

Jocelyn Philibert, Dimension Lumière

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La série d'œuvres réalisées dans le Grand Nord était exposée parallèlement avec deux projets vidéographiques entamés dernièrement par l'artiste, en Colombie, et s'intéressant aux conditions de travail des militaires colombiens et des employés de la mine de sel de Manaure à La Guajira. Les qualités formelles vaporeuses de ces œuvres dialoguaient avec certaines des images de l'Arctique de Léonard.

En somme, l'exposition d'Emmanuelle Léonard portait en elle un commentaire à la fois intime et troublant sur la présence des Forces armées canadiennes en zone arctique. Humanisant les protagonistes de ce déploiement militaire tout en interrogeant le caractère politisé de leurs manœuvres, les images présentées par la Galerie de l'UQAM

semblent ouvrir une réflexion sur les méthodes de socialisation des soldats canadiens, sur leurs expériences individuelles du Nord et sur la charge de leur présence collective dans cette région.

Christophe Scott complète actuellement sa maîtrise en histoire de l'art à l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Ses recherches portent sur la peinture figurative nord-américaine d'après-guerre. Il occupe également un poste comme assistant de recherche pour un projet de l'ERHAQ (Équipe de recherche en histoire de l'art du Québec) sur l'histoire des ateliers d'artistes au Québec depuis 2018. Il mène aussi une pratique artistique en peinture depuis 2014.

Jocelyn Philibert, *Dimension Lumière*

Bernard Schütze

**EXPRESSION, CENTRE D'EXPOSITION
DE SAINT-HYACINTHE
NOVEMBER 9, 2019 –
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A sustained focus on trees has been at the centre of Jocelyn Philibert's photographic practice for over fifteen years. After a long period of exploring sculpture and installation, the artist chose photography in 2006 as his principle medium and the tree as his main subject. He first created a set of remarkable works depicting trees in nocturnal settings and then towards 2016 he turned his attention to depicting trees and figures in daylight with the *Au jardin des possibles* series. *Dimension Lumière*, presented by EXPRESSION, is the first time that selected works from these two series are brought together under one roof. The richly textured



Jocelyn Philibert, *Dimension lumière*, 2019. Vue partielle de l'exposition. © Jocelyn Philibert. Photo: Daniel Roussel.

exhibition is the fruit of a curatorial proposal by Marcel Blouin that seeks to shed new light on this far-reaching photographic corpus and the practice that underpins it.

The guiding thread of *Dimension Lumière* is the contrast that takes place when the nighttime and daytime works are presented alongside one another. A visit to this display of various, large-scale images can be likened to the sensation of walking through a forest both in daylight and then in the dark of night. As in a real forest, one can alternately view one tree at a time or step back and try to catch a glimpse of the whole. In this sense, each photographic composition needs to be considered on its own terms as well as in relation to the set of selected body of work. Consisting almost entirely of large-scale photographs—save for a sculpture work from an earlier period that is shown in a separate room—the works are grouped together into clusters of nighttime and daytime scenes. The two photographic series are similar in terms of both the choice of subject matter (trees, either alone or in bucolic settings) and the process Jocelyn Philibert has devised to create them. The technique in question is to scan an entire image field—at times without prior framing—photograph by photograph, followed by a process of meticulously recombining each image detail on a computer screen to compose a large-scale picture. Through this careful juxtaposition of the two series of works, the exhibition reveals both the differences and overlaps between the aesthetic and representational issues that the artist addresses in his practice.

Upon entering the main space, viewers at first pass two medium sized photographic compositions of trees at nighttime to then come upon four very large-scale works of daytime scenes (three from the *Au jardin des possibles* series, and the large scale photographic composition *Adam et Ève au jardin des possible* 2019, which was specifically created for this exhibition). These nearly panoramic works depict sunlit landscapes featuring several human figures gathered under imposing trees. While the artist's digital recording and montage method endows these images with a hypereal quality, the inclusion of groups of figures in a bucolic setting variously references the landscape genre of classical Western painting. For instance, in the monumental photographic composition *Sur le chemin des bohémiens*, the crisp clarity of the trees and sharp blue of the sky is coupled with the presence of a central group of figures whose arrangement suggests a story for the viewer to unravel. This ambivalence between an immediate and photographic (i.e., indexical) *real* and a painterly *imaginary* and its attendant fictional elements is present to various degrees in all of the diurnal representations. In contrast, the series of nocturnal photographs confronts the viewer with a different perspective on various trees subjects at night (an apricot tree, a wild apple tree in bloom, weeping willows, etc.). Cast against the depth of black night sky and sharply projected into the foreground as a result of the successive flash lighting and the co-existence of various minute and barely perceptible depths of field, these *portraits* of trees also have a tangible 3D feel that evokes a sculptural dimension.¹ Moreover, seized as an immediate and real presence, these images also introduce a novel perception by revealing nocturnal trees in a manner that is ordinarily not accessible to the human eye. For example, in *Sans titre (abricotier de Sibérie, vu du nord)* (2007), the blooming tree appears as an immediate and powerful illumination that is at once strangely realistic and artificial. There is an unusual and paradoxical realism at work in the night images: they are realistic because the artist here appears

to have captured the vital forces and sheer presence of these trees, but they are manifestly an artifice that is the result of an underlying digital composition process, which gives rise to an invented and fictional image that does not have a counterpart in the real.

In placing these nocturnal, strangely real works alongside the ambivalent fictions of the art historically informed daytime photographs, the *Dimension Lumière* exhibition invites viewers to broaden their understanding of the artist's varied landscape representations. The exhibition's well thought out work selection and its careful spatial display provides an insightful reading of this far-reaching practice that combines and overlaps the possibilities of photography and painting, while presenting the artist's ongoing quest to capture and illuminate the tree subject in its real dimension as a natural phenomenon, and as an art historical motif with a wide range of fictional, symbolic and iconographic ramifications.

1. The underlying role of sculpture in the artist's work is displayed in the work *Tête* (1998) created in an earlier period. This sculpture, the result of a plaster cast that was moulded in a hole dug out of a patch of earth, crudely resembles a human head. The work echoes the notion of an indexical relation to the real and the earth, as well as the inclusion of a human figure, elements that are central to the artist's current photographic practice.

Bernard Schütze is an independent art critic and curator. His essays have been published in numerous art magazines. He has written various catalogue articles and artist monographs. He has presented talks as part of several art-oriented events mainly in Canada and Europe. Originally from Germany, he lives and works in Montréal.