

Inviting

The panorama created by Yan Giguère is a landscape. We approach it first via its streets, roads, buildings, then by its fields, plains, tracks, footpaths, streams, rivers. Some of its routes run smoothly, others branch out, intersect, interpenetrate. Certain trails surge up, steep and jagged. Still others, more tortuous, coincide or overlap. Many of its networks open onto clearings. Gaps emerge. Vistas appear. “Landscapes of the depths of man,” wrote Roland Giguère, “where darkness sometimes gives way to light. A place where the slightest glimmer must be preserved, lovingly nurtured.”¹ Between the ups and downs of this land, beyond its forests, across the bends in a river, hovering over its horizon, can be glimpsed its secrets and its rites. A unique landscape that each traverses uniquely.

The titles of the series and images are like invitations, the whole oeuvre requests our presence. *Visite libres, Attractions, Choisir, Bienvenue*² ... everything indicates that an appeal is being made to the unmoving traveller who, eyes fixed on the images, prepares to embark upon the journey.

But there’s more: the work engages. It demands that as we roam, we consider. As the artist has before us.

It’s also a summons – to meander, to contemplate, to reflect. As it celebrates the world and its inhabitants, it encourages us to look closely at their particular ways of being and communicating, the upheavals echoed in those emanating from the panorama that, in a single drawn-out breath, awaits discovery.

The compositions urge us to take the time we need to ponder – or re-ponder – our humanity. To cast a curious eye over our surroundings, over the other. To scrutinize them. Everywhere, and under all circumstances. *Ici et là*.³ Close by, where things are easy to see, and further off, where life seems more chaotic, the world less clear.

The work enjoins us to seek a meaning in the life we lead or that leads us... What is the universe? What order lies behind it? Or what disorder? And the world? What trace will we leave upon it? What impression? What will be our stamp?

The images are like steps forward, victories over dehumanization and the isolation that weighs so heavily upon us. Each picture is independent, but still always part of a global idea, a system. Which is all the stronger for its presence.

¹ Roland Giguère, *Forêt vierge folle* (Montreal: L’Hexagone, Typo series, 1988), p. 30 (trans). The title of an essay by Fernand Dumont also comes to mind: *Le lieu de l’homme* (The Place of Man).

² Simply translated: “Unguided tours,” “Attractions,” “Choose,” “Welcome.”

³ “Here and there.”

Questions haunt us...

Who are they, the people in these images, captured clearly or just vaguely hinted at? Who are the absent ones, who once took shelter within these walls, like hermit crabs inside their shells? Those who long ago sowed the fields, warmed the houses, inseparable from the country, the first landscape? Who is the presence at the heart of these series, the one we feel we recognize but whose mysteries remain entire? Who are we, who roam, cross paths, meet? We who celebrate, pray, meditate? Who chant and scream? With rage and by compulsion. We who laugh out loud? Fit to burst. Till we cry. We who *inhabit the earth*, like all the others? But, most importantly, who sweeps all this with his gaze?

In any case, the work *questions* while it evokes. But never concludes.

In the garden formed by the series, the tree calls, the appetite goads. To dig. To penetrate and be penetrated by the world, its systems, its secrets, its myths... absolutely.

Imagine an explorer venturing into a dense wood or a child burrowing determinedly, frantically, in the earth, in the hope of uncovering a secret thousands of years old. Isn't their quest the same as the photographer's?⁴

Or think of a stroller walking through a city, its boulevards and alleys, alert for signs, trying to spot the previously unspotted. Propelled by a surge of life, doesn't he see faces that others may have *failed* to see, facades too often hidden?

Everything overflows: enchantments glimpsed through woods; frailties that bury themselves in the soil; fortuities that divert the road, punctuating the promenade like breathing.

Jaccottet has written: "They must be renamed, these flowers, detached from the networks of science and restored to the network of the world where my eyes have seen them."⁵

Living flesh, pulp, skin, fungi... Stems that bend in the wind, trunks that soar... Fibres, tubers, branches... Spores, pistils, petals, slow ripening fruit... Roots and stumps, still and forever... As through a microscope, a miniature world unfolds under the camera's lens. Plants here are like trails. Understanding comes only to the eyes of those who follow them, who look at flowers with the passion of a *herbalist*.

