

Nicolas Baier: *Pareidolias / Pareidolies*

Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, 2 May - 14 June 2009,
Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography,
cmcp.gallery.ca, 5 February-24 May 2010, Musée national des
beaux-arts du Québec, www.mnba.qc.ca, 17 June - 7 September
2010

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[See table of contents](#)

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Vanitas 2007-08
Ink jet prints laminated to acrylic
329 x 902 cm.

RIMOUSKI, QC

NICOLAS BAIER

PAREIDOLIAS / PAREIDOLIES

Sophie Pilipczuk

Organised by the Musée régional de Rimouski, the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, and circulated by the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, Halifax, NS

2 May – 14 June 2009

Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography,

1 Rideau Canal
Ottawa, ON K1N 9N6
(613) 990-8257
cmcp.gallery.ca

5 February – 24 May 2010

Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec, QC
Parc des Champs-de-Bataille
Québec City (Québec) G1R 5H3
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www.mnba.qc.ca

17 June – 7 September 2010

There is something both mysterious and enchanting about Nicolas Baier's latest works assembled in a touring exhibition organized by the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography entitled *Pareidolie/Paredolias*. Impressions of stateliness and posh beauty wash over me as I enter the hushed space. From a distance many of the works look like large (7 feet high, to 12 feet high) slabs of highly polished marble. Their glossiness is so intoxicatingly luscious that my curiosity is put on hold. I no longer want to know what the exhibition title means, nor do I care what medium is being used. I just want to gaze and admire.

On the left, two works immediately catch my eye. *Paesines 2 and 1, 2008*, are reflecting light. I swoop in like a crow, drawn to the richness and colour of these two smaller works whose irregular and craggy silver edges send my imagination soaring off cliffs and toward the mapping of the world. Strange land, sea and cityscapes appear in terracotta and sea foam green. I dream about the colonisation of the new world and the use of reli-

gion to justify expansion. Western history is being reflected back to me and I lose myself in a reverie about how all of our histories and knowledge could be held in something solid like a geological formation. Fractals and DNA cells play in my mind.

I hadn't smoked anything, if you are wondering. Just using the right side of my brain, the side that houses facial recognition and visual imagery, the side that probably snaps into action when we play a game of *Paredolias*. The term is a scholarly one I found out, reading the didactic panels conveniently positioned at the end of the exhibition, one that describes the mind's way of making sense of random information.

The artist and the curator's layout seem to lead from left to right (mentally and through the exhibition) around a wall that juts out into the space like a representation of the corpus callosum. *Paesines 2 and 1* are actually 4 works: 2 on either side of the division, repeated and inverted.

In *Old Continents, 2007* we can admire flaking paint on concrete (a wall, a floor?) with

a dappling of bird droppings, le tout surrounded by a gold frame that is so convincingly 3-D that the mind balks at its actual flatness. There is no frame—just an image of one. The jolt makes the spell begin to fade. In *The Path of Water* the illusion of texture is incredible. I was convinced I was seeing ripples on fabric or paper. Curiosity, questioning and analytic reasoning are reactivated. How do you do that? What technologies permit a perfect replication of texture while offering absolutely no depth of field?

On the opposite wall, a gargantuan piece looks like a slate mosaic. Focusing in on one of the nearly 50 components, I wonder if I'm staring at an X-ray of a painting: one of Monet's Water Lilies. Then it hits me: mirrors. Old mirrors, the silver disappearing and crackling into ghostly continents or faces or...

Mirror, mirror— you show me nothing: Only what I project onto you. The piece is called Vanitas.

Scratching the glossy surface I've hit something slightly unfriendly, a human true-ism, an artist's disillusionment.

I suppose it's freeing to see things for what they are.

Baier scans objects, rocks, Tuscan ruin marble (*Paesine*) or mirrors. He enlarges the scans, prints and sometimes laminates them onto aluminium or acrylic. Once you get past the feeling of being somehow duped with size, beauty, gloss and fancy words, you become aware of the sheer playfulness of Baier's work. He has excavated pieces of history and fed them to us in a very modern format. He's also managed to convey a) a sense of time collapsing in a giant anachronism b) the daunting presence of geological time making human concerns seem somehow petty.