Ciel variable

Raymonde April, *Equivalences 1-4*, Galerie Donald Brown, Les Territoires, Occurrence, Montréal, *January 9 to March 13, 2010*

James D. Campbell

Conflit
Numéro 85, été 2010

URI : id.erudit.org/iderudit/63732ac

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Les Productions Ciel variable

ISSN  1711-7682 (imprimé)
1923-8932 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article


Tous droits réservés © Les Productions Ciel variable, 2010

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d’Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d’utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne. [https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/]

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l’Université de Montréal, l’Université Laval et l’Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. www.erudit.org
Raymonde April
Equivalences 1–4
Galerie Donald Brown, Les Territoires, Occurrence, Montréal
January 9 to March 13, 2010

Why is it that Raymonde April’s art always occupies the foreground of my consciousness when I think about photography—about what it is and what it can be? Even as flashier and more graphically cinematic, her work retains an aesthetic grace. When I say “prosaic,” I do not mean in the sense of lacking in imagination or spirit or resembling prose but in the sense of being straightforward, close to the life-world, unadorned and free of the theoretical concerns that sometimes mire photographic practice in the baroque, extraneous, and pedantic. When we look hard and long at her images, their meaning—as though one could “solve” their formal beauty and introspective mien as mere idyls of the prosaic life—is less important than is our heightened engagement in seeing by virtue of the simple and selfless poetics that always inform them. Simply put, April’s photographs remind us of what it is to be a human being, to be alive.

She may photograph the “hard facts” of our existence—whether in the inner city, in the country, or by the seaside—and yet she always remained true to her own maverick sensiveness of her creative vision. She has shown at Galeries Donald Brown, Les Territoires, and Papal Alpha. It has also been the subject of a number of exhibitions in Canada and abroad. Leaside offers perhaps a glimpse into the future.

Il faut mettre dans la même catégorie de dérision la série des images photographiques de la ville de Québec. C’est une histoire moins récente qui s’y affiche et le traitement photographique qu’impose Isabelle Hayeur aux images numériques permet une plus grande audace. Les balafres et éventrements que l’on voit ne sont pas seulement le fait de l’architecte, c’est aussi, et surtout, le traitement photographique qu’il impose Isabelle Hayeur aux images numériques qui permet une plus grande audace. En effet, même les profits que faisait pour lui l’État indépendant du Congo, sa colonie privée. Les gravats, les tuyaux rouges des conduits électriques ou d’autre nature annoncent le promeneur, montrant ici son visage, ou là l’envers de son masque. De même, dans Mortifications, les murs de la forteresse que fut Québec se pressent les uns sur les autres, sans qu’on sache si cela est effect réel ou travail de l’art.

Les dernières images proviennent d’une série intitulée Formes de monuments. Quoi-
always evokes something numinous before and after those facts, however quotidian and unprepossessing they seem to be. She tackles a latent semiotic plurality that informs the fabric of a commonly experienced world, whether in family, inhabited spaces, or quirky souvenirs of the everyday.

If, as some commentators have held, every image has its own duration, well, that duration can be multiple, just as every image has its own spatial modalities, predicated upon its interwoven matrices within place and the infinite, unfurling horizon of human subjectivity. April’s photographs mark out a geography that is at once intimate and heartfelt. If we are attuned to them, we sense both their intimacy and universality, and are moved as a result. And we are almost always attuned to them. Furthermore, they are all about inscription, and a radical enfolding of what her eye seizes upon, and not the immaculate conception of meaning in a given frame that she, of course, abjures.

April seizes upon the present instant of seeing, but the images carry within them both atavisms of the past and portents of the future. Which is only to suggest that, in her images, more than one tense may be present at the same time. Duration is coeval therein not only within the gestation of images, but in their seizure and aurae, and those images speak of a time not only within the gestation of the future. Which is only to suggest that, in her images, more than one tense may be present at the same time.

Yes, she captures something of the truth of April’s project, a truth of how parts conjure up worlds, of how parts become worlds in their own right and constitute scaffoldings for those worlds that can be extraordinarily revealing. Her humility and the syntagmatic integrity inherent in her images enable a transformation into dialogue, and thus the work never devolves into muted soliloquy or closed-in, opaque meanings. Her optic is phantasmatically nomadic, a trait shared by photographers as disparate as Isabelle Hayeur and the young Moscow-born savant Yuula Benivoiski. We sense that her goal is only to arrive at a place where her images may tell their own truth. Her work does not shy away from its own scar tissue, for it is overwhelmingly resilient rather than fragile, like epidermal tissue that renews itself time and time again, getting dimensionally thicker all the while. And April’s vision is overwhelmingly tactile. Our eye, alongside hers, moves voluptuously and voraciously over the surface of things, palpating both what is visible, given, on the exterior – and that which is invested, interiorized, and withheld. April is, in one sense, always outside herself, always ready to seize the moment and reveal it as being highly stratified and possessing enormous depth. She accepts, stoically and without regret, the condition of being here – of being, that is, in a world. With hard-won serenity and an exciting measure of poiesis, she is wholly open to the world, she welcomes it within herself; her images, almost as a sacred trust of what it means to see and be a witness of what is seen.

April images “make present,” which does not mean only that they bring us home to the here and now of our experiencing but that they achieve a vital “presencing” that comprises both disclosure and concealment. Her practice incarnates a remarkable ethic of making in this sense. Poiesis equates knowing with making, incorporates both, and April effectively uncovers and retrieves the wayward and often ignored poetic essence of everything that comes under her purview.

In all of her work to the present day, we can eavesdrop on Raymonde April saying to herself something like “J’accepte.” “I accept.” This is different in kind from choosing a specific moment in time per se, and preserving it as a worthy relic of the prosaic life – and is thus an inverted proprietory gesture on her part. A stoic of no small persuasion, her ongoing acceptance of the world and its inhabitants imbues her work with a deliberate serenity that is as at once tactually felt and uplifting for her viewers.  


James D. Campbell is a writer on art and independent curator based in Montreal. The author of over 100 books and catalogues on contemporary art and artists, he contributes frequently to visual arts publication across Canada.