le mois de la photo  
Où divers lieux - 28 octobre 2001

Plus de 130 artistes, à la fois novices et confirmés, ont participé à ce concours photographique publicitaire. Le thème était « Le voyageur de l'ombre ». Chaque candidat devait décrire son parcours, en utilisant une photographie originale ou une œuvre d'art. Les résultats ont été présentés lors d'une exposition à la Galerie du Village, à Paris. Les gagnants ont été récompensés avec des prix d'argent, d'or et de bronze. Les œuvres sélectionnées ont été également exposées dans différents lieux de la ville, permettant ainsi à un plus large public de découvrir et apprécier ces créations artistiques.
With a selection of more than 130 artists, some 50 exhibition venues and a rich panoply of theoretical resources in the form of various lectures and talks, this seventh Montreal photography biennial will certainly be remembered as one of this year's outstanding art events. Further, even aside from the proliferation of offerings and artists, this is an event which has proven itself for three good reasons. First, lead curator Marie-Josée Jean opted for an undeniable hit theme, the power of images, certainly a familiar one but here directly interpreted by the images themselves. Second, the topic was considered not only from the angle of photography (art and otherwise) itself but also in terms of the way photography is enriched (and thrown into question) by its sister media, video and movies. Third, it was the occasion for an enormous convergence of energies, some of them local (almost every organization on the Montreal art scene was mobilized, which would have been unthinkable in Paris) and others arising from beyond North America: the French Season in Quebec, organized by the AFAA (a French governmental body for the arts), a partnership with the highly international Festival of Light, the direct participation of Scandinavian countries, etc. Such magnanimous, fervent and non-partisan involvement in the service of art and its international development deserves the highest praise.

Whence the power of images? It is not an innate quality, but rather the effect of other powers that precede it and quantify it. This means, above all, those who own the means of information and run the spaces of expression. Consequently, as McLuhan demonstrated, it turns out to be impossible to reduce the question of the image's potential to its putative "content." The medium is also the message, of course, and we know that images are generated as much by the messenger as by the artist, i.e., those in charge of the particular medium, whether they be TV producers, ad agencies or exhibition space managers. Often the initial violence viewers feel in the face of an image comes from precisely this factor—the feeling of a well-orchestrated dispossession. Conscious of this political factor and its altering effect, the various curators invited to take part in the staging of the Montreal Photography Month constantly bent over backwards to correct it, both by rejecting any totalitarian pronouncements and manifesting a taste for sharing and the spirit of giving back. The implicit objective was not to once again recycle and instrumentalize certain pointed images but to offer the public eye inherently more authentic images and encourage people to pass up the everyday media diet that manipulates and poisons our visual perception of reality.

The breadth of this event and its many thematic subsections go into this reflection in more detail than can be chronicled here. I will therefore limit myself to a few of the more emblematic works. Convincing evidence of this corrective inclina tion was offered by the show staged by the Frontenac art center, of which curatorship was entrusted, and not by accident, to Alfredo Jaar. This artist and committed fighter for the cause of humanism chose to exhibit photojournalism snapshots. In contrast to the dehumanization operated by the free-market crowd, their election is to function. Jaar explains, as "modest signs of social solidarity." Another example of this desire to share images that could be called honest, refusing to lie about their deep-seated intentions, was Evergton's series about his

mother. Margaret and I. shots of an aging nude body, an ordinarily unacceptable image this time displayed with all its power of suggestion and latent morbidity (in that it is in respectful memory of a person who is shown apparently nearing death). Finally, and not surprisingly, some projects involved face-to-face meetings with the public and interventions in the street.

This stance is completely in keeping with the logic (taken to great lengths here) of sharing. In some cases the public was asked to create its own images. In the polemical exhibition organized by head curator Jean in the Berri-UQAM subway station a number of artists presented ambiguous or paradoxical images meant to inspire a reaction and at the same time reflection on the usual occupation of public spaces by advertising imagery. Madelon Hooykaas and Ella Stensfeld came up with a relational scenario in which the public was invited to imagine images it would like to see projected on a blank screen in the municipal botanical garden. Clearly this kind of offering embodies a genuinely democratic hope of entering into a dialogue about images with a public seen more as a partner than as a cultural consumer.

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