

*‘Moving Histories: Heritage, Migration
& Storytelling’ - John McDougall*

In October 2014 a group of EU member states, including the United Kingdom under the advice of then Home Secretary Theresa May, stopped financial support for Operation Mare Nostrum. The Italian-led search and rescue operation was replaced by Triton, an operation delegated to the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders, otherwise known as Frontex. As border control agents, Frontex are designated to control so-called “irregular migration,” with a focus on the solidification of the EU’s outer borders, and as such the humanitarian efforts carried out by Mare Nostrum were minimized under the new plan.

In just under four years since then, upwards of twenty thousand men, women, and children have lost their lives attempting to cross the Mediterranean. Many more are missing. Given Lightwaves’ themes of heritage and migration it is hard to ignore this fact – not merely because of the horror that comes with analyzing these numbers, but also because of the shifts in political and social languages which have developed around them.

The UK’s Brexit dilemma has brought this even more strongly to mind, with conversations about who we are or what it means to belong somewhere becoming fractured and contentious. In Québec, a strong sense of national identity within a larger state has its own misappropriations and controversies.

At times like these it is often artists who provide us with insight, their visual approach allowing us to think beyond the buzzwords and catchphrases of everyday analysis. Photographers, with their particular sense of responsibility to the stories they tell, can often open up a space far beyond the personal and intimate realities of the subjects they portray. Exchanges such as Lightwaves offer the opportunity to explore these realities in a new way for the artist, to explore new ground, to translate the world of strangers through their own eyes. Brought together by exchange residencies involving dialogue in words and images, the stories told by Josée Pednault, Melanie Letoré, Bertrand Carrière, and Mat Hay explore ideas of heritage and migration with separate voices but through shared grounds.

Josée Pednault, drawing on past work and thought processes, finds that her own journey in search of an imagined island creates an empathy for the stories of islands and their inhabitants. Upon arrival in Scotland she found herself drawn to St. Kilda, whose evacuation of its human population in the 1930s due to food shortages and disease is echoed in today’s tales of migration. At the same time, she met a fisherman from Somalia who has been forced to seek asylum in Glasgow.

By developing a project in which the histories, journeys, and mythologies of St. Kilda are intertwined with those of her friend in Glasgow and her own continued search, Josée seeks to highlight the entanglement of natural resources and human movement which runs through each strand of the tale.

This layering of narratives is also key to the work of Bertrand Carrière, playing on notions of memory, place, and time. Bertrand’s work takes as its starting point his first visit to Scotland in 1977, when as a twenty-year-old aspiring musician and photographer he hitchhiked

around the UK, deliberately avoiding Glasgow due to warnings about its reputation for violence. “Don’t go to Glasgow,” he was told, and he didn’t.

Speaking at Street Level on his last day in Glasgow, he spoke of his admiration for the work of Paul Strand, and that inspiration is clear in his bringing together the studied portraits of his sitters, the street scenes in and around Glasgow, and the distant landscapes which punctuate his explorations outside of the city. With images newly printed from his 1977 visit to Scotland, Carrière manages to encapsulate a sense of the unknown, the hopefulness bound up with uncertainty that comes with any young person’s thoughts on the future.

Melanie Letoré visited Québec on a more tangible journey of self-exploration. Having grown up in Geneva, a city inhabited by the United Nations, the Red Cross, and CERN – initiatives embodying the very ideal of international collaboration – Melanie seeks to untangle complicated threads of cultural identity. Her grandparents’ migration from North America to Europe in the 1950s came with its own traumatic experiences, adding another layer to her search for identity.

Melanie depicts the world around her with a thoughtful understanding connecting everyday events in ways which are surprising and revealing. The exchange has allowed her to hone this skill into something more relaxed and confident about the ever-unfolding stories around her.

Mat Hay, whose exploration of place is evident in previous projects, brings his painstaking approach to research to the fore. Creating graphic interpretations of the historical maps, graphs, and charts which formed the basis of his preparation for travelling to Québec and utilizing them as overlays upon his images, he produces a flattening of time and space which recognizes the depth of history and human movement which has formed of our environments, social structures, and everything that comes with them.

