

CV Photo

Vid Ingelevics, *Project Photographs 1992-2001*, The Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto, June 14–July 28, 2001

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Expositions

Vid Ingelevics

Project Photographs 1992–2001

The Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto

June 14–July 28, 2001

This small but deftly selected sampling of Vid Ingelevics's work of the past decade left the viewer feeling that the veteran Toronto-based photographer and curator could now be well served by a full-scale retrospective exhibition. Yet, given the way the photographs shown here seemed powerfully representative of the projects they indexed, this apparently casual exhibition was, for the time being, a mnemonic signposting of one's remembered overview of the artist's individual projects – and thus, for the time being, retrospective enough.

Retrospective – and introspective, for each of Ingelevics's intensely deliberate, highly pondered photographs invariably seems like one of the artist's meditations now finally deemed sharable. For this immensely ruminative photographer, "the epistemological dilemma posed by photographs frustrates and yet compels. I am fascinated," he writes in a statement accompanying the exhibition, "by the elusive nature of already existing images, by how the real is transformed when I make images of it and by our collective compulsion to consign our memories and, ultimately, the traces that history is dependent upon, to ever-increasingly fragile media."

There are several important images here, for example, from Ingelevics's historically ambitious and profoundly moving *Alltagsgeschichten*



Vid Ingelevics
"Saviour"
colour print
2001

chichten (some histories of everyday life), a project he worked on from 1992 to 1996, which centred around his visits to the sites of three former displaced-persons camps in southern Germany that housed members of his uprooted and dispersed Latvian family. "What I encountered there," he notes, "was an absence of memorialization." What Ingelevics did, in the course of marshalling documents, historical photographs, interviews, and the photographs he took himself of these anguished sites, now overlaid with the callousness of the present, was essentially to rememorialize the past. The work, manifested as a handsome book published in 1996 by Gallery TPW (Toronto Photographers' Workshop) and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, is still being exhibited in Europe.

But Ingelevics has always applied to his photo projects the same kind of scrutiny he expended upon the intensely personal investigations that informed the *Alltagsgeschichten* project. His 7:1 photographs (1998–99), for example, which are colour photographs of the multi-million-dollar renovation of the former City of Toronto City Hall, a frantic, exhaustively expensive, and symbolic attempt to embody the spirit of the amalgamation of the city's municipalities with the former Metropolitan Toronto, possess a strange, troubling, aloof, and utterly unlooked-for pastoralism (see, for example, his "Council Chamber, Toronto City Hall, July 30, 1998") in place of the kind of satire one

might well have expected from a photographer for whom history is less imminent and contingent than it is to Ingelevics.

This is true also of Ingelevics's fine *Bathurst Street* project (2000). This body of work, first shown at the Koffler Gallery on north Bathurst Street in Toronto, seemed, like the 7:1 photos, unaccountably simple, almost deliberately banal at first. One came to realize, however, that the banality was, in fact, a kind of tragic accretion, a build-up of failed urbanist aspirations to which Ingelevics, with his relentless, unmediated, high-focus examinations, had simply given eloquent voice. The photographs were of the street's many small, grimy strip-malls and modernist apartment buildings, poignant remnants of what he identified as part of the inventory of the "postwar flowering of modernism in Toronto." Bathurst Street was clearly planned to have been a much handsomer, more dynamic, thoroughfare than it turned out to be – the victim of "the dismal failure of post-war urban planning to create a streetscape hospitable to anything other than automobiles." Now it is a more or less invisible reproach for the failure of urban ideals, now made touchingly inspectable by Ingelevics's species of visual archaeology (and anthropology: the original exhibition also featured fossil-like rubbings of manhole covers and sidewalk inscriptions and a CD on which the street's alumni talk about the street as it was, and is).

Ingelevics's current project, titled *Between Art and Art*, was represented here by only one image, a wooden statue of Christ that has been removed from a Quebec church and is now being documented in the photo studio of the Musée du Québec. A photo of a photo being made – though, in this still moment (the whole photograph is like an intake of breath), the statue is no less static than the camera and light stands – the work is as fully about history and its overlays as is everything else in Ingelevics's canon.

We're all pretty sophisticated these days about the reading of photographic images, and we may well feel that we no longer require of photography that it should show us how to see, how to incorporate the invisible, how to galvanize memory. But that is precisely what Vid Ingelevics's work is about. And in his hands, these perceptual, epistemological ambitions are so fully realized that it's as if the nature of photography and its peculiar agency is somehow newly available.

Gary Michael Dault



Vid Ingelevics
Council chamber,
Toronto City Hall
colour print
1998