

CIEL VARIABLE

ART PHOTO MÉDIAS CULTURE / N° 124

Nicolas Baier
Thomas Demand
Adad Hannah

DES IMAGES POUR MIEUX VOIR SEEING THROUGH IMAGES

—
Décadrement colonial
Les vies des documents
Edward Hillel

—
PAROLES / VOICES

Ji-Yoon Han

—
Alain Paiement
Mary Ellen Mark
Joannie Lafrenière
Marisa Portolese
Bert Danckaert
Sanaz Sohrabi
Lynne Cohen /
Marina Gadonneix
Evergon

—
African Studies
Manifeste pour
une post-photographie
Ouvrages à souligner /
New & Worthy

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Goose Village

Once upon a time, there was Goose Village – also called Village-aux-Oies or Victoriatown – a working-class district in Montreal, adjacent to the port on one side and the Canadian National Railway train yards on the other. This enclave in the southwest part of the city was home to burgeoning industrial activity from the mid-nineteenth century until it was demolished in 1964. First, in 1847, a quarantine camp was set up for the thousands of Irish immigrants suffering from typhus. Then, makeshift housing was built for the immigrant labourers erecting the Victoria Bridge. The temporary buildings were gradually transformed into permanent housing, which was expanded to form an area encompassing seven streets. European immigrants who had fled the Second World war or were seeking a North American El Dorado could set down their suitcases there. With its majority Italian population, Goose Village made it possible for new arrivals to make a home in their adopted city and be in contact with other members of a diaspora in order to dissipate the sense of being culturally uprooted. Around 1950, a Calabrian family settled in the welcoming neighbourhood. The story of this area, which was stricken from Montreal maps, is told in the exhibition by the Montreal photographer Marisa Portolese, a daughter of that immigrant family.

Portolese's project took more than twenty years, coming to fruition in 2023. She researched numerous sources to build her photographic corpus. The Archives de la Ville de Montréal, a huge pool of photographic documents, and the gathering of oral testimonials from former residents of the neighbourhood were essential to creating the narrative for this work and trying to bring the truth to light: that of a massive expropriation orchestrated by the administration of Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau in the name of modernization of the city. Under cover of the Dozois Plan (1954), the putative goal of which was to offer decent housing to people in precarious living environments, the city deemed the buildings in this working-class neighbourhood to be unsanitary. In reality, Drapeau



Panneau de chronologie, années 1950 / timeline panel, the 1950s, photo : Alignements

coveted the land; his plan was to build an expressway (the Bonaventure Expressway) to handle traffic during the world fair planned for 1967; we can note the irony of the fair's theme, Man and His World. Also in the context of Expo 67, the city was planning to build the Autostade, a facility for sports events.

In the first gallery, Portolese shows the site of Goose Village today with a series of contemporary topographic views. Her parents pose in the urban space where their neighbourhood disappeared without a trace. The images show empty land, parking lots, and construction sites that leave little room for

nature, which tries in spite of everything to make its presence known. Thanks to a detailed study of the municipal archives, for the exhibition Portolese reconstructed the street where her family lived, placing the façades of the houses side by side, enabling neighbours to find where they once lived. This exhaustive documentation exists because, between 1962 and 1964, three photographers were mandated by the City of Montreal to inventory the housing in Goose Village. First, one photographer took a series of pictures for the purposes of a so-called urbanization plan. The following year, two more photographers were sent to build a visual

dossier, as if for evidence, of the future demolitions.

The second gallery contains a generously documented chronological frieze to provide an understanding of the neighbourhood's historical context. To orient spectators geographically, maps are displayed, both official and "hand-made," drawn from memory by former residents. The assemblage of private archives, institutional documents, and press clippings, set on a background of green wallpaper inspired by the houses' interiors, projects scenes of neighbourhood life through its history from the 1800s. Finally, a twenty-minute educational video narrated by Portolese paints a touching portrait; we learn that productive gardens and family businesses brought self-sufficiency to those who lived there. However, once the photographers arrive to carry out their mission, it was understood that the countdown to demolition was accelerating. Neighbourhood life gradually gave way to the irrevocable decision of the Drapeau administration. Goose Village was completely razed in 1964, expropriating 350 families to make way for an event that was major but ephemeral.

