

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

SEP 25

Current Feature: Annette Lemieux

FEATURES



Bad Habits © Annette Lemieux

Interview with Steve Miller and Annette Lemieux from Issue 17. Enigma

STEVE MILLER: In the work of Sally Gall and the *Glow Series* by Andrea Blanch that is in the same issue of this magazine called Enigma, you don't necessarily have to know their work...the enigma for me in their work is to figure out exactly what you're seeing. Their images are abstract enough to mess with your knowledge of the lens capturing something about which you're not sure of. In your work the image is clear, the enigma is in deciphering the meaning. For example, at your last show at Kent Fine Art there was a work entitled *Hellos and Goodbyes*, 1994 - a wall of twenty-two hands in separate frames presumably waving. Eleven were positive images, and the other Eleven were the negative version of the same image. My question is what are you greeting?

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ANNETTE LEMIEUX: First of all, I always think my work is very clear. It's clear to me, apparently maybe not so clear to the viewer, and that always puzzles me...because I think I'm very clear. But, is the point to be clear at all? With *Hello and Goodbyes* you use the word 'greeting,' someone waving to someone. For me it was *that*, but it was also grieving in the end...the goodbye. 'Greeting' and 'grieving' I guess. It was a hello and a goodbye to something or someone. There's no enigma there, I thought.



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Mon Amour, 1987 © Annette Lemieux

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SM: Well there is. The enigma is that you do have to decipher it. Because the next question is what were the sources of the hands waving?

AL: Many sources, from many books actually. My life was informed by the news and picture books, places that I was never physically at. They're from all over the place. They're from Nazi Germany, from U.S cocktail parties, from political rallies, etc., etc.

SM: They are displayed generally in an oval. How do you come up with the straight line, vertical, the grouping...how did that happen?

AL: That was intuitive. You say an oval I say a cross.

SM: See, this is the enigma. You're giving some clarity. This piece preceded Left Right Left Right from 1995 that's currently on view at the Whitney. Is that correct?

AL: Yes

SM: The Whitney exhibition was about portraits. Did you conceive that particular piece Left Right Left Right as a portrait?

AL: At that time it was my observation of what was going on during the election in 1996. During the debates, observing the opposites.

SM: So it's like the portrait of a moment or a portrait of a time?

AL: Exactly.

SM: What was the communication between you and the Whitney that led you to invert the images for the current display.

*AL: Well, I woke up on November 9th at about 4:30 in the morning and checked out the news. I was horrified that Trump was now my president. My world just went upside down. I thought that my work *Left Right Left Right* that was installed in the Whitney's *Human Interest* exhibition didn't make any sense anymore. The piece was a celebration of protest or opposition, but that morning I and it felt defeated. So I went into school to teach that morning and all my students came in dragging their feet, they were in mourning too. There was not going to be any kind of regular class that day. So I said to them, why don't we all go into the seminar room and wait for Hillary Clinton to concede. So we did. While we were waiting for her to come on, I shared the thought with my students that I had that morning. I showed them *Left Right Left Right* and asked them what did they think of the idea to request that my work be turned upside down? They unambiguously said, go for it.*

So I emailed the curator Scott Rothkopf at the Whitney and asked if he would consider doing this. He got back to me right away, that he had discussed it with the Director Adam Weinberg and Adam said something like - yes we're the museum for artists. Yes, we can do this. And so

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the next Tuesday when the museum was closed that's when they flipped the work. When the



Hello and Goodbyes © Annette Lemieux

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SM: And that was a great idea for a protest, I thought it was a really effective gesture and the first wave of artists making strong statements about the election so I thought it was a beautiful gesture.

AL: It was really from my gut.

SM: You were once described as a minimalist with an ax to grind - your clean presentation and your inscrutable assemblage of a complex reality certainly is relevant to the current situation. You are mixing politics, art history, misogyny, popular culture and the leveling of hierarchies. I know you're not going to spell it out for me but am I close?

AL: You are close.

SM: Duchamp plays a big role in your 2015 exhibition at Kent Fine Art as well as Guston.

*AL: Yes, there is one photo work that refers to Guston's painting, *Painting, Smoking, Eating* from 1977. But the exhibition was influenced more with Duchamp and Man Ray's collaborations. *Fumé*, the other image of me smoking is after Man Ray's portrait of Lee Miller, it's the same exact pose. And the photo work, *Duchamp Erased*, is actually that. I manipulated the four Man Ray portraits of Duchamp by erasing Duchamp's image, leaving only the backcloth that Duchamp was photographed in front of.*

SM: Each image in that particular show seems like the piece of a larger puzzle. When I first came to New York in the 70s Duchamp was the name of the game. We were talking about conceptual art, a lot of people were.... I think the Pictures Generation has a lot to do with grabbing readymades in a sense.

AL: Well art has always grabbed at something that came before.

SM: With the rise of commercial art fairs, good looking (over conceptual) seems to be the name of the game

AL: Yeah, big red and shiny. I don't have the production resources other artists have, if I did, who knows what could happen.