
James D. Campbell
et image de la nuit opaque. Le dialogue qui s’institue entre la sphère sombre et l’à-plat frontal de l’image éclatante évoque certes la dualité fondamentale de l’homme, fait de nature mais que la culture fait tenir. Il offre aussi une autre métamorphose à la poussée de la vie représentée: celle qui inscrit l’œil lui-même dans son propre reflet. Comme si l’objectif était l’image qu’il assemble, comme si le regard était l’objet qui s’offre à sa visée et l’homme cette nature qui le fait surgi au monde. Comme si, en fin de compte, un va-et-vient qu’une autre époque aurait dit dialectique rivaient le «je» au «ils». Comme si le réel se torçait tel un ruban de Môbius où une topologie fantastueux condamne la condition humaine à se sentir à la fois incluse et étrangère. Ces incessantes recompositions qui frappent l’image et jusqu’à son principe même sont ici relancées dans la publication qui double l’exposition. Le centre Sagamie a en effet créé récemment Sagamie Éditions d’art dont le but est d’augmenter sensiblement la diffusion du travail des artistes tout en suscitant le développement de contenus critiques et théoriques. Signé Jean-François Caron et intitulé «La face cachée du réel» le texte qui ponctue l’œuvre de Jocelyn Philibert augure fort bien, par sa dimension poétique et l’intelligence de son propos, d’un travail d’édition dont on est sans doute en droit d’attendre beau- coup, au vu des autres réalisations auxquelles il a déjà donné le jour. Il rend en tout cas pleinement justice à ce surnom magique où, à force d’artifice et de lumière calculée, en jouant d’une profondeur de champ qui excède le cadre et même le visible, Jocelyn Philibert nous rend, paradoxalement, l’ingénuité souveraine d’un regard envahi et relancé. Quelque chose comme la perspective du spectre.

— Sémioticien et écrivain, Jean-Pierre Vidal est professeur émérite de l’Université du Québec à Chicoutimi.

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Susan Bozic
The Dating Portfolio
Galerie Art Mur, Montreal
August 18 – September 22, 2007

Susan Bozic’s latest series, The Dating Portfolio, elicits easy, involuntary smiles but poses a serious question or two that leave the viewer in an interrogatory frame of mind. Bozic appears in each of these medium- to large-scale photographs in the company of a plastic (clothed) male model or window-display mannequin who plays expressionless “straight (or straw) man” to Bozic’s extensive repertoire of alternately adoring, quizzically blissful, expectant, and expressionless “straight (or straw) man” to the yacht, the private jet, and so on. Bozic poses herself and the ubiquitous Carl in a variety of these roman­ ticated tableaux as participants in a “true love” idyll, such as Carl takes me to the nicest places (2005). We made a toast, here’s to us (2005), and He let me pick the movie (2005). But it is, as she further shows, a rather hollow idyll, indeed.

Bozic says, “Carl is the perfect man... He's young, he's tall, he's fit, he's successful, he's romantic, he's attentive. Carl's girlfriend is in bliss. There's nothing wrong with him except he's fake, but she doesn't quite see that because she's blinded by her love.” Perhaps Bozic is playing a highly contemporary riff on anthropologist Margaret Mead’s suggestion that women should have three husbands during their lifetimes: one for young sex, one for raising children, and one for companionship later in life. Of course, Bozic, in these works with their overtly romantic idylls, clearly addresses the first-stage category of husband. One could argue that (and Bozic makes the same point in a more subversive way), men who are “too good to be true” — that is, men rife with an abundance of looks, wealth, and status — are much less appealing to women than are those with average jobs and still attractive looks. Of course, there is the ongoing problem that crops up in life that only the most brilliant asocial cynic evades: love can and does blind one to the truth. Bozic lures us into her subver­ sive narratives through laughter but seems to end up asking, by extension, should we laugh at the absurdity of Carl and his girl­ friend, deep down, a part of us still desires the fantasy we see in the superficial image?

The Dating Portfolio is highly topical, and our own inadvertent smiles cover up a rather painful dental (or, better, trepan­ ning) op on Bozic’s part (with mirth the only anaesthetic) for both women and men. Her feigned expressions hide private lack and hint at the price exacted by the personal masquerade. She stands alongside con­ temporary Canadian photo artists such as Diana Thorneycroft and Jennifer Long in the integrity and vertical depth of her critique.

Mr. Perfect for all, and thus represents a certain risk? The flipside of this is a certain residual desire that sometimes cannot be denied. As Katie Apsey wrote, “Even while we laugh at the absurdity of Carl and his girlfriend, deep down, a part of us still desires the fantasy we see in the superficial image...” The Dating Portfolio is highly topical, and our own inadvertent smiles cover up a rather painful dental (or, better, trepan­ ning) op on Bozic’s part (with mirth the only anaesthetic) for both women and men. Her feigned expressions hide private lack and hint at the price exacted by the personal masquerade. She stands alongside con­ temporary Canadian photo artists such as Diana Thorneycroft and Jennifer Long in the integrity and vertical depth of her critique.

