

Eve K Tremblay
by James O Campbell

Eve K Tremblay's exhibition "Madeleines minérales entre les feux" at Occurrence in Montreal, brought together recent photographic works, ceramic installations, paintings and drawings. Certainly, the restlessness that is her hallmark has never been more pronounced than here, where she establishes a modular aesthetic identity as mutable as life itself. All these creative expressions were meaningfully dovetailed, rooted in her signature poetic sensibility, and generated en *toto* a remarkably engaging environmental installation.

Tremblay has always been fascinated by science and scientific discourse, and she carries this forward in different media in her new work. An autobiographical consciousness and certain scientific theories are broached in tandem. The exhibition is replete with what she calls instance, those between digital and analogue photographic technologies are explored on paper and on ceramic grounds. The hybrids are arrestingly strange. Scientific data, notably pertaining to the universe of bacteria and the concept of the microbiome or the combined genetic material of the micro-organisms in a particular environment, is pursued in her work, where it inspires diverse forms. Perhaps Tremblay finds herself drawn to this discourse because of its implications for consciousness and symbiosis with a natural world that is now in the process of being systematically decapitated.

Tremblay has always enjoyed a cult following, and has long been seen as a photographer to watch. From her earliest works at Concordia through the recent past, her work has an indelibly theatrical cast even while she questions some of the underpinnings of the medium of photography and what is still possible for it. In this sense she is related to photographers like Jessica Eaton, for whom experimental research is necessary to aesthetic progress. Her earlier series "L'éducation sentimentale," 2000, whose title refers to Gustave Flaubert's novel of the same name, depicted young girls in school uniforms in various solitary and social situations. Those photographs were to some extent autobiographical, drawing upon her teenage years attending a private college in Montreal.

In 2003 Tremblay collaborated with her then-partner artist Michel de Broin on the photographic series "Honeymoons," in which the two artists were photographed in romantically entangled real and imagined situations and geographies. In her photographic series "Unmanifested Still Films," 2006, Tremblay presented photographs shot on film sets, combining stillness and movement both in time and image—a kind of hands-on investigation of philosopher Gilles Deleuze's thinking on cinema. Earlier series such as "À la recherche des placebos," 2003, and "Disparaître en bleu-Ein Spiel der Biosemiotik," 2003, are clearly relatable to the artist's current work. Still later, in "Becoming Fahrenheit 451," Tremblay built a memory palace around Ray Bradbury's powerful novel of speculative fiction *Fahrenheit 451*. Tremblay committed to memorizing Bradbury's book, and photographed friends and acquaintances as they, too, attempted to memorize other chosen books.

The recent photographs shown here clearly demonstrate a shift from narrative and theatricality to a more ritual, performance- and process-based but conceptual framework, without cinematographic clarity's being sacrificed. Her recent experiments in ceramics are photographed, and the experiments themselves displayed adjacent to the photographs, broaching an environmental installation within the wider installation. These photographs have an enigmatic, gnomic and entirely winning quality much like Celia Perrin Sidarous's weirdly compelling photographs of natural history specimens.

The paintings and works on paper exhibited are a surprise to many of her followers, and also quite radical, leavened with a breath of the outside—a radiant freshness. There is a joyous surrealism and high, almost hallucinatory colour in the paintings. While it would be disingenuous to suggest that she has been unaware of art brut, there is no wilful trading on its tropes here.

Instead, the mental travails of her birth mother—serial episodes that she began to observe in early childhood—meaningfully inflect the iconography of her paintings and drawings. The figural treatment in what would otherwise be largely gesturally driven abstract landscapes may well reflect something of a survival move on the artist's part. Women figures inspired by the world of research, psychiatry, and various introspective gestures associated with them haunt the paintings and are installed adjacent to the photographs and ceramics. In one painting the tiny image of a woman trying frantically to escape the picture plane reads as harrowingly, heart-rendingly sad and true. But the work itself has a clearly healing ethos.

In recent years Tremblay has experimented with ceramics under the inspiration of her father, an endlessly inventive artist who has tested the definitional limits of ceramics over the course of more than five decades. Tremblay grew up near his ceramic kilns in Val-David, Quebec. From 2013 to 2015 she studied at Greenwich House Pottery in New York City and later practised at Guttenberg Arts in New Jersey. Tremblay uses her father's glazes, kilns and studio when she is at Val-David.

The ceramics in "Madeleines minérales" (mineral madeleines) were photographed in sundry ephemeral states along the path of various firings towards their creation, the myriad mutations of the ceramic material-in-process becoming the central subject matter. There is more than a touch of the Proustian *petite madeleine* in the title and in the works because they are memory-laden sensory cues vested there, involuntary and inviolable. Tremblay subsequently photographed them in selected landscapes during the course of long walks through places like the rocks of La Riviere du Nord not far from the ceramic kilns in Val-David and placed in the sand of Ponquogue Beach, NY. The ceramics on the floor plane of Occurrence are laid out in Lilliputian fashion as though for a tiny Alice to meander through and meditate upon. Tremblay fired the ceramics after transferring decals of photographic images to their surfaces so they become integral, sealed in like photographs under glass. She also subjects the ceramics to crimping and rending twists and other manipulations that lend them an eccentricity of form.

This exhibition offered the full array of Eve K Tremblay's creative expressions over the last few years. Whatever their scientific inspirations, none of the works exhibited has anything to do with the canons of linear logic, but rather with the poetry of sundry internal mental and emotional states and a sort of innocent whimsy that is uniquely Tremblay's own. Here is a kind of embodied working through, by which I mean not just a process of understanding and acceptance of the self in the face of limiting experiences or, as in psychodynamic psychotherapy—repeating, elaborating and amplifying interpretations— but a courageous, ongoing attempt to work through the promise and implications of media new to her as a practitioner and those that she knows like the literal back of her hand.

The poetry here is radiant and hard-won. It is grounded in performance, ritual, avowal—and what one might well call lifesaving grace.

"Madeleines minérales entre les feux" was exhibited at Occurrence, Montreal, from January 20 to March 3, 2018.

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