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Image & Imagination

Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal 2005
8 September to 10 October

Reviewed by Jon Baturin

07:15, 10/09/05, Montreal: 60 artists, 29 exhibitions, 15 vernissages and me, an aging masochistic artist-educator from Toronto...

...So, about now you maybe begin to worry?

Nope, don't do that! This is your safe place. The 2005 *Mois de la Photo* succeeds where other festivals never have. For two reasons: its focused, audience-responsive commissionaire (Martha Langford) and its assiduous reflection on notions of history.

That's not to suggest that *Le Mois* is pure bliss. A few exhibitions depend on simplistic 'physical bridges' for their curatorial rationales. For example, *L'Huile et L'Eau* (Espace le Bain Mathieu) is sited in a refurbished public bath. While that appears to make intrinsic sense, Evan Lee's 'residues' and Laura Millard's 'eddies' lap too feebly and too literally about Michael Flomen's 'secretions'. Likewise, *Les Revenants* (Galerie Mai) promises the spectral, but the glue that binds is actually motion not spirit.

But my quibbles are minor.

While history is the *raison d'être* of the festival, it is spoken of by artists as a mere creative opportunity or it is overtly contextualised as subjective memory rather than 'objective history', without the artists

realising, apparently, that all telling of all history is creative and subjective.

We have "works of personal, familial or cultural history" by Arthur Renwick, Lindy Lee, Noritoshi Hirakawa, Tracey Moffatt, Destiny Deacon, Iain Baxter, Polixeni Papapetrou, Michael Snow, Rafael Goldchain, Marc Audette and many more.

We have works from conflicted souls. Langford, in her writing on *Unstilled Lives* (Evergon and Destiny Deacon: Galerie Leonard & Bina Ellen) suggests that Evergon and Deacon are engaged in "a serious form of play". Langford tactfully under-reports the "serious" that she locates within Evergon's *Chez Mois / Domestic Content*. Offering much more than a collection of fetishistic memorabilia and some personal portraits, this work is also about loss, failure and those recently gone or perhaps soon to perish: a history of accumulated anguish encrypted as a type of contemplative Morse code, with the arrangement of small and large works equating to the dots and dashes. Evergon's mother's health is problematic; her children have no children. With this work he has provided her a substitute. These images are her surrogate grandchildren.

In *Prologue to Epilogue* (Galerie Eric Devlin) Donigan Cumming's new collages methodically mine the archive of his own practice. In almost every way these works appear angst-ridden. In *Epilogue* we see what appear to be roiling waves of detritus ululating over a chaotic architectural wasteland. Why ululating rather than undulating? The detritus is comprised of wave upon wave of individually cut out figures. There are hundreds of them, truncated or imperfectly formed. And they exist to wail about the trajectory of 'civilisation'. The artist has suggested an affinity to the works of Flemish painter Brueghel, but, for me, Cumming's work attempts something more

wilful. (Brueghel's satire is just too velvety.) There are stronger filmic affinities, which invoke despair: Klaus Kinski in Werner Herzog's *Aguirre: Wrath of God* springs to mind.

Other histories arise from those whose eyes can still close at night. Both *Cuba Still (Remake)* (Adad Hannah: Galerie B-312) and *Cran* (Galerie Pierre Francois Ouellette), Marc Audette's ghostly evocations of erasure of both real historical artefacts and of memory, incorporate time-based installations that challenge notions of the historical documentation particular to the still image.

In *(Remake)* Adad Hannah recreates a fifties Cuban publicity still. While the projected image appears to portray one fixed moment, it is actually composed of six videos each with a masking device akin to the dodging tools in photographic printing. The result is at once blatant (you see all the paraphernalia necessary to produce this 'single' image) and subtle (the characters were videoed separately in real time. They each in their turn blink, scratch, twitch, sniff.) The result is not just the historicising of a performance photograph - the new performance work taking on a 'historical' aspect through its relationship to the prototype, but nonetheless remaining firmly of this age - but also a history of several methods of creative rendition: an original performance; a 19th-century theatrical movement (*tableau vivant*); and sculptural figuration.

Martha Langford, in her writing about Marc Audette, sums up *Le Mois* nicely. This "is the fusion of cultural memories, fertile imagination, and a decision to release the image-making to spectatorial intervention. The pleasure is all ours."

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Adad Hannah
Cuba Still (Remake)
2005 installation with
six video projectors
[photo: Guy l'Heureux]