Famille, Photos de Gabor Szilasi, Visual Arts Centre, 2008

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LE CONTRAT
Better known for working in video and film in the 1990s, Gisèle 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 Gisèle 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, Gisèle Poupart’s early videos expanded the definition of interactivity in what was not yet new media. The décors, 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, Gisèle 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 to her father, we can start from page one and appreciate the mastery of each image.

John Grande

FAMille
Gabor Szilasi

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 picketing 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 Hedwige Asselin, and a touching, profound reflection by Andrea Szilasi, Notes on my father.

Dorota Kozinska