

**Alain Lefort, *PEQUOD* ('pi: 'kwad), Plein sud, Longueuil,
February 21 to May 18, 2015**

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naturels colossaux et quasi lyriques, sa caméra-drone n'y opère qu'avec indifférenciation esthétique. Ce retrait de l'auteur invite à prendre ces essais simplement pour ce qu'ils sont : d'implicites constats. Ces vues plongeantes sur des essaims de citadins peuvent toutefois suggérer une autorité étatique induite.

Ainsi *Fortel!* (2010), paysage aussi désincarné que des images transmises par satellite, instille une impression de surveillance – panoptique et subliminale – renvoyant aux théories de Bentham². Une vue aérienne nous rapproche du fort de Bard situé dans la vallée d'Aoste, en Italie. Des figurants en franchissent subitement le seuil pour dévaler une route sinueuse tels les robots d'une existence surdéterminée. Impliqué par l'omnisciente caméra subjective, le spectateur lui-même en ressent le tournis. Nous ne sommes pas dans *La région centrale* (1971) de Michael Snow, où l'artiste programmait le bras d'un automate pour que celui-ci filme jour et nuit, à 360°, le désert du Nord canadien. Car les vues de Lewis, malgré l'écrasante permanence qu'elles suggèrent, semblent indécisées et presque moelleuses. De ces trajectoires planantes, rasantes ou curvilignes, l'artiste ne décide d'aucune fin attendue, si ce n'est celle de simples propositions s'estompant avec discrétion.

Ces plans-séquences chers à la Nouvelle Vague embrassent ici une réalité autrement mixte, globale, locale dont les latences ne se ressentent qu'en silence. Lorsqu'il plaide en faveur du statut de figurants assimilés à un « silencieux prolétariat du cinéma », Lewis ne désigne à travers eux que le mètre étalon d'une oppression sociale évidemment plus vaste. Suivant ces lignes ondulantes, volatiles semblant accomplir quelque ambitieuse courbe du monde –

paradoxalement totalisante et tolérante – on comprend que ces hétérotopies, pour reprendre un terme de Foucault, permettent à l'artiste de traiter du déclin d'utopies politiques qui marquèrent fortement l'histoire du XX^e siècle et qui, dans le pressant contexte qui est le nôtre, n'opèrent plus qu'en potentiels rhizomes.

¹ Mark Lewis, « Is Modernity Our Antiquity? », *Documenta Magazine*, n° 1, Cologne, Taschen, 2007, p. 109-117. Ce texte fut initialement publié à Londres dans la revue *Afterall* (n° 14, automne-

hiver 2006), dont Lewis est cofondateur.
² Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p. 228-264.

Michèle Cohen Hadria est née en 1950 à Tunis et vit à Paris. Diplômée des Beaux-arts (Rome, 1974) et d'une maîtrise en études cinématographiques (Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris III, 1996), elle s'intéresse tant à l'art contemporain qu'au cinéma expérimental. Depuis 1998, elle a collaboré à des revues telles que *art press*, *Jeune Cinéma* (Paris), *ETC*, *Ciel variable* (Montréal), *Third Text*, *n.paradoxa* (Londres), *Tema Celeste* (Milan), *Camera Austria* (Graz, Autriche). Entre 1998 et 2014, elle s'est intéressée aux artistes du monde arabe et aux questions féministes et postcoloniales. En 2014, elle a publié, aux éditions féministes en ligne *KT Press* (Londres), trois entretiens d'artistes tunisiennes aux lendemains des soulèvements en Tunisie.