Observing the tools and infrastructures created for and by our movements while at the same time recording his own small part of that exploratory instinct, Mat gives the viewer space to think about how for the duration of our existence on earth humankind has naturally migrated.

Each photographer in the exhibition is in some way touched by their own history of migration, whether it was ancestors risking life and limb to find a better life or contemporaries seeking to explore their own stories and heritage. The personal aspect of their journey, facilitated by this partnership between Street Level Photoworks and VU Photo, has given them the opportunity to add their own small part of the story to the wider canon of tales which makes up human history. Their projects remind us that current migratory routes cannot be separated from those which have formed the very nations and cultures which seek to close off access to them, to divide despite a heritage that is undeniably shared through centuries of movement.

The resulting exhibition becomes a space for thought, without the forced direction and deliberate misdirection we face on a daily basis through political soundbites and social media controversies. We are offered the luxury of time – time to look, and hopefully to understand our own place in time and space a little more deeply.

John McDougall, August 2018.

*‘The Cradle of Fog’
A Voyage to Where
Images Disappear’*

Preamble

Seeing as the subject here is a residency, let’s erase its walls – walls erected between the territories of Québec and Scotland. Let’s transform them into bridges and anchor points, promises of exploration, promises of connection within another image.

I don’t intend to describe here the actions and ways of seeing proposed by Bertrand Carrière, Mat Hay, Melanie Letoré, and Josée Pednault: doing so would run the risk of reducing the residency to the four walls that contain it. Rather, I aim to leave the creative process open, to focus on the invisible, so that each image might open up time and space, might make way for a new room, a room to explore and stay in for a while, as guests invited to navigate through the fog.

Day Minus-One

Having two homes / Avoir deux “chez-soi”²

He hadn’t told anyone about his fear of flying over the ocean. He didn’t know what to pack – something light, so the plane wouldn’t be too heavy, so it wouldn’t crash. He wanted to rid his eyes and actions of their usual habits, of everything from his part of the world. He decided to buy a toothbrush on this side of the ocean. In the mirror, on this other side of another morning, his entire way of seeing would be changed. He would perceive everything differently, even his toothbrush and toothpaste.

Day Zero

All the same, after packing some clothes and a raincoat, he made his escape – from his mirror, from his apartment, from his room, from the darkroom, from the wind slamming the door abruptly behind him.

Day One

The first image to share is simply the view . . . taken on the first morning of the residency.³

He arrives with the morning fog. After the air conditioning of the plane, it tastes salty, like the sea. “Conditional air,” he thinks, opening mouth and nostrils wide, inhaling a lungful of it in one deep, reconditioned breath.

“I’d like to capture this breath.” He knows this goal to be impossible, and promises to photograph the fog every morning, to bring it into contact with his lens, to introduce them to each other like morning-after strangers waking up to pronounce each other’s names for the first time. Later, the fog begins to disperse, revealing the outline of surrounding buildings in vertical stutters, to the rhythm of the passing trains.

On entering his room, his gaze falls on the empty table against the wall. A promise of photographs appears in his mind’s eye, photographs cut into time-based stencils, prisons of moments now left to drift, compassless. Jet lag has gotten the better of his sense of time.

¹ The title is borrowed from Homer’s Odyssey, II, 1.

² Melanie Letoré, “Week 2–Back in Geneva,” Photodialogues blog August 29, 2017, photodialogues.net/week-2-back-in-geneva

³ Mat Hay, “Bonjour Québec!,” Photodialogues blog April 6, 2018, photodialogues.net/bonjour-quebec

Claire Moeder

Day Three

*This morning, for a few minutes,
I couldn’t see the mountains north-east of Québec from my window.⁴*

Every morning, the fog comes to visit. For their daily meeting, he offers it a makeshift tarp and a bit of window, pressing his lens up against it, both demanding and timid, self-effacing and acquiescent. Here, he has found a routine that truly destabilizes him, a viewpoint from which his subject will never seem the same. He sometimes thinks of the light on the other side of the Atlantic, and everything he has been taught: the settings, the strong eye, the footsteps in the studio, the anxiety of development. Here, his eye never rests, a wanderer in the all-consuming mist, a constant witness, out of the frame and overexposed to what it observes. He listens, unable to distinguish every word, circumnavigate every space, plot out every street, point to every horizon. Sometimes, it’s enough to make his head spin.

