

## VISUAL ART

## Eve K Tremblay

by James D Campbell

1. Steven Beckly, *Mood Ring*, 2017, burned transparency and pearlized pin, approximately 10.5 x 8 x 3.5 inches. Images courtesy Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto.

2. *Soft Tissue*, 2017, inkjet on tissue, sea urchin spines and plastic sequins, 22 x 16 inches.

on tissue with a torso, festooned with bursts of sea urchin spines and sequins. *Sea Elegy*, 2017–18, on the other hand, is surreal and a little morbid: a plaster leg sticks up from the ground, holding a folded photograph covered with cellular shapes. These are pieces that are not about mermaids and the myths they appear in, but about the body changing, transfiguring, beneath the sea. And as with all the pieces, the sea is a gateway into another world.

“Meirenyu” is a first exhibit by a young artist with a refined eye and a deft, subtle hand. Nonetheless, Beckly’s talent for the subtly luxurious (you want to wear all those beautiful pins) and his delicacy and lightness of touch often get in the way of a more forceful pursuit of a theme. The exhibit is really not about mermaids at all or their appearance in folk tales in China or anywhere else. It is about the frangibility of the body and its boundaries, about the infolding of the upper world of the sky and the world under water, and about the magical power and beauty of the world under the sea. As viewer, I wanted Beckly to pursue these themes with more resolute contrasts and bolder gestures. His work is at risk of being read as merely beautiful and alluring. But after I saw each piece a few times, giving it a little space, it is clearly much more than that. The sirens in Homer are both alluring and terrifying. Beckly needs to bring out a little more of the terror. ■

“Meirenyu” was exhibited at Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto, from January 18 to February 24, 2018.

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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 “crossovers”—for 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 divers 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 Deleuzes’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



1

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 surreality 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



2

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 Rivière 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

1. Eve K Tremblay, installation view, "Madeleines minérales entre les feux," 2018, Occurrence, Montreal. Images courtesy Occurrence, Montreal.

2. *Cera sous l'eau #1*, 2017, archival pigment print, 20 x 25 cm.

## VISUAL ART

## Nicolas Sassoon

by Meredyth Cole

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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It's easier to believe in magic, by which I mean power over one's own life, at night. Also, I find, to actuate fate. Nicolas Sassoon's animated works take place at night, or at least on a starry backdrop reminiscent of the night sky—both a void and its opposite. Sassoon is known for dreamy animations—for the most part softly moving, woven patterns—rooted in early computer graphics. This signature imagery is deceptively serene; while the animations themselves are meditative, each is simultaneously disquieting—poignant and dated, like time capsules unearthed too soon. A recent body of work uses these visual hallmarks to evoke the memory of semi-legal dance venues in Vancouver; incidentally, the first places I encountered Sassoon's work. Incidentally, at night.

Sassoon exhibited “Index, Avenue, Skylight,” his ode to three Vancouver event spaces of the same names at Vancouver's Wil Aballe Art Projects, a gallery space as clandestine as an after-hours party (access is via another gallery, down a set of outdoor stairs, beneath a balcony). Operating roughly from 2014 to 2016, these spaces formed, at one time, the locus of the city's after-hours dance scene. Venues like these, in any city, operate with the knowledge of their inevitable obsolescence, making them almost perfect metaphors for both conceptual pillars of Sassoon's project: technology and memory.

Sassoon's digital animations are, strictly speaking, GIFs, a file format that endlessly replays a set movement—repetition that is the visual equivalent of rumination. GIFs and loops (auditory or visual) are preludes to nothing. As such, they comprise their own, complete,

world. After-hours venues are also worlds unto themselves, created as reprieves from the established and commercial. Sassoon picks up on the childlike verve that keeps these places going; the events and work created in these spaces were not designed to leave the confines of the space itself; the joy is in creation alone and validation is gained from a hyper-insular world. This is as liberating as it is limiting, and Sassoon depicts a world aware of its own precariousness, even revelling in decline. Operating, as they do, on the fringes means these spaces are largely undocumented. Without formal records of their existence, after-hours become suspended in time and subject to the caprices of memory. It is the afterlife of these venues Sassoon strives to remember, the quasi-magical ways they continue to exist as memories. There is something disorienting and playful about this approach, and ultimately pragmatic. The artist invites you to share, not a memory, which would be impossible, but a memory of a memory, which is beautiful.

The set piece of “Index, Avenue, Skylight” is an animation of the interior of each venue, with invented elements filling in the gaps in the artist's recollection. These pieces (shown on “his and hers” wall-mounted monitors) are paired with works on paper, specifically a fluorescent orange poster board meant to fade with time—material chosen for its capacity to slowly disintegrate and thus impersonate memory itself. Neon orange accents evoke cheaply distributed rave flyers; the colour glows under the gallery lighting like a turned-up screen and the bright figures float on a starry black backdrop. Elements from the animations are scaled-up and reproduced on paper: a space