Above and Below the Minhocão, 2014

Alain Lefort

PEQUOD ('pi: 'kwad)

Plein sud, Longueuil

February 21 to May 18, 2015

Lefort fittingly cribs his title from American author Herman Melville's 1851 magnum opus *Moby Dick*: the *Pequod* is a fictitious nineteenth-century Nantucket whaling ship that appears in the novel as an instrument of revenge. Narrated by Ishmael (here, Lefort), the story follows the ship's strange captain, Ahab (perhaps also Lefort), who is still recovering from losing his leg to a rogue sperm whale on his last voyage. His fierce desire to pursue and kill that great white whale, the *Moby Dick* of the

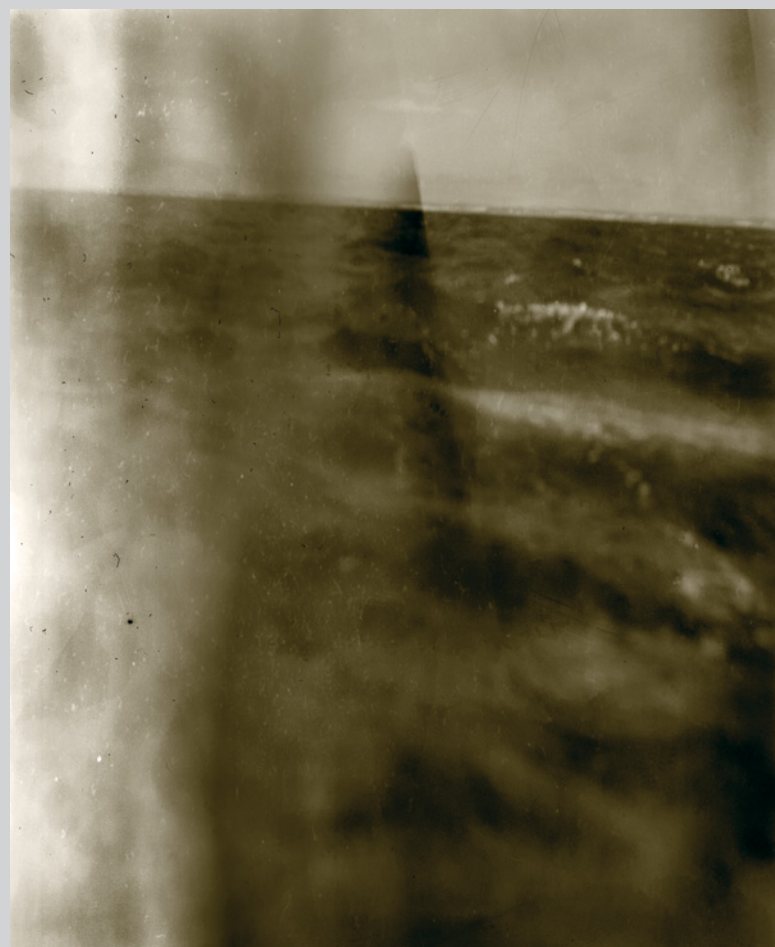
novel's title, is fuelled by his belief that the creature is the pure embodiment of evil and must be expunged.

In his *Pequod* series on exhibit here, Lefort searches not for a paradigm of evil as Ahab did, but for the numinous itself in the compass of a camera lens. This is not surprising, since he has historically been drawn to images of the natural environment with an almost profane joy. Certainly, his images of the bayou and other tropes of nature demonstrate the truth of this. Here, equally powerful, it is the sea.

These images of untamed water convey their ferocity with rare immediacy, and the vulnerability of the photographer equally well. That vulnerability is felt in confrontation with a natural force that is unrelenting, rife with numinosity – and inimical in its mien.



PEQUOD ('pi: 'kwad), 2015, exhibition view



épreuve #8, from the series *PEQUOD* ('pi: 'kwad), 2015, inkjet print on Barite paper, 102 x 81 cm

The word “numinous” was coined by the Lutheran theologian Rudolf Otto and discussed at length in his highly influential book *The Idea of the Holy* (1923).¹ According to Otto, the numinous experience installs the *tremendum* that brings on fear and trembling, a quality of unfettered *fascinans*, the tendency to attract, fascinate, compel – and terrorize.

Somewhere between brutality and sophistication, Lefort shows the personal quality integral to the numinous experience, a feeling of being somehow in communion with something altogether outside himself, something replete with alienness, outside the circles of time, savage and unnameable. He succeeds in evoking the *mysterium tremendum* – the once and wholly Other – in his images of an unforgiving sea, and his own fragility in the face of it. The sea itself is the inimical Great White Whale, and the *Pequod* pursues it like a transcendent mystery across a radius drawn by the artist himself in space, time – and textures of light.