By all accounts, silence has reigned regarding the collateral damage caused by Expo 67. Although, above all, it interprets a single family's heritage, Portolese's exhibition positions Goose Village within the still-contemporary concerns regarding expropriations, evictions, and protection of the built heritage, often dependent on cities' political and economic ambitions. *Translated by Käthe Roth*

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Photographer, critic, and independent curator **Sophie Bertrand** has been a regular contributor to *Ciel variable* since 2018. Her essays have also been published in *Photosolution*, *Esse*, *Ricochet*, and *L'Œil de la photographie*, as well as in the book *Une histoire des femmes photographes*. She holds a master's degree in museology from the Université du Québec à Montréal, and her research areas include contemporary and documentary photography, heritage, and photographic collections.



Cine Apollo, 2019

Bert Danckaert

Teatros
Galerie Laroche / Joncas, Montréal
11.01.2023 — 11.02.2023

Les séjours réguliers de Bert Danckaert à Cuba semblent avoir ouvert, dans son travail, une brèche qui se manifeste dans la récente série *Teatros* (2018–2022). Ses projets précédents ont tous pour point commun de collectionner des

fragments de vues urbaines en plans serrés. Il a presque traversé les cinq continents, autant pour ces prises de vue que pour leur diffusion.

À Montréal, après une première exposition individuelle en 2018 à la Galerie Laroche/Joncas, il récidive au même endroit avec *Teatros*. Ce corpus d'une vingtaine de tirages annonce des plans plus larges et des étendues plus vastes. Toujours collé aux murs de la cité, cette fois exclusivement à La Havane, Danckaert a ouvert sa focale, opéré un zoom arrière.

L'artiste belge n'est pas un touriste. Pas de séjour dans un complexe hôtelier, pas de plage, il ne court pas sur le Malecón. Flâneur, oui, il ausculte, frôle et fixe les murs, mais sans attrait particulier pour les bâtiments défraîchis, si caractéristiques de la cité havanaise. Sa quête n'est pas celle de la photographie de l'architecture coloniale espagnole.

Certainement repérée lors de précédents séjours, la série de façades de cinémas rassemblées dans *Teatros* démontre une vision resserrée sur un

seul sujet et néanmoins portée par un regard ample. Si ses plans sont toujours frontaux, ils s'élèvent, passant du fragment de ses séries antérieures à la grande surface. Le sujet *teatros* nourrit le rapport esthétique grâce à une assise sociale et politique.

Ces cinémas sont-ils préservés tels quels, abandonnés, réaffectés? Seules quelques présences humaines (inédités dans les photographies habituelles de l'artiste) soulignent leur possible changement de fonction, tout en préservant le mystère de leur attribution actuelle: des églises? – une croix l'indique dans une des photographies. Le propos n'est pas là. Et les façades de cinéma de Danckaert demeurent nues: aucune affiche de propagande politique.

Pourquoi et comment recycler un cinéma inexploité? En Occident, dans les années 1980 et 1990, de nombreuses grandes salles ferment. Les raisons sont multiples: le désaveu des publics, la fragmentation des habits de consommation culturelle, l'apparition des systèmes de cinéma maison et le coconnage émoissent l'expérience de la projection en collectif. Ces espaces – véritables paquebots – sont convertis en supermarchés ou en parcs de stationnement étagé. Les temples de la surconsommation se substituent aux fabriques de rêves.

Dans l'histoire de la photographie, bon nombre d'artistes ont porté leur regard sur les façades de cinéma, avec la frontalité comme angle privilégié. Nommons quatre exemples parmi d'autres.

À Montréal, durant un après-midi de novembre 1965, Melvin Charney photographie les façades des commerces le long du boulevard Saint-Laurent, entre la rue Sainte-Catherine et le boulevard René-Lévesque. Son diptyque devient historiquement emblématique. Parmi les devantures, le cinéma Crystal (plus



Cine Karl Marx, 2020

tard Eve) figure avec sa marquise proéminente.

Au travers des différentes façades et enseignes lumineuses captées à Montréal par Gabor Szilasi – la série *Rue Sainte-Catherine* (entre les rues Frontenac et de la Montagne), de 1979 –, on distingue avec surprise plusieurs salles de cinéma. Le Palace, le Loews (initialement Loew's Vaudeville Theatre), le Parisien... Elles pullulaient dans le centre-ville et dans les quartiers de

Montréal. Le compte Facebook *Les cinémas de Montréal* en recense un bon nombre, images d'époque à l'appui.

