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**A PHOTOGRAPHER FRIEND
GAËTAN GOSSELIN**



We took Raymonde April's photographs for granted. We were conscious of the autobiographical merit of her project and unhesitatingly accepted the tenderness of its development. Each time we looked at one of her images, we tasted the poetic flavour of the narrative sequences and took pleasure in weighing up the real and the fictional side of a work that was immediately recognized as one of the major bodies of work of contemporary Québec photography.

These were the factors that originally motivated us to publish Raymonde April's recent photographs. When we went over her photographic work since 1986 with her however, we decided to let the important relation between the artist's photographs as developed over time unfold in these pages. Much still remains to be conquered in this work. We certainly hope to penetrate the mystery of these photographic relationships, but we found it important to recognize zones of intersection, merging points and allusions in the works gathered together here.

Rigorously defined on the intellectual plane, this body of work allows for ruptures, cultivates reversals and combines different ways of enjoying photography. Raymonde April's photographic images were to gently become our images, as they will become yours.

For most of the 1980s, Raymonde April's photographic series remained essentially narrative: picturesque scenes of the spaces of private life filled with landscapes and people. The artist then reached a critical phase in her development during a stay in Paris in 1989. Her photographic actions branched off and happily metamorphosized. The artist's familiar epic yields to the necessities of life «elsewhere». On this rare occasion, April's images economize on self-representation to exacerbate an inner turmoil which the *Sphinx* series gives us a wonderful account of. The artist's image fragments are "gigantically" enlarged on canvases reminiscent of cinematographic screens. The grainy and imprecise images float as if they are suspended between heaven and earth, and give the impression of an arrest-on-the-image. The result is that the real merges into whiteness. This diaphanous image series is a prelude to an existential quest and, through a spectre or apparition taking flight, foreshadows the main theme of an upcoming work: *Réservoirs Soupirs*.

The *Réservoirs Soupirs* album is an amalgamation of many families of images: *De l'autre côté des baisers* - The Other Side of Kisses (1985-1986), *Les temps satellites* - Times Satellites (1986), *Parade* - Parade (1986), *Les coeurs en bois de rêve* - Hearts on Dream Wood (1988) and *Sphinx* - Sphinx (1989) as well as more recent series. The artist weaves a universe of images to be divided up over days and a lifetime. Through this collection of the derisory combined together with the familiar, Raymonde April goes deep into the form and heart of collective identity.

It starts with aligned images ; a father, a mother, a brother and friends, with self-portraits of the artist, form a genealogy like a dream with riverbanks, forest paths, birches, thrushes and pines drawing up a backdrop. A work of ethnological dimensions, it is constructed with gentle cutouts, a hand held out to Québécois.

Then other images, produced at different times in Paris, Montréal and the Québec countryside, are presented as compact, indivisible units. In Raymonde April's photographic cosmology, the images act on us like black holes enticing us in... These photographs confuse the present with stories from the past; they make remote and unlikely stories appear familiar, and well-known and

lesser known stories converge into a single view. April's photographs could be derived from our image and our story.

It is in the endless games of distancing and bringing closer that *Réservoirs Soupirs* exercises its poetic will. Intertwining the photographs' history with the complexity of individual and collective histories, Raymonde April, the artist, makes a pact with History. This pact makes the photographic work into a universal epic ; each photograph controls an influential focus which taken together induce a great force field that goes more or less right through us. This is how the photographs touch souls and open minds, in such a way that the work aspires to authenticity.

Through the publication of the *Réservoirs Soupirs* album, the members of the artists' collective of VU have sought to take into account the artistic authenticity which makes Raymonde April's production one of the most remarkable in current Québec photography. They were also concerned with conveying the lyrical magnetism which suffuses and links Raymonde April's photographs in the fine transitions, the subtle whims and the slow peregrinations of a work in the paradise of feelings. Together with the complicity of Régis Durand, the writer, and Michèle Waquant, the videomaker, *Réservoirs Soupirs* displays the humours, steadfastness and the gentle strength of Raymonde April's current photographic project, a photographer friend.

Translated from the French by Michael Bailey