⁴ It's hard to deny that what drives the practice here is a quest, an almost palpable longing.

⁵ Philippe Jaccottet, *Et, néanmoins* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 27 (trans.).

So the artist may seem like an experimenter: a botanist, for example, or a biologist, or – at many other moments – a geologist, geographer, entomologist, or even a poet⁶ so frequent are the hints, throughout the work, of the relentless compulsion to unravel a mystery. And the mystery, of course, is existence: human, animal, floral. Life – the manifestations, phenomena and architecture of life.

Everything in the panorama is part of this quest. Rooted in it, everything is offered as evidence, the trace, the *language* always perceptible to those who choose to see but, spangled and illuminated by myriad signs, constantly open to new readings.

The gaze of a single being who, with humility, *stares* at the world like someone striving vigilantly to solve an enigma. He ventures in wholeheartedly, accepting without judgement all that comes his way, the picture that appears before him, the raw material that strikes his senses. But he also positions himself. He checks behind, and often rethinks what's gone before. In the selfsame movement, he absorbs the essence of the path travelled and of the one that lies ahead. What has been cultivated blossoms. What has been ploughed bursts forth: an instantaneous presence suddenly revealed.

The panorama is a landscape whose furrows, shores and horizons endlessly intertwine, inseparable but constantly *renewed*. Like the past and present that the eye and hand continually rework, and the presentiment, perhaps, of a barely rocky future, muck-free and delightfully nebulous. (Or maybe these things recompose themselves, almost naturally, like the rolling of waves that skim moss-covered rocks, the sway of pebbles bordering the sea? Because the work *moves*, is perpetually in motion.)

Winter with its heaps of snow, its cloaks of frost. And then, spring, summer, fall. It's all there. An uninterrupted *continuum*, like the one that links tree to earth.

To observe the intimate and unknown more closely, the artist sounds shadows, gauges doubt. He's drawn to the chiaroscuro of ritual, the eruption of disruptions. He accepts digressions, circuitous routes that *throw into question*, evade the unequivocal, and light takes him unawares. (Or is it the opposite?) The gaze awakens, is tested, roused.

⁶ If, as Glissant (after Char) maintained, “the defence of the landscape is the poet’s first act” – Glissant who accepted as natural the need to “rise up” against men’s “oppression” of the landscape, and “consequently, against their ignorance and definitive exile.” “Nature holds the secret of the powers that absolve. In nature, in being, and *in their relationship*, lies the ‘internal justice’ from which knowledge springs.” (Édouard Glissant, *L’intention poétique* [Paris: Seuil, 1969], p. 87 [trans.]. The quoted expression is René Char’s.)

“The works we love are ... linked to ‘places,’ even if they are of another order... This is the only culture: the one that preserves and transmits ... what is innate.”⁷

By the photographer’s hand, *fragments* of the everyday form a whole of which *we* are part. And the humanity that emerges from this practice is at once simplicity, finesse, and plurality: complex, many-sided. While others speak for the *whole-world*, become its balladeers, the photographer redraws this world’s panorama. His approach is ontological, but above all *ecological*.⁸ So the work reflects the singular and the multiple, constantly evoking them, vibrating between them. And woman and man, among so many other things, so many other beings, assume once more a place too often renounced. Is it that, the universe? The objects, faces, bodies that are the same as animals, insects, grass, the milky way?

The artist records, in detail, then reports. But more: he seizes the spirit of a time, a place, of times and places – of time and place? – although his route avoids the modish, the well-worn path. Step by step. There is no deception to assist him, no concession to the tyranny of trends. Existence? He plunges in, over his head. He confronts a *material* that is ever changing and unsettled, without recourse to the seductive powers of exoticism. The surroundings? The environment? His oeuvre is nerveless, irrigated by the ability to track them, nakedly study and then reflect them. The immediate? Never glibly magnified, never crudely disguised, nor even veiled. The work eschews such strategies. The vision it springs from offers no simple key to enhance our understanding of the world, to allow us to interpret it, but rather an infinity of trails that lead to the heart of beings and things, strip them bare. If there is sometimes theatricality – never make-believe – it aims to mirror the world, or rather society, that endlessly surprising theatre that assembles actors and spectators on the same stage. (In showing reality, the series sometimes *reworks* it. Here a hand-torch, a sex-paintbrush; there, a human angel spreading its wings, a Sacred Heart floating like a banner in the wind; here, a skeleton-house, a forest of pillars, a fairground parking lot, cranes, their steel necks and beaks in fighting mode; there, a bed-canvas, a nest of hair, a stump in which to sleep, a flowering swarm...) In the play of correspondences, the inflorescence, the genealogy and the cosmogony protect against divorce from the world, against detachment. Primal, elementary connections that we might forget, were it not for the string of images reminding us.