Lefort’s images seem to have been shot at the helm of a wave-drenched binnacle, with compass and octant close at hand, and all is in a state of irredeemable flux, as the ship pitches and rolls on the face of the deep and fateful cusp of jeopardy that is the open sea. The fact that he is in a kayak and not at the helm of a large sailing ship is not immediately apparent. There seems



Abysses 2, from the series *PEQUOD* ('pi:kwad), 2015, inkjet print on Barite paper, 102 × 81 cm

to be a porthole – a window, as the late, great photographer Charles Gagnon would say, between inside and outside, and, more importantly, between shifting epistemologies of seeing and seen. Serendipitous light leakage in the bellows

of his 4 x 5 camera yielded a ghostlike shape at the left side of the images, which seems related to an arm thrown up defiantly against the hegemony of the sea and the nameless perils of the deep.

He conjures out of raw experiences of being “at sea” a curious collision of the Romantic sublime and its Gothic counterpoint: Romantic because his quest for the numinous is heroic and enduring; Gothic because the observing self is obviously in jeopardy and subject to surreal visions and fractured perspectives. A palpable sense of threat and imminent collapse (capsizing) and vertigo hangs over all. To hold these very different species of the sublime in balanced counterpoint is no easy task. Yet Lefort makes it seem effortless – a bravura high-wire act second to none.

Here is a photographer bravely and even obsessively in pursuit of his own enigma, his very own Great White Whale; I mean, the numinous truth of the photographic image itself, and all that it conceals, implies, and portends.

¹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* [Das Heilige, 1917], trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923; 2nd ed., 1950).

The writer and curator **James D. Campbell** writes frequently on photography and painting from his base in Montreal.



Touchée, 2015, black-and-white HD video installation, drawing on tracing paper

The artist’s body as a site for the investigation of the internal dualities of the self is the subject of a compelling exhibition of video projections, kinetic sculptures, and drawings by Montreal artist Manon Labrecque. As she was trained in contemporary dance and visual art, many of Labrecque’s recent works engage the gesture of touch – the energy and physical contact between the hand and the body – to communicate a deeply sensed corporal and psychic experience of being.

Curated by Nicole Gingras, the exhibition occupies three spaces, each with its own distinct mood, media, and spatial presence. First, I stepped into a gallery infused with abundant natural light in which six oversized drawings (1.3 metres x 1 metre) on heavy paper, *Les uns* (2008–15), were displayed on slim easels arranged in the centre. Two drawings greeted the viewer; their primal human figures were sensitively rendered in the manner of an untutored child – but in fact were drawn by the artist with her eyes closed, relying on memory.¹ They conveyed a lively spiritual presence – a subconscious depiction of the self or, in this case, selves. For in each of the sinuously delineated graphite drawings there are two semi-

merged or semi-joined female figures, suggestive of psychic companions or the inner duality of being. One drawing is reminiscent of twins conjoined at the head and hip. In all of them, the unclothed bodies have exaggerated and enlarged limbs, hands, fingers, feet and toes, creating a sort of haptic map that traces the sensation of touch, feeling, and memory of the body itself. Fingerprints, handprints, smudges, and other direct hand marks in a vibrant range of oil-pastel colours, probably made with eyes open, accentuate and narrate these bodies. The marks include ovals above the head suggestive of coronas of light, inner female organs, and smiling lips that generate fields of positive psychic energy.

However, there is also a sense of unease and the uncanny in the dissolution or non-resolution of body parts in relation to the whole. In one horizontal drawing, a set of “twins” engage in a fight – bodies separate and fall, arms flail, and mouths grimace – it’s a primal battle of the selves. Interestingly, Labrecque’s title, *Les uns*, part of the expression *les uns et les autres*, meaning “one another” or “each other,” alludes to the forever intertwined and inseparable parts of the self.

Manon Labrecque

L’origine d’un mouvement

AxeNéo7, Gatineau

April 1 to May 2, 2015