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RAYMONDE APRIL : MUSÉE D'ART DE JOLIETTE, JOLIETTE, QUÉBEC
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With «*Raymonde April, Les Fleuves invisibles*», Curator Nicole Gingras offers a retrospective tour of the places, people, objects and themes the photographer has visited over the course of her twenty-year career. This is not, however, a retrospective exhibition in any simple sense of the term but one which takes form self-consciously around the theme of retrospection.

April's practice lends itself well to this association. Her life's work has been almost singularly preoccupied with the idea that identity is a product of creative endeavour, forged through the imaginary relationships assumed between people, places and things and only coherent after the fact. In shadow or fully taking her place as its subject, April inevitably appears in her work. Typically more evocative than descriptive, her autobiographical suites cross genres and mix staged and documentary photographs to exploit the harmonies and discordances that arise in the encounters April forces between otherwise discrete images. The dynamic that this creates — of constantly shifting perspectives, contexts and content — forms the *fleuves invisibles* [invisible rivers] that produce the works' meanings.

L'Arrivée des figurants (The Extras' Entrance), April's most recent work, provides the centrepiece for this exhibition. Comprising 33 large-scale photographs organized into four linear montage sequences, the series condenses many of April's recurring motifs and themes. Gingras excellent selection of historical pieces highlights these connections. We find some of the "extras" from *De l'autre côté des baisers* (1985-86) reappearing as the lovers, friends and familiar spaces in *Les Arrivées*. The landscape, as in *Tableaux sans fond* (1988), is as much a subject in these works as the recurring players and joins them here as a featured character. By the same token, the spatial dramas of light and shadow in *Miniatures* (1981) make sense of the mise en scène of domestic space in the current work. And if the theatricality found in April's personal appearances in *Je passais des jours à douter de tout* (1979) seems subdued in her new work, it is because the dramatic self-portrait that inaugurates *Les Arrivées* is the only one in this suite, not because the work is any less "staged" than before.

In the exhibition catalogue Gingras observes that April's creative process comprises "incessant recall and association between different periods of production" —an approach that stresses the subject as a representational project, rather than an autobiographical and linear accumulation. The identity that emerges in each work is thus not subject to historical change in the evolutionary sense of the term. This distinguishes April's project from those of her contemporaries preoccupied with similar concerns. In this work, historical specificity is not a condition given in advance of identity. History is the *raison d'être* of identity — almost, but not quite, one and the same thing. In this regard it is not coincidental that April appears in *Les Arrivées* costumed in historical dress. As the idea of identity is presented here, history is enacted and embodied both in individual works and in the connections made between various people, identities, places and things.