En 2006, lors d'un voyage de dix jours au Texas, Alex Soth réalise une série de trente-trois photographies intitulée *Theaters and a Funeral Home*. Enfin, de Stephen Shore, on relèvera une photographie emblématique du cinéparc Sunset: *West Ninth Avenue, Amarillo, Texas, October 2, 1974* (1974). Elle fait partie d'une série dont le titre, *American Surfaces*, fait écho au travail de Danckaert.

Les prises de vue frontales de façades de cinémas seraient-elles un sous-genre de la photographie?

Et à Cuba particulièrement, avec les œuvres de Danckaert, se pose une question: quel type de films présentaient ces cinémas sous les ères autoritaires de Batista, puis de Castro? Époques sous influence américaine, puis soviétique. Rien ne peut l'indiquer dans la série *Teatros*. Une façade de ces cinémas se détache toutefois de l'ensemble: celle qui déploie une fidèle reproduction à très grande échelle de la signature de Karl Marx. Il semble dans un parfait état. La composition rigide, avec ses carreaux de céramique bleue, apporte un certain rigorisme. Un décor qui, toutefois, ne trompe pas: de nos jours, pas de file d'attente sur le trottoir, les vitrines sont vides.

De tout temps, la fonction écranique des devantures des cinémas s'impose

en contraste, au milieu des bâtis environnants. L'architecture distinctive d'un cinéma à l'autre, fantaisiste, voire kitsch, évoque pour le quidam la promesse du dépaysement, de l'enchantement, de l'évasion, bref, de la distraction.

Ainsi, on peut avancer que cet « écran » extérieur avant l'autre (la toile des projections) agit comme une devanture aguicheuse, une accroche, une annonce de plongée en immersion. Les reliefs de la façade principale et les affiches des films jouent de pair, tels des préliminaires (un avant-avant-programme). Ce « premier » écran suscite le fantasme.

Dénudées dans les photographies de Danckaert, déshabillées de leurs appareils par le passage du temps, les façades de cinémas déshérités de La Havane se présentent à l'occasion comme de gigantesques stèles funéraires, de par leurs noms (Atlas, Lido, Apolo), leurs graphies, leurs reliefs datés. Au-delà de la recherche plastique propre à la démarche de son auteur, *Teatros* offre un travail de recension mémorielle – architecturale et patrimoniale. L'artiste, avec ses moyens habituels, retient ce qui ne peut complètement être conservé: monuments non désignés comme tels dans la ville, remembrances d'endoctrinement politique (?), souvenirs de sorties cinéma, réminiscences individuelles et collectives. Un geste capital.



Cine El Mégano, 2019

TOUTES LES IMAGES / ALL PHOTOS: épreuve pigments d'archives sur papier FineArt Hahnemühle satin / archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle FineArt Pearl paper



Cine Lido, 2018-2022

Artiste et commissaire d'exposition, **Emmanuel Galland** observe l'environnement physique et social tel un anthropologue. Il réalise des typologies qui traitent des contextes qu'il investit et des personnes qui y évoluent, allant du milieu de l'art contemporain à l'architecture vernaculaire ou aux objets du domestique, en passant par les marqueurs d'individualité.

Teatros

The Belgian artist Bert Danckaert's regular visits to Cuba seem to have created a new opening in his work, as can be seen in his recent series *Teatros* (2018–22). In his previous projects, he collected fragments of urban life in tight shots. He has gone almost around the world taking these pictures, and his work has been shown just as widely.

After a first solo exhibition in 2018 at Galerie Laroche/Joncas in Montreal, he returned to the gallery with *Teatros*, a corpus of some twenty prints that offer broader views and vaster expanses. Still focusing on city walls, this time exclusively in Havana, Danckaert has opened his lens and zoomed out.

Danckaert is no tourist. He doesn't stay in a nice hotel, go to the beach, or jog on the Malecón. He's a *flâneur*: he scrutinizes, brushes up against, and captures walls – with a particular penchant for buildings that have seen better days,

of which there are many in Havana. Spanish colonial architecture has nothing to do with his photographic quest.