Day Seven

Most of the time, I don’t feel the need to be truthful in regard to the image, its date, place, context, or even its natural colours.⁵

The sky hasn’t shown its face today. It has crushed the earth down flat, and has to watch its step and try not to damage it. His camera feels like a foreign body in a grafted-on country.

Day Ten

*I have to get rid of every trace of exoticism, and just keep those images that are enigmatic.
Only then can I draw the project in closer to myself.⁶*

The table is inhabited, the rectangular images gathered on its surface threading themselves into a pearl necklace, into piles, into busy mounds of time and place, leaving walls behind. His gaze finalizes the four corners, then wanders to the window. Through it, he can make out the fog, the fog that lives in the night. He packs up the table’s contents, his eye encircling each image. He thinks of his first breath of fog, and the mechanics of time. The table watches him, the vise of time becoming photographic, tracing out the borders of a named country onto a nameless map, a country whose street names make the tongue twist and turn.

Day Fifteen

To board again, the images must be imprisoned. Along the edges, out of the frame, times lives on: the time of the other, backwards and counterclockwise, marching through the mist, from the other side of the world. Every day, he had followed it through the streets, like one follows a stranger’s silhouette. And then, in the wee hours, they would meet again, like accomplices whose names can only be whispered.

Claire Moeder, August 2018

⁴ Melanie Letoré, “Québec Day 24,” Photodialogues blog October 23, 2017, photodialogues.net/quebec-day-22

⁵ Josée Pednault, “Day 10–Photo vérité,” Photodialogues blog August 22, 2017, photodialogues.net/day-10-photo-verite

⁶ Bertrand Carrière, “Et à la fin . . .,” Photodialogues blog June 30, 2018, photodialogues.net/et-a-la-fin



Lightwaves is an exchange residency between Street Level Photoworks in Glasgow and VU Photography Centre in Quebec City. New work made by the contemporary photo-based residency artists has resulted in two parallel exhibitions: *Lightwaves* at Street Level Photoworks and *Ondes lumineuses* at VU. Working around themes of heritage and migration, the two artists from Quebec and their counterparts in Scotland have developed new work in response to their stay in each respective city and the dialogue that emerged both during and after their residencies.

Claire Moeder is an author and a curator who supports artists with writing and editing projects based in Montreal and Gaspé Peninsula.

John McDougall is a writer, curator, and photographer based in Glasgow.

The project has an online blog which includes commentary on the process:
PhotoDialogues / www.photodialogues.net

Image Captions

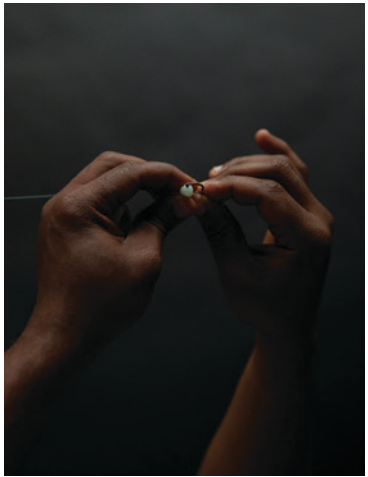
- Josée Pednault and Nasir S, 2017
- Calum Shaw, 23, delivery man, Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow
- Rachel Byrne, 26, photographer, Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow
- Joanne Lee, 20, Art student at GSA, Bus stop at Robroyston
- Anna McLaughlin, 21, graduate in psychology, Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow
- David Kaszmarski, 23, born in Poland, On the ferry from Arran Island
- Sofie Keller, 22, Photography student at GSA, from Copenhagen, Rupert Street, Glasgow
- Emma Hillcoat, 20, works in a supermarket, Paisley
- Lee Ferguson, 20, Mix martial arts fighter, Glasgow

