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RAYMONDE APRIL

*Sans titre*



RAYMONDE APRIL'S CORPUS of photographic images seems often caught in a paroxysm of nostalgia, which perhaps serves as a buttress against the desolation of forgetting. However, to imply her work is merely poignant in a flat understanding of the word (evoking sadness or regret) would be to ignore the extraordinary humour and intellect at play.

April's images are poignant in that they prick and sting, they are pointed and to the point, they pierce. Her work is charged with ambiguity, something that echoes the displacement of memory and destabilizes the images, making each of them an *un-telling* despite its obvious narrative qualities. Indeed, her most unsettling work, entitled *Sans Titre (Without Title)*, is a series of images narrated by captions, conjuring the impression of film stills. The (dis)unity suggested by the placement of images, of a film yet to come, and the tension between the text that accompanies the images is a bold re-enactment of the dialectic between interior and exterior, an examination of the self - seen and unseen.

Often termed as minimalist, April's work corresponds with the drifting monotone of dreams or memory before the hyper-colouration of desire strikes, evoking a passivity, an implied

waiting. Together with the fragmentary nature of her earlier work (in which, for instance, figures are decapitated by the lens) April expresses the nature of feminine experience - the fragmented image, the image that is narrated by expectation and society - but still her work resists the penetration of specific meaning. Her work visualizes what is deemed feminine - the domestic, the filial gesture, intimacy - but this familiarity shouldn't invite contempt: rather, it sanctifies, in treasuring the unknowable known, the secret at the heart of all knowing: the inherent truth that informs all fiction. The prosaic imagery that recurs - a washing line, a canteen, bodies in chairs or reclining on beds, landscapes that have yielded to human presence - rebuffs interrogation, obscured as they are behind a veil erected by the play of light on her lens. This dislocated view from her camera, the image amplified from that which contextualizes it, turns the image into a hallucination, a distortion, a fragment of April's imagination.

From the early work, which alluded to film, *Tout embrasser* follows, an *un-film* in which, every three seconds or so, a hand removes the top photo from a pile on a table. As the images slowly come and go, a narrative emerges, another hallucination. There is no need for a sense of the real in this work, these are scenes replayed as snapshots, united but not continuous, the irony of the film capturing the performance of the hand, and the images themselves moving, film-like yet not a film as we know it, teasing us with a *mise en abyme*. The inchoate film within a film, this is April's extraordinary skill, employing the fictional device to illuminate her photographs.

Most recently, *Gravitas* documents April's restoration of the embossed wall coverings in her apartment, something which involved the careful scraping of the accumulated layers of paint from the walls, and the gradual excavation of the striations of colour that accompanied the lives of previous occupants. This paradox - of painstaking labour rendering the slow evolution of an image which is then captured instantaneously in the blink of the lens - underlines much of April's photography. Her work in its many permutations - tableau, fresco, portrait, montage, film - interrupts the myth of our contiguous inner consciousness, and celebrates our fragmented, fragile and forgetful selves. We are after all only human.