are forthright exposes of a story unfolding in time, with a string sense of the social, and it is the faces and expressions of the characters that have that ring of truth, found in the contexts and atmospheres Gisele Poupart creates.

John Grande



FAMILLE
Gabor Szilasi

FAMILLE

Gabor Szilasi is one of Quebec's best known photographers. Celebrated as much for his portraits as for his documentary photography, he is this time offering the public an intimate selection of family pictures spanning close to half century.

Presented in his trademark black-and-white, they are at once a personal journey and visual diary of a Montreal family.

Published in tandem with an exhibition of the photographs at the McClure Gallery, and to fete Szilasi's 80th birthday, this elegant picture book is a document wrapped in a work of art.

Szilasi's only child, daughter Andrea, also an accomplished artist-photographer, is a natural star, posing with the same nonchalant abandon during childhood antics as in later, sombre teenage years. In a tub with an adoring cat sitting beside her, or framed between two graffiti figures, she is the central character in most of the images.

So is Szilasi's wife, artist Doreen Lindsay, photographed with a very different affection, the gentleness of the captured, unposed moments reflecting the tenderness between husband and wife. Unassuming and unpretentious, Lindsay is a perfect model, natural, oblivious to the lens aimed at her.

And then there is the photographer himself: playing a flute in a bathtub, posing for the camera seated in front of Doreen and Andrea who are standing behind him in a doorway, a sombre portrait reminiscent of the images of the Great Depression; Gabor the patriarch watching over his picnicking family, nose to tiny nose with the new addition to the family, Andrea and Andrea's partner, painter Michael Merrill's baby boy.

Once we have had our voyeuristic share of 'snooping' through someone's life, we can start from page one and appreciate the mastery of each image.

The virtuoso play of light and shadow, that in some photographs creates a magical, overlapping composition, the precise cropping of the photos, and the placing of the figures. Szilasi takes photographs with an intuition that comes from vast experience and talent. He is extremely prolific, but as demanding of himself and his craft. There is absolutely nothing to add or to take away from any of the photographs in the collection.

The joy of having a book of photographs, rather than just visiting an exhibition, is that it offers endless leafing, turning and returning to the images that capture something within our spirit, a chance to reflect on a face, trying to decipher the thoughts behind the eyes looking into the lens.

The book includes an introduction by Victoria LeBlanc, McClure Gallery's director and a beautiful writer, an essay by curator and art critic Hedwig Asselin, and a touching, profound reflection by Andrea Szilasi, *Notes on my father.*

Dorota Kozinska