

April, Raymonde. — «Autoportrait au rideau».— «My Best Shot». — BlackFlash.— Vol. 28.1 (Fall 2010). P. 16-17

Autoportrait au Rideau

By Raymonde April



For more than twenty years, every summer I have left Montreal for the Lower St. Lawrence, where I spent my childhood, and during these happy weeks, my life feels weightless, tied to the rhythm of the tides. In late August, I return to the city and my activities, and it takes time for me to reconcile myself to my other life, but it's not so bad. As I see the summer's freedom recede, I sigh like a teenager, but after a few days it's just a memory. It was during one of these transition phases that I photographed *Autoportrait au Rideau*. It was in 1991, during Labour Day weekend.

In the apartment on St. Urbain Street where I was living at the time, there was a summer kitchen, what we call a *tambour*. It was a balcony that had been closed in to increase the floor space of the apartment. The exterior brick wall, pierced by two windows, had become its interior edge. The addition of two new walls, a ceiling pierced with a skylight, and other windows and doors defined the new room. It wasn't really a usable space ; with all of the openings, it was more like a showcase. In it I stored objects that had not found a place elsewhere. A pleasant sensation of displacement ruled in this space ; in it one felt like one was both outdoors and indoors, and always a bit on display. I have long since moved from that apartment, but when I think back on it, the

luminosity of that strange room still enchants me, with its little back wall like a set for a canvas to be painted.

My photographic work could be seen as a form of writing. My method is intuitive, open to everything, but also very reflective. Once I had framed the little back wall, I took a position near the windows and closed my eyes, and it took just a few shots to capture the wind in the curtains. What luck ! But beyond this little event, what makes the image unique, in my view, is that its slightly shifted balance exactly mirrors the strangeness of the room. Wrapped photographs in which we glimpse a bear and a birch tree, a small painting of exotic birds, two fishing rods, a woman with her eyes closed — all of this is subjected to the puff of wind with a calculated abandon. On display. Self-portrait, narration, ellipsis, archive, image within image, and figure in the landscape have been recurrent themes in my work since the beginning, and they are fluidly superimposed here. It could have been planned. Yes and no.

Curiously, *Autoportrait au Rideau* was never integrated into any series, and after it was published in *Réservoirs Soupirs*¹ in 1993, I waited another twelve years to make it a real print of it and to show it, in 2005 in the project *Aires de Migrations*² (a collaboration with Michèle Waquant).

Today, it is August 4. A sumptuous storm is unfurling over the river in front of my cottage.

Translation by Käthe Roth

¹ Monograph published by VU, Quebec city

² Exhibition presented by VOX, Montreal ; book published by VOX/Le Quartier (Quimper) in 2005