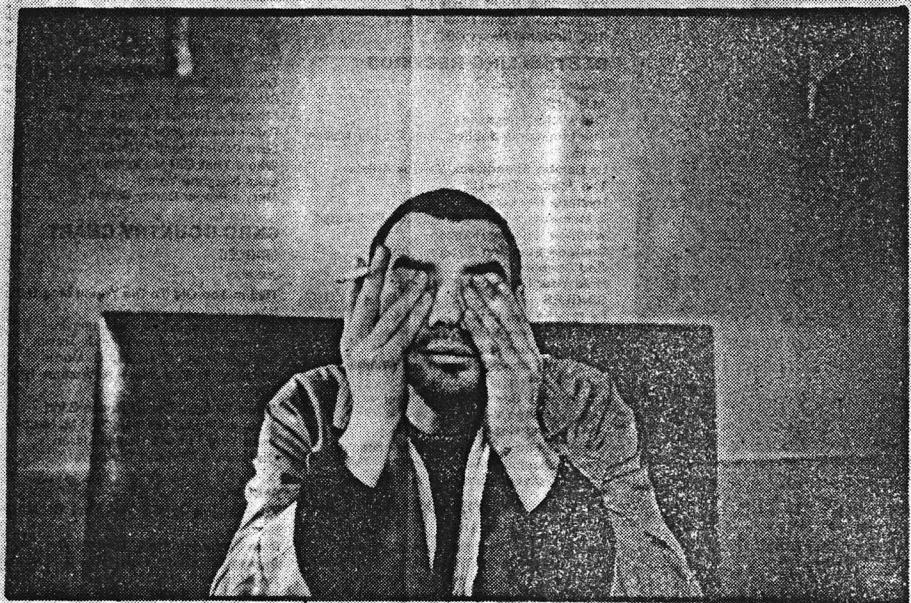


Galleries at a glance

Carriere exhibit blends journalism, personal journal

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This untitled photo forms part of Bertrand Carriere's exhibit, *Carnet d'Absences*.

Carnet d'Absences marriage of photographs, text

By Randal McIlroy

If autumn is truly a time of reflection, then *Carnet d'Absences* by Bertrand Carriere could arrive in Winnipeg at no better time.

A profoundly touching marriage of photographs and text, the exhibition is an eloquent, autumnal story of longing (the title translates crudely as *Notebook Of Absence*). As narrator and observer, Carriere is torn between wanting to be home in Quebec with Josee, the woman he loves, and wanting just as much to follow his work as a photojournalist based in Paris.

Melancholy

The world keeps turning, as it has a habit of doing in the most melancholy of times, and work calls, but events and feelings dishearten him until he reconciles his conflicting needs.

Carnet d'Absences is both journalism and a personal journal, as such inevitably inconsistent in subject matter, approach, and even artistic considerations, but shaped and informed by the soul of the artist. For virtually every image there's a written passage, either a journal entry or a fragment of correspondence. The matting is studded with little souvenirs of travel — an air mail envelope, a baggage ticket, a local newspaper headline.

One step

The actual journalism is one step removed from reportage to become an ironic and perhaps cynical report on the reporters. So, for example, a picture of Pierre Trudeau meeting Francois Mitterand is actually a study of the press of press people against them. (His photographs of Cyprus eschew direct reportage for a different reason: various military authorities warned him he'd be in dire circumstances if he tried.)

REVIEW

Bertrand Carriere, *Carnet d'Absences*, The Floating Gallery, Room 218, 100 Arthur Street, to Oct. 24.

After reading the ruminative text it's all too tempting to see deeper emotions where they perhaps were not intended. One setting pairs one scene of a man waiting alone in a railway station, and a couple kissing on a public bench. Is Carriere musing on his own solitude or is he showing the love and loneliness that live together in the world?

Ultimately, it doesn't matter, because the care and thought that went into the story — and Carriere is a wonderful storyteller — elevate it above such concerns. The beauty and simplicity of his portraits prove his compassion for others. His images of Parisien street accordionists and Cypriot soldiers off-duty work better than travelogues.

He's never maudlin, and though he seems unconcerned with compositional cleverness, he is not without wit. For example, a picture of gendarmes in formation by the Arc du Triomphe is slightly off balance,

which slyly and quietly transforms officiousness into something comic.

Moreover, when he does delve into matters of the heart he does so with an astuteness that shames legions of poets. In describing the first awkward days after he reunites in France with Josee, he pictures her in a pensive mood while, unseen, a youth attempts to scale a brick wall — as if to say that lovers persist in their struggle, despite the many walking wounded.

Fly home

His memory of leaving friends to fly home is told in a simple, striking quintet of images that are basic but powerful. The waning correspondence between two increasingly distanced people talking only via post is represented by a curious, elderly woman peering dubiously through a hole in a wall.

Although *Carnet d'Absences* is complete in itself, the potential for expansion is there, in a slide show or a novel ("I'll never be a writer," he records, but don't let him fool you.). If this is a true story, let's hope he finds the heart to create more work as beautiful as this, and soon.