Season of Photography 2018
Featured as part of the
Season of Photography 2018
www.photo-networks.scot

Street Level Photoworks
Trongate 103, Glasgow G1 5HD
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‘Badda means the Sea’



In her installation *Badda means the Sea*, Josée Pednault, narrates the memories of Nasir S., a fisherman and free diver who left a Somali island for a new beginning in Scotland. His grandiose stories which evoke mythology became a springboard for this work, which reflects on how modes of memory are tactical forms of survival.

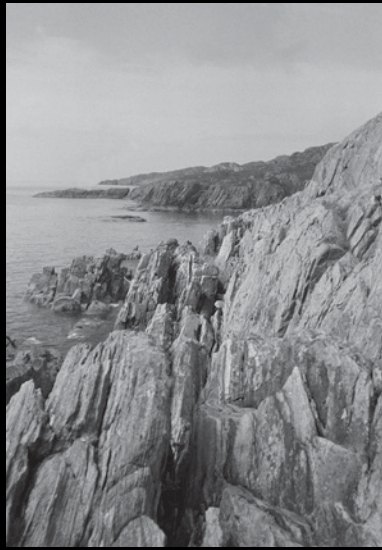


Josée Pednault is a visual artist living and working in Montreal. Her work has been shown in national and international venues, such as CONTACT Gallery (Toronto, 2015), TYPOLOGY (Toronto, 2015), Museo del Chopo (Mexico City, 2014), and Darling Foundry (Montréal 2012). She is currently on a one-year residency program at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, where she will be presenting the solo exhibition *Glazial-Cosmogonie*.

Québec > Glasgow

August 2017

Josée Pednault



Bertrand Carrière is a photographer and video artist who lives and works in Longueuil, Quebec. Carrière's work is included in numerous collections such as The National Gallery of Canada. He is presently artist in residence at the Cinémaèque québécoise in Montreal with an upcoming exhibit there. He teaches photography in Sherbrooke and holds a master degree in communication arts from l'Université du Québec.

Québec > Glasgow

June 2018

Bertrand Carrière

‘Don’t go to Glasgow!’



Bertrand Carrière's work explores what it means to be from somewhere through the eyes of young people. His expansive series of portraits include young men and women of, or around, 20 years of age, the same age Carrière was when he first visited Scotland 41 years ago. In the series he fuses history and present time, giving a sense of place with a poetical perspective, a quest to find some kind of an origin and the sentiment of belonging.



Melanie Letoré



Melanie Letoré graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in 2014 with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art Photography. Melanie was selected for The Skinny Showcase, Futureproof, and Pingyao International Photography Festival, and has since showcased her work nationally and internationally. She has written for The Common Guild, The Skinny and Young Artists in Conversation, and is currently on the editorial board of NOTES Journal. Melanie lives and works in Glasgow.

Glasgow > Québec

September 2017



‘No You Without’



In *No You Without*, Melanie Letoré takes as its starting point inherited familial histories of migration to explore questions around belonging and attachment to place. Photographs of anonymous people and broken things hint to unnamed tensions, which reflect the process of identity-building when one doesn't quite yet know "home".



Mat Hay's main area of interest and exploration during this residency has been human migration into and across Canada. Sourcing maps and charts, his work explores the causes and results of movements of people, with the photographs observing the relationships that people have with their environment, marks on the landscape and the architecture of industry, religion, and culture.



Mat Hay is a Scottish fine art and commercial photographer, originally from Edinburgh, now working across the U.K., Europe, and North America. After receiving a BA(Hons) in Photography and Film from Edinburgh Napier University in 2013, Hay spent several years in London developing his practice while working for a number of acclaimed and internationally recognized artists and brands. Since then his personal and commercial work has continued to be exhibited internationally.

Glasgow > Québec

April 2018

Mat Hay