

ARCHITECTURE AND VISUAL ARTS

Photos through lens of an uncandid camera

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Special to The Gazette

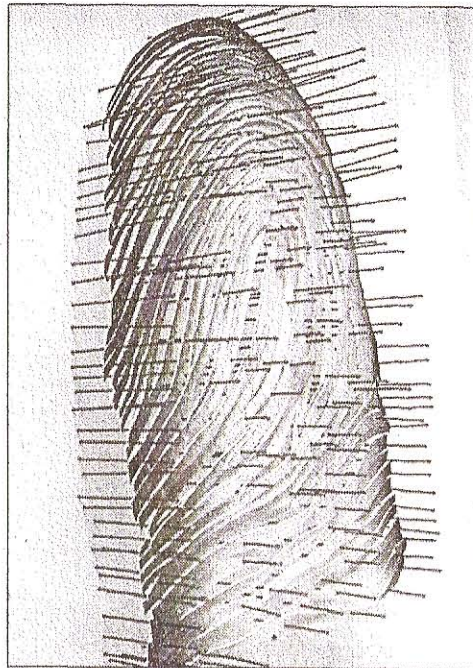
Traditional photographers, believing in the untouchability of the photographic image, will see Galerie Art Mûr as a crime site, littered as it is with photos that have been cut, folded, pinched and otherwise abused. What we get in a show titled *La Photographie Découpée* (cut-up photography) is more art than photos in their strictest meaning. Certainly the seven participating Montreal artists, known and relatively unknown, consider themselves artists who merely use photography.

Some of the photographic carnage on view has been wrought with the aim of achieving a sculptural effect. Alain Paiement, in the spectacular *Phil's Room*, cuts up photos and then arranges them in three dimensions. The subject depicted in the panoply of images is a disheveled room strewn with assorted blankets, books, paint brushes – a multilayered hallucinogenic domain, with photos of photos on the brink of flying off in all directions.

Household rooms are also the focus of Nicolas Baier's multi-part piece, titled *Pour Cuisine et Salle de Bain*. And here the surgery on the photographic image is performed with utmost precision; Baier uses digital imaging that leaves no scars. In this work, spread over numerous panels hung on the wall, is a selective inventory of items for the bathroom and kitchen.

Some of the panels contain composed vistas of a sink, dishes, stove top and tiles, with white or gray the dominant colours. Baier mocks the notion, brought home to us by countless ads for detergents, that a spotless kitchen is a sure sign of purity of soul. Baier scrubs photography bare of the role of reproducing external reality. His spick-and-span panels are almost pure abstraction.

Andrea Szilasi takes a craftsman's low-tech, hands-on approach. She slices photographs, presumably her own, into strips that she deftly weaves into each other. One work titled *Inverted Figure* (front and back) was constructed from two photographs of the artist, one from the front, the other from the back. The two have been woven in-



MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER, GAZETTE

Pellegrinuzzi's distinctive fingerprint.

to each other to produce a checkerboard grid that's as much painting as it is photograph. This fascinating work, with its allusions to folk art and craft, mocks the notion of photograph as ID.

The finger is given to traditional photography by Roberto Pellegrinuzzi in his witty, naughty and beautiful work titled *Empreinte* (Imprint). It takes a moment for us to realize that what we see in a cigar-box-size case is the blown-up photograph of a fingerprint cut into thin strips, the blade having assiduously followed the delicate curving ridges of the whirls of a finger. Then each of the thin slivers of paper has been lovingly reassembled in the correct order to reconstitute the thumbprint. Mounted on countless pins, this odd specimen is both flat and three-dimensional, like Paiement's work, assuring an almost sculp-

tural presence.

Pellegrinuzzi proclaimed some of his intentions a while back, in a 1988 work titled *Camera*, displayed in the current show as a kind of small shrine. Crowning a pedestal is what from a certain distance seems a real camera, an actual life-size three-dimensional object complete with metallic buttons and dials. But, from up close, it quickly becomes apparent that this camera is a fake, constructed from cardboard, with all the mechanical details of a real camera. Now, this instrument designed to take pictures becomes itself a kind of picture; but, adding to the conundrum, it is a picture that is also a three-dimensional object.

Meanwhile, Lucie Duval's mission seems to be to hold and protect. She seals her photographs, printed on transparent plastic and neatly curled, in bottles of the type associated with jam preserves. There's a poignant sweetness to the array of glistening back-lit jars arranged on rows on shelves and containing photos of autumnal trees, the honeyed glow so sweet we want to taste it. Is this work part of an effort to save photography for a future when it will have become extinct, pushed aside by cinema and video?

Certainly the works on view constitute a questioning of traditional photography, the continuation of an interrogation which, in fact, started in the early part of the 20th century and has recently gained in intensity. It's not altogether a question of rejection of tradition, but also of retention. The works here keep a residue of traditional photography; they do have some contact with objective reality. We might almost think that the artists in question have a neurotic attachment to traditional photography: they can't live with it, they can't live without it.

♦ *La Photographie Découpée* is at Galerie Art Mûr, 3429 Notre Dame St. W., until Nov. 3. Call (514) 933-0711.



Striking for both painterly realness and controlled rawness are Montreal artist Doreen Wittenbols's recent oil paintings on view in a show at Galerie McClure titled *Unfinished*. Wittenbols, who was born in Holland and came to Montreal

with her family in 1974, casts herself as the main subject, to be both depicted in the present and seen through the looking glass of memory.

As the title implies, most of the works are unfinished – or, rather express that sense, which may explain certain liberties taken with the human anatomy, such as, in one instance, a shoulder that seems out of proportion. Some of the paintings have an intentionally unfinished look, with vaguely delineated parts seemingly waiting to be filled in with dredged-up memories and with whole areas of the canvas left in a somewhat contrived limbo of monochrome beige.

The most exciting work, titled *Magic Wands* (*Numbers One-Six*), consists of six small paintings. This set depicts the artist putting the

Detail from Wittenbols painting titled *Recall Remembrance*.

finishing touches of makeup on her face. Now, we are the mirror, into which she intently, almost desperately, gazes, while wielding her "wands," a canister of lipstick, an eyeliner stick and a tiny brush for grooming eyelashes.

Indeed, the face, seen in extreme closeup, at times so close it doesn't fit altogether inside a given panel, becomes a pinkish, rolling landscape punctuated by the dark bottomless orifices of mouth and nostrils. These are painted in a loose manner that nevertheless takes into full account subtle variations of light and transparency of skin. The minuscule red line indicating the inner edge of one nostril is absolutely sublime. Don't miss this show by an artist going places with her intimate feel for paint and an artistic sensibility all her own.

♦ *Unfinished*, by Doreen Wittenbols, is at Galerie McClure, Visual Arts Centre, 350 Victoria Ave., until Oct. 27. Call (514) 488-9558.