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

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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 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 decors, 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 reads in the book, one of these characters is based on a close friend who passed away. Immortality influenced Poupart throughout her work, precisely because life itself is fragile state. Le Contrat takes place on a fictional island and the main protagonist is an accountant.

While most Manga and contemporary comic book artists seek perfection and a certain predictable repetitiveness with their comic book imagery, Poupart’s Le Contrat (an English version will soon be available at www.lulu.com) glorifies the rough and raw. There is no pretense here. Poupart leaves the image open, at a point of tension, closer to art than the art of the comic book. If you were to remove the caption frames, these works would be paintings, with their relative nuances, jokey colloquialisms, gestural moments, quirky and resplendent scenes. Sometimes awkward, these images are forthright expose of a story unfolding in time, with a string sense of the social, and it is the faces and expressions of the characters that have that ring of truth, found in the contexts and atmospheres Gisèle Poupart creates.

John Grande