

Désires and ideas: one influences and inspires the other, their seeming contradictions excite. Doubling and dichotomy characterize "Desirs - Idées": a photographic project in book-object and mural forms by John Di Stefano. Intimate and emblematic, private and public, "Desirs - Idées" is at the same time an evocation and an examination of male erotic desire.

Di Stefano's photographic process involves compilation and layering: negative upon negative; image upon image; episode upon episode, constructing onto the surface of the photographic plane the complex perceptions of a given experience. Each work can be seen as a segment pastiche of the author/subject/spectator's mind. Any one reading, one circumstance or one instance of temporal experience is denied. The story line builds in layers of incidents and subsequent feelings, echoing and contradictory like the gestation of idea and the waves of desire.

Each individual "story" is cut, sequentially or spatially from the larger piece and the project as a whole. This practice of photo "collage" - the contextualization and recontextualization of each image fragment, between each layer and within each individual piece, continuing into the next frame through juxtaposition - suggests other narrative possibilities. It prevents narrative closure, supporting the notion of accumulative experience and context over the more traditional linearly/historically determined summary. This reconsideration of narrative form favouring spacial development over the more traditional linear development is a better ground for alternate interpretation which in turn liberates plots and roles, especially gender and sexual roles. Endings become beginnings and beginnings end through the presentation and re-presentation of alternative paths.

"The history of a man is his solitude" is the story of Narcissus in allegory. Here the primary level imagery pictures a male torso seen from the back. Through the next two collages his gestures evolve - head bowed in reflection evolves into, what seems to be a painful awakening. Smaller secondary imagery: a male figure running away; fainter ghosts of grimacing faces on outstretched bodies; and layers of non-descript fabric, light and shadow, serve to both embellish each narrative with references to the psychological state of the primary level

characters and expand on each with further characterization and drama.

Here we have Narcissus, not in love with himself but his reflection. The secondary imagery pictures the intangible, untouchable, unattainable ghosts that are simultaneously his self and his other. At the same time passive and active, exhibitionist and voyeur our mythical figure looks to himself as other, with a desire for knowledge. But his socially constructed maleness - his austere solitude - and his existential condition prohibits any real discovery. Male is the martyr-saint and Male is the mythological god on the walls of the Canadian Cultural Centre in Rome for the exhibition in collaboration with Studio E. Di Stefano's murals mimic the (fresco) epic narrative form. Like a banner or billboard the works announce/confirm the idea of masculinity. In this giant production maleness is both parodied and revealed. The viewer must stand at a distance to see the works in their entirety. Doing so not only painfully acknowledges their/our inability to "get close" to know/touch male but confirms their/our tendency to revere.

Defering to desire Di Stefano's book-object/box works invite touch and intimacy. This further fragmented image surface abstracts the content; ruptures the linear movement of conventional narrative evolution and further extends the narrative in space rather than by way of temporal/chronological evolution.

The objects sectioned in microcosm inspire sensual simile with the macrocosm. Detailed shadows and highlights deny their original perceptual function. They no longer describe perspective and emotional intensity. This abstraction serves tactile gratification. Isolated gestures offer erotic pleasure that is compounded on the advent of the boxes unfolding and refolding, but the dichotomies continue creating a state of reception of ambivalence moving toward frustration.

On pulpits the photographic book-box works move, undulate, snake across the surface inviting, even demanding touch and involvement. Although the frame has changed and the neo-narrative form claims to accommodate the acquisition of "truth" beyond convention, the story of Male is still the same (if not opened up). It is about the solitudes and dichotomies of desire and idea.

Cheryl Simon (Montreal 1988)