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Susan Bozic
He’s so thoughtful, it wasn’t even my birthday,
The Dating Portfolio, 2006
C-print, 76,2 x 101,6 cm
Carl takes me to the nicest places, the Dating Portfolio, 2005
C-print, 76,2 x 101,6 cm
images: Art Mûr Gallery, Montreal
It has taken Bozic a couple of years since her remarkable Incarnation series to come up with a worthy and equally stunning sequel. The earlier black-and-white images commented on humankind's colonization of nature and its methodical idealization. Bozic constructed amazingly well-wrought theatrical dioramas revolving around taxidermist's birds. Now, we have a plastic mannequin instead. Same difference. It is as meticulously wrought, placed, and posed as the taxidermist's birds were. And, notably, just as hollowed out. The new work is as witty and satirical as that work though, it must be said, rather more pointed.

Martha Langford


The experience of reading the latest book by Martha Langford is strangely medieval; it's a Cappellanian compendium, an Ars Memoriae Contemporaria Photographia. Beckett is found on a single page with philosopher Avishai Margalit and St. Augustine; Benjamin, Penelope, and Proust in the same sentence. Drawing from literature, art history and criticism, philosophy, psychology, and more, Langford presents us with a schema for a game-viewing photography, as it relates to Memory, in terms of three relational symbols whose powers to influence the quality and type of memories vie with and complete each other.

Langford "translates" contemporary photography: scissors, "the joust between remembering and forgetting"; paper, the "meeting ground between memory and history"; stone, "the relationship between memory and history." "And this game of paper, stone, scissors, may be the Canadian way." If anyone has the right to judge the Canadian way, it's Langford, but while her qualified observations are certainly worth saying once, they are not easily read, however articulately, a hundred times. After all, the relationship between photography and public and private memory, between consciousness and history, has been the primary critical leitmotif in cultural analysis for as long as photography had been around.

Snapshots of a score of Canadian photographers are displayed surrounded by a plethora of analogy, quotation, and metaphor. The overall effect can be overwhelming, and the drama with which tautologies are stated, her revelations and epiphanies stacked, describes a metaphor whereby photography, as a step-child of Memory, must play out its destiny as an art-form. Still, one reads on in order to encounter more of the compelling work that Langford has been known for showcasing in her long career as a scholar and curator.

The main photographers to whom Langford refers throughout the text are represented with several exemplars. They are all fascinating, and a primary pleasure of the book. After many pages in which she describes journeys that "begin in one place, and end up in another," she proposes the function of her analogy: "It could be argued that every work of art offers the opportunity for empathetic, improvisational interpretation, and no one would disagree. This book wants to raise those possibilities at every turn. At the same time, there are artists who, consciously or unconsciously, leave more room for spectatorial action..." (italics mine). What is done "unconsciously" by an artist is perhaps the least palatable aspect of imposing on artists constructs by which to view their work. Fortunately, Langford mostly sticks to learned anecdotes, fact-filled encapsulated descriptions, and on page 190 we are still reading explanations of the "metonymic" game.

Photography's mnemonic forms and concepts are put under a prism; a chapter on album works talks about "collection," "memoir," and "travelogue." Dialogue from the classic film My Man Godfrey frames the chapter "A Forgotten Man," and Langford is not above mentioning tea-soaked made-lines more than once.

"Remembering and forgetting" are the property of individual and collective memories; the criteria by which we choose what to keep and what to lose depends on both subject and subjectivity. What remains is History, which becomes histories of the "fugitive acts" of memory, the legacies of the past for generations who will again choose whether to remember or to consign to oblivion. She concludes with an apt pronouncement and a somewhat disingenuous question: "An art of memory is a system for encoding knowledge in signs that make it retrievable. Can that concept be translated to photography... have I done so in this book?" I believe that she has created the memory-palace in these three, albeit crowded, rooms.

It is a beautifully printed edition, the reproductions vivid and repaying close inspection, the notes, bibliography, and index thorough, if one has a tendency to name-check. Among others, we meet photographers Hamish Buchanan, Diana Thorneycroft, and Donigan Cumming in the first part, Scissors; Barbara Petley, Jin-me Yoon, and Michael Snow in Paper, and Carole Condé and Kari Beveridge, Robert Houle, and Robert Minden in Stone; would they approve of their assigned categories? Answer Langford's question in the affirmative? It makes no difference to this book, which is something of a relief. As the author herself states, this book is here to raise opportunities for art, at every possible turn.

Niki Lambros is a theologian and writer of philosophical and literary criticism who recently returned to North America from twenty years abroad, mainly in Europe and Asia.