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## VISUAL ARTS

IN GRANDMAISON'S WORKS, IT'S HARD TO BE SURE WHETHER IT'S THE FIGURE THAT HOLDS UP THE GLASS, OR THE GLASS THAT PROVIDES A GRIP FOR THE FIGURE

# Through a glass artfully

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Most interesting approach to intriguingly well-known Montreal painter Pascal Grandmaison's large graphic images is to regard them as meditations on the nature of privacy. Some years now, closure and privacy have been, at least on one of Grandmaison's obsessions, in an old-fashioned looking portrait in fact, could be easily misread as paintings as lovingly and stakingly rendered as any by hyperrealist Alex Colville.

Grandmaison's recent series has an intriguingly close relationship with the notion of the ideal portrait. Portraits at what might be called a perceptive level – assuming such a subject actually exists – and a compact subject matter precisely fitted into the typically formal format of conventional art. The current series, consisting of images of young subjects seemingly occupied with something half in themselves and the viewer's portrait convention of privacy is put in question. For here is Grandmaison's take on, somewhat battered by the fast super-fast digital photography that pose, alluding to a ritual of picture-taking up to half of the 20th century. Grandmaison's sitters are required to hold a means more than just sit-

ting. The subject holds up a large piece of glass, clearly a door. The piece of glass functions as a window, with the subject peering behind it. In this convoluted art riddle, the subject is physically supported, indeed as an integral part, his own reflection into portrait and art.

Every image, each featuring a different pose, we become increasingly aware of slight differences in pose and tone. Does the fact that the subject grips the glass higher up or lower down, or that the subject's articular personality trait – attempting a bit too much? Do the people seem more deeply introspective, or is it an art-induced mannerism?

Some works, which recall the photographer/artist Sylvie Fleury, it's hard to be sure whether the subject holds up the glass or that it provides a grip for a figure to emerge into some sort of virtual space, among the many inspirations for Grandmaison's more sober creations, we have to look to the work of Montreal painter Jean-Pierre, with figures morphing into fictions, and even the great René Magritte, engineer of a



COURTESY OF GALERIE RENÉ BLOUIN

Grandmaison's images are meditations on the nature of privacy.

two-dimensional black hole, often deceptively luminous, into which people and things mysteriously disappear.

The holding up of glass can be seen as quite another thing, depending on the viewer's generational perspective on the history of art. Referred to by the efforts of Grandmaison's subjects is the conceptualist "grand gesture" that was no so long ago an aspect of conceptualism and performance art, such as that by Dennis Oppenheim and Vito Acconci. In their photographic documents of bodies, these esthetic pioneers literally and figuratively stretched notions of self and portraiture to new limits, but usually not so far as to obliterate all link with the human condition.

In a sense, Grandmaison's images, granulated and velvety, are updates on an art form and style that is vintage late 1960s, early '70s. What Grandmaison has done is, among other interesting things, to subtly make over what was once known as the anti-portrait. The artist's triumph is in demonstrating that a mere re-touch, no matter how technically complicated it is behind the scenes, can have such wide-reaching consequences for finished product.

Images by Pascal Grandmaison are at Galerie René Blouin, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W., Room 501, until May 7. Call (514) 393-9969.

The current show by up-and-coming Montreal painter Doreen Wittenbols, cutely titled *Sexentricité*, also, in a sense, invites us to look through a glass – or window – held up to us by various people. Not that these deftly depicted figures, possibly painted from living models or photographs, actually cling to a chunk of glass. Rather, they seem more than happy that we see them indulging in assorted sexual pleasures.

Indeed, the two women in a work punningly titled *Pit-stop* (one with her blushing privates peeking from beneath her dress), look right back at us. In fact, if the real theme of Wittenbols's series is sex, then it is a form of sex having more to do with being seen in the act. This latter is the case in a work called *Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places* that features a young woman blow-drying her hair; it suggests looking for love, or whatever, in a tacky pick-up joint.

Certainly, the hand-held dryer looks like a gun – is the woman committing

emotional suicide? – and those green cocktail boots are straight from the Playboy 1950s. Of course, as fun as it is to toy with Wittenbols's erotic narratives and her suggestive visual non sequiturs, the best thing, by far, about her paintings is her finesse with paint and brush. In her works, these come together to produce images bristling with animated line, itself far more erotic and mischievous than the sexual goings-on.

At times it seems the artist's true narrative aim is to show human love connection as cliché, seemingly all the more so for the sheer exuberance which a paint stroke can attain in just delineating one dilated nostril or twitching finger tip. If Grandmaison alludes, intentionally or otherwise, to 17th-century artist Vermeer, Wittenbols's work is, interestingly, imbued with a liveliness associated with 17th-century master Frans Hals.

Doreen Wittenbols's paintings, collectively titled *Sexentricité*, are at Galerie B-312, 372 Ste. Catherine St. W., Room 403, until April 23. Call (514) 874-9423 or consult [www.galerieb-312.qc.ca](http://www.galerieb-312.qc.ca)

## EXHIBITIONS

**Beaudry**, 14678 Notre Dame St. E. La Forêt enchantée, until May 15. (514) 872-2240.

**Maison de la culture Ahuntsic-Cartierville**, 10300 Lajeunesse St. Raconté par la caricature, ends Thursday. (514) 872-8749.

**Maison de la culture Côte des Neiges**, 5290 Côte des Neiges Rd. *Alfombra de flores*, an installation by Jesus Bejar, until April 24. Photographs by Roger St. Laurent titled *Artisans du soleil*, until June 11. Photographs by Yves Arcand and paintings by Jean-Pierre Vivian, until May 8. (514) 872-6889.

**Maison de la culture Frontenac**, 2550 Ontario St. Les Passagères s'exposent, today to May 21. Le Cantique des créatures, installation by Nathalie Maranda and Pier Chartrand; and Photomathon, photographs, until May 7. Monument à Ciudad Juárez, works by Claudia Bernal, until Nov. 3. Call (514) 872-7882.

**Maison de la culture Marie-Uguay**, 6052 Monk Blvd. Regards sur les prix Pierre-Ayot et Louis-Comtois et Regards sur l'avenir: une rétrospective des prix François-Houdé, until May 8. Call (514) 872-2044.

**Maison de la culture Mercier**, 8105 Hochelaga St. Works by Robert Cadot titled *Les Portes secrètes, d'heures en heures*, ends tomorrow. Anniversaire de la maison de la culture Mercier 1989-2004, until June 20. (514) 872-8755.

**Maison de la culture Notre Dame de Grâce**, 3755 Botrel St. *Sight Seeing* by Lynne Haagensen, until April 24. *Projet Contigo Pérou 2004-2005*; and an installation by Martin Leduc, both until May 1. (514) 872-2157.

**Maison de la culture Plateau Mont Royal**, 465 Mount Royal Ave. E. Works by Bertrand R. Pitt, continues until May 7. (514) 872-2266.

**Maison de la culture Rosemont-La Petite Patrie**, 6707 de Lorimier Ave. *Les Animaux dans la ville*, tableaux by Jocelyne Bouchard, continues until April 30. (514) 872-1730.

**Maison du Bon Temps**, 8000 Gouin Blvd. E. *Rivière sous les étoiles*, ends tomorrow. Sculpture by Winji, until June 5. (514) 872-9814.

**Stewart Hall**, 176 Lakeshore Rd. In *Pointe Claire*. After Notman: Photographic Views of Montreal, a Century Apart; and John Collins: Views of the West Island, until May 1. (514) 630-1254.