It’s true that the ensemble is built on a ground of correspondences, on soil that has been broadly but thoroughly raked. It may be the profusion of their interplay, elaborate and refined, that makes the approach so singular. That said, what is assembled here, scattered fragments,

⁷ Philippe Jaccottet, *La semaison. Carnets. 1954-1967* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 105 (trans.).

⁸ The series are the product of an *ecological* approach to reality, in the sense employed by Pierre Nepveu: they are *alive*, and the practice is lived.

everyday objects – ex-votos, statuettes, vignettes ... paintings, canvas unrolled on the studio floor ... empty seats, desolate, like vestiges, former places of refuge, then chairs that offer rest, invite abandon ... keys, rakes, tools, instruments of all sorts – can be seen as the fundamental constituents of a single nature that cannot be ignored. Like a beat from which the heart never could, never would escape. It's this, perhaps more than anything else, that makes the expedition so *heartfelt* we tremble in awe. A journey so earth-bound it might disorient. Experienced, assumed, entirely lived. A human journey, as essential as a pilgrimage.

Like someone patiently weaving a silken maze, the photographer fills his panorama with gossamer connections. Gradually a kind of lace emerges, a tracery shot through with oblique rays, swaying and diffuse. “We imagine a spider’s web as big as the infinite world, gleaming in the dark, whose centre would be a gentle unknown sun.”⁹

So does the artist assemble, stitch, hem his fabric. And the edgings and anchor threads frame motifs that, though innumerable, suddenly unite. It's “the material itself through which the work advances” and that can “here persuade us to stop at the uncertain – at that which trembles, vacillates and ceaselessly becomes.”¹⁰

The parade of images includes cathedrals, altars, madonnas, effigies, crucifixes ... A procession of symbols conjuring whence we came: could it be an echo, a call to the divine?

What is the source here of interaction and affinity? Of natural correspondence? Conciliation? Combination? The image. Does it not abolish boundaries? Cast off shackles?

Made up of separate parts, the work is entirely connected and united. Like an *album*.¹¹ Where anecdote becomes history. The tiniest, most modest thing is of paramount importance.

⁹ Philippe Jaccottet, *Et, néanmoins* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 30 (trans.).

¹⁰ Édouard Glissant, *Le sel noir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 21 (trans.). Yan Giguère’s work, which has been presented more than once on gallery walls in the form of a mosaic (in arrangements meticulously thought out by the artist for each series), invites by its form another comparison: the quilt. There is the same diversity and plurality, even contrast, but there are also obvious similarities, echoes, repeats – and consequently harmony. And the images, different in size and appearance, have sometimes been juxtaposed, made to rub shoulders, laid out for an exhibition side by side, and, taken together, they often combine to form a whole. So we can imagine the photographer *gathering*, like Miron: assembling, joining, matching, then rethinking, tightening, changing, linking, connecting pieces that call to one another, that constantly retune themselves over time.

¹¹ Pierre Perreault’s penchant for this concept comes to mind here. And we actually have the feeling with some of Yan Giguère’s assemblages that we are watching a film.

At the heart of the picture is a woman. Everything is concentrated on her, radiates from her. Orbits, cycles, waves,¹² rippling outwards like a shiver.

Love is a tree at the edge of a wood, a sentinel, showing the way. Its boughs and blossoms, roots and radicles, reach out to the whole world.

Love and the tree, side by side. Love, like the tree, stretching across the landscape from earth to heaven, spreading through it. Occupying it. *Inhabiting* it, entirely.

The panorama spans worlds, across the earth and on it, through cities and woods, over harvests and crops.

Like a great and ever rolling river.

Valérie Litalien

¹² The work also includes many circular, spherical and even spiral motifs, symbolic reminders that this artistic vision is based – like life itself – on the circular and the cyclical, on circumvolution and self-reflection.