The series of movie theatre façades presented in *Teatros*, no doubt spotted during previous stays, offers a narrowed focus on a single subject – but conveyed by a broad gaze. Although his shots are always frontal, the view rises, transitioning from the fragments in his previous series to the entire surface. The subject, teatros, nourishes an aesthetic relationship on a social and political foundation.

Are these theatres preserved as is, abandoned, reassigned? The rare human presence (unprecedented in Danckaert's photographs) underlines their possible change in function while preserving the mystery of their current purpose: perhaps churches, as a cross in one of the photographs indicates. That's not the point. Danckaert's theatre façades are naked: no political propaganda posters.

Why and how would an idle movie theatre be recycled? In the West, in the 1980s and 1990s, many large theatres closed. There were various reasons: audiences' lack of interest, the fragmentation of cultural consumption habits, the advent of home cinema systems, and cocooning obviated the experience of watching movies in a crowd. These spaces – once true luxuries – were converted into supermarkets or multilevel parking garages. Temples to overconsumption replaced dream-making factories.

In the history of photography, a good number of artists have cast their gaze on movie theatre façades, usually from a frontal angle. I'll take just four examples.

In Montreal, one afternoon in November 1965, Melvin Charney photographed the fronts of stores along St. Lawrence Boulevard between St. Catherine Street and Boulevard René-Lévesque (then Dorchester Boulevard). His diptych became historically emblematic. Among the storefronts, the Crystal Theatre (later the Eve) stands out with its prominent marquee.

In Gabor Szilasi's 1979 series *Rue Sainte-Catherine* (between Frontenac and de la Montagne streets in Montreal) capturing the different façades and neon signs lining the street, the number of movie theatres is surprising: the Palace, Loews (initially Loew's Vaudeville Theatre), the Parisien, and more. They proliferated downtown and in the city's neighbourhoods; the Facebook page *Les cinémas de Montréal* contains period photographs of many of them.

In 2006, during a ten-day road trip to Texas, Alex Soth produced a series of thirty-three photographs titled *Theaters and a Funeral Home*. Finally, there's Stephen Shore's emblematic photograph of the Sunset Drive-in: *West Ninth Avenue, Amarillo, Texas, October 2, 1974* (1974), which belongs to a series whose title, *American Surfaces*, is reminiscent of Danckaert's work.

Could frontal views of movie theatre façades form a photographic sub-genre?

One might wonder what types of films the Havanan movie theatres in Danckaert's works presented, under the authoritarian regimes of Batista and then Castro, in eras under American, then Soviet influence. Nothing in *Teatros* provides an answer. One façade stands out from the others, however: it displays a faithful reproduction, at a huge scale, of Karl Marx's signature. It seems to be in perfect condition. The stiff composition, with its blue ceramic tiles, gives a sense of rigorism. This setting gives no clues, though: no line of people waits on the sidewalk and the showcase windows are empty.

The "screen" function presented by the fronts of movie theatres always provides a contrast with the neighbouring buildings. The distinctive architecture from theatre to theatre – fanciful, even kitsch – unfailingly evokes the promise of a change of scene, enchantment, escape – in short, entertainment. So, one could propose that this outdoor "screen" in front of the other (the screen on which the movies are shown) acts as a teaser, a hook, an announcement of the immersive experience to come. The reliefs on the main façade and the movie posters act in tandem as preliminaries (a movie-trailer-before-the-trailer). This "first" screen encourages fantasy. In Danckaert's photographs, the façades of the dispossessed movie theatres in Havana, their finery stripped away by the passage of time, seem to be gigantic gravestones, with their dated names (Atlas, Lido, Apolo), graphics, and adornments.

Beyond the visual research in Danckaert's approach, *Teatros* offers a memory-related – architectural and patrimonial – inventory. Making use of his usual methods, Danckaert holds on to what cannot be completely conserved: monuments not designated as such in the city, recollections of political indoctrination perhaps, memories of outings to the movies, individual and community reminiscences. An important gesture.

Translated by Käthe Roth

Artist and exhibition curator **Emmanuel Galland** casts an anthropological gaze at the physical and social environment. He produces typologies for the contexts that he is involved with and the people who live there, ranging from the contemporary art scene to vernacular architecture and domestic objects, as well as markers of individuality.