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Geneviève
Cadieux

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From your very first sight of it, it shocks, it draws you irresistibly. The effect is immediate: it calls you, the force of its fleshlike presence has created an uneasy feeling in you. But your eyes can no longer tear themselves away, and you must come nearer. Little by little, as you step forward, your astonishment gives way to fascination. You continue to observe it, but in a more curious, more objective way; you so clearly perceive the complexion, the corner of the lips, the grain of the skin... Are you already too close?

It is time to stop and wonder why this work by Geneviève Cadieux, *La Fêlure, au choeur des corps*, nearly always produces this same captivating effect. Let us go back to the beginning, then. Let us imagine you have noticed this work among others in an exhibition gallery.

TOO BIG AND TOO CLOSE

Usually, it is small works that invite us to approach them. Why, then, doesn't this large photograph prompt you to step back? Look at this giant image, of almost incredible precision. See this enlarged detail, this blowup, which can easily be recognized from afar. It enjoys the brilliance of the advertising image which, in its technical perfection, can manage without proximity. What urge impels you to observe it from close up? Why, from the first impression, is your own body so forcefully involved?

ATTRACTION AND REPULSION

Your reaction may be very emotional. This is natural, since everything is amplified and magnified in Geneviève Cadieux's work. Anatomical details are enlarged, presented as if under a magnifying glass. The fragment becomes monumental, out of all proportion.

Here you can observe these hairs, one by one, and there, the density of this beard, of this head of hair and, over there, that scar, those lines, those wrinkles. Already the image is becoming unsettling, and it would not be surprising if you thought, standing before these photographs, that jubilation can soon turn to repulsion.

THE HAUNTING PRESENCE OF THE BODY

Let us say for the moment, about the enlarged detail as used by Geneviève Cadieux, that, while it quickly creates a fascination, it inevitably gives rise to an uneasiness. And if you suddenly realize that this body fragment which seemed sensual can, at the same time, be repugnant to you, it may be because you see in it the effects of time, the signs of wear, which often provoke a rejection. A good two centuries ago, classical painting thought of containing this dizzying sense of aging: it was recommended that artists not depict the lines and ravages of time on the skin, so as not to distress viewers with the vision of decrepitude, which leads to the idea of the destruction of the body.



Geneviève Cadieux, *La Filure, au cœur des corps*, 1990, photographic colour print, 228 x 662 cm
Coll.: Musée du Québec. Photo: Louis Lussier

BLUE FEAR. REAL FEAR, BLUE FEAR, IS THE FEAR OF DYING.

In *Blue Fear*, the superimposing of two images can put you in an uncomfortable position. You just have to come close to the work to feel yourself in the place of this man seen from behind, this man in front of the colossal blue gaze; you are transported into the photograph, inside its frame. But as soon as you approach, you would like to draw back to benefit from both a psychological and a physical distance.

THE DIVIDED BODY

Eyes, a mouth, a head seen from behind, a partially obliterated face, a long scar on the skin — isolated fragments, separate from the

body. The framing of the image splits the body, divides it. Geneviève Cadieux's photographs appeal first to our senses, hence their initial impact. Then they muddle those same senses, they twist them, and the body parts become interchangeable. The lips of a wound are like a gaping mouth, the sutured cut, like closed eyelids, the wide-open eyes, of the colour of the sky, like bruises on the skin, a scar, like the lips of a woman's genitals...

Here you are, before the corner of the eyes, of the mouth, before the join of two parts of the body. But which two parts? The image shows you the physical detail with precision, very close up, with supernatural clarity. And yet, the regions of the epidermis remain indefinable, the faces become anonymous.

WOUND OF THE BODY AND OF THE MIND

Geneviève Cadieux's work employs a form of captivation that expresses itself only in transgression. And so, the secrets of a sensual intimacy end up falling over into the image of a colossal body onto which viewers project their own fantasies, as if onto a giant universal screen. All this undermines the calm application of our senses. Our "view of things" is consequently injured, thwarted, bruised. This emotional wound will leave its mark, and we will depart bearing this stigma. The sight of a scar always creates a shock. ■ Christine Bernier

Geneviève Cadieux was born in 1955 in Montréal, where she lives today. She has taken part in many international events, including the Biennials of São Paulo (1987), Sydney (1988, 1990) and Venice (1990). Her work has since continued to receive wide international exposure. Her presence has been noted in major exhibitions held in New York (The New Museum of Contemporary Art) and Paris (Musée national d'Art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou). Solo exhibitions have been held in New York (Kent Fine Art), London (Institute of Contemporary Art), Amsterdam (Institute of Contemporary Art), Tokyo (Sagacho Exhibit Space) and France (Musée départemental de Rochechouart). Her recent work has been shown in Montréal at Galerie René Blouin and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

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Geneviève Cadieux, *Blue Fear*, 1990
Photographic colour print, 185 x 122 cm
Courtesy of Galerie René Blouin
Photo: Louis Lussier