

GALLERIES



Gilbert Garcin's La persévérance - Perseverance

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Gilbert Garcin: "Mister G." Marseilles-based photographer may be an old dog, but, as his current Stephen Bulger Gallery exhibit proves, he doesn't need new tricks

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BY DAVID BALZER September 01, 2010 15:09

EDITORIAL RATING: To Sept. 25. Tuesdays-Saturdays, 11am-6pm. Stephen Bulger Gallery, 1026 Queen W. 416-504-0575. www.bulgergallery.com

Toronto gallery-goers will be familiar with the lively, bittersweet photocollage work of Marseilles-based Gilbert Garcin, which was shown as part of CONTACT several years ago. It hasn't evolved, really, but that's a moot point for an artist of 81 years who only began his career in his 60s after retiring from his job as a lamp-maker. This is not to be ageist, but to say, rather, that Garcin's vision is assured in its disassociation from trends: he is interested in universals, and his inspirations, mostly modernist, speak broadly and authentically, and thus have stood the test of time.



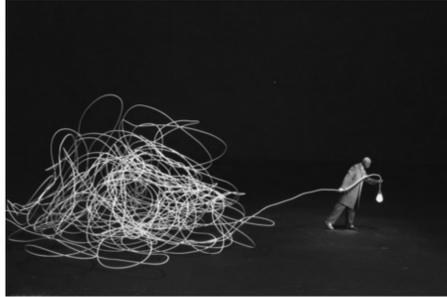
Le coeur de la cible - Bull's eye

Garcin's work inevitably summons Magritte: in each black-and-white photo, Garcin plays an everyman in an overcoat who discovers visual puns and existential allegories within surrealist landscapes. The sensibility is intellectual-comedic, and thoroughly French. There are other influences, all stemming from Magrittean things, from silent film comedians (Keaton, Chaplin, Lloyd, and also their successor, director-performer Jacques Tati), to absurdist playwrights (Beckett, Ionesco, Jarry) and novelists (Gogol, Kafka), to French semioticians, post-structuralists and deconstructionists (De Saussure, Robbe-Grillet, Derrida).



Au musée - At the museum

The work is thus a mix of the jovial and the brainy; in all, it's quite accessible. Many standouts in the show, entitled "Mister G.," recall Mr. Bean in their satirizing of museums, galleries and artists. In 'Regard sur la peinture contemporaine - Looking at contemporary painting', from 2005, Garcin stands on a ladder in the foreground in a beach behind him, facing the viewer, and is caught in the act of painting half the image black. In 'La vie d'artiste - An Artist's Life', from 2007, he draws a line down the middle of the page, and dangles from it, as if from the tab of a zipper. In 'L'indifférent - The indifferent', from 2006, he walks past an enlarged version of Courbet's notorious, myopic vagina painting 'L'Origine du monde' without looking. When acting, Garcin's figure seeks to subvert the expectations of our gaze; when passive, it draws attention to, or often becomes a victim of, that gaze's penchant for the classical and symmetrical.



Diogène ou la lucidité - Diogenes or lucidity

There is a preciousness to what Garcin does that can annoy: many of these images would work well on t-shirts, mugs or greeting cards. But it's precisely that blunt, aphoristic quality that can also be so affecting. In the very Beckettian 'La Persévérance - Perseverance', Garcin builds a walkway for a woman (his opposite-sex analogue, who sometimes appears beside him in the images, and his real-life wife) with increasingly skinny supports. It's poignant not only because of what it says about long-term relationships, but also because of how it connects them to what we so often want from art: a striving, however futile, towards resolution, which satisfies in ways that the resolution itself simply cannot.

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