

Modern photos recall bygone era in photography

By Alison Gillmor
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MONTREAL-BASED artist Bertrand Carriere offers black-and-white photographic observations on travelling. The works are technically and esthetically good, with the kind of craft and authority that calls up earlier matters of photography like French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson.

These art-historical references seem quite deliberate, at times almost stagy. Carriere does not use his camera to document truth (a concept in which the artist has very little faith), but to look at the way cameras have been historically used to create "truths."

So his work, though done in the last few years, somehow manages to look like European photography of the '30s and '40s — and calls up a strange nostalgic mood redolent of cafe life, existentialism and displaced people.

Carriere pictures Eastern Europe, Ireland and Cuba, but these settings (except for their strange timelessness) are in some way incidental. He is not interested in sublime nature or important monu-

REVIEW

Bertrand Carriere: Recent Work, The Floating Gallery, 218-100 Arthur St., until August 18.

ments — the obvious destinations of the tourist.

He is intrigued more by the journey itself, and his photos are more likely to describe weary men in train compartments or solitary pedestrians on dreary walled streets.

Like a good neo-existentialist, Carriere sees no beginnings or ends, only journeyings. In his work, the traveller becomes a sign for the necessarily lonely search for self and meaning.

There is a strong sense of alienation in Carriere's art. Almost every photo contains a human presence, but only rarely do we see a subject confronting the camera, and thus the viewer, head-on.

More often an anonymous person scurries by unknowing; an elongated shadow looms into the picture-frame; the body is cut off sharply at the neck; or the subject is shot from the back.

Perhaps the most graphic demonstration of this facelessness is a photo shot from below of a man (or

perhaps a woman) on an escalator. The head is sunk so far down it can't be seen, and there is an uncanny feeling that a disembodied coat is riding up from the Paris Metro.

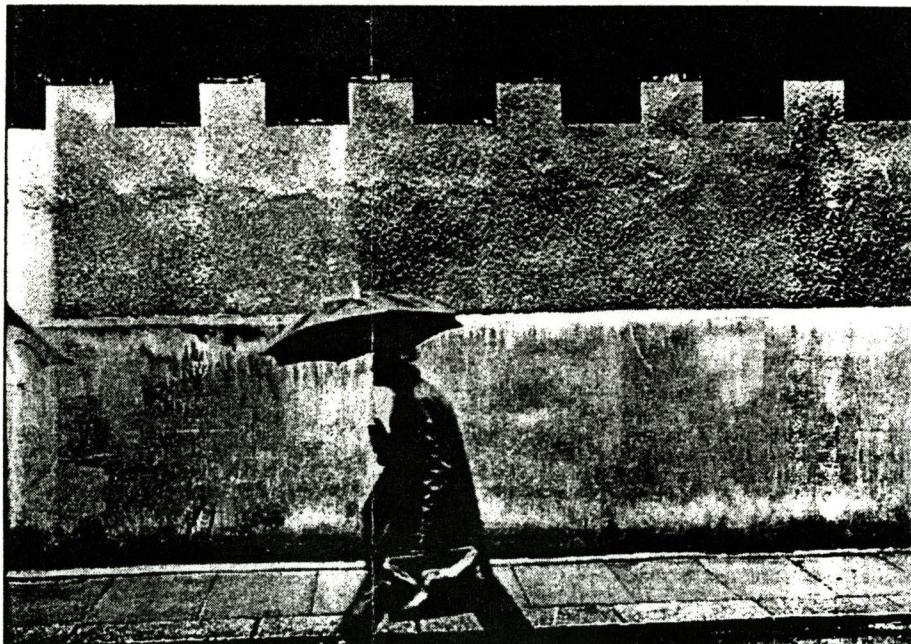
Carriere is good at evoking the strange absurdities of urban life. A shot from Havana depicts a man, standing amid rubble and garbage, looking into a mirror, fixing his hair with careful vanity.

A photograph taken in Prague before the break-up of the Eastern Block shows a hunched man walking quickly past a wall covered with the scrawled message "Destroy me or save me."

Only the fact that the graffiti is written in English (with a typically post-modern eye for the global media) lifts this shot out of Carriere's strangely timeless limbo.

Carriere also offers some very straight observations of the natural beauty of Ireland — the sea breaking on the shore, hills wreathed in damp clouds.

But he can't resist undercutting the conventions of gorgeous tourist places. One shot features sublime cliffs and the endless sea, broken up by the obtrusive back of a solid woman covered in a transparent plastic hat and coat.



Carriere's pictures focus on the journey itself, rather than the destination.