

*The Dad Tapes / The Mom Photographs: Kim Waldron*

Co-production of Galerie Werner Whitman and Article Special Projects, Montréal

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translated from French by Mona Filip

After being shown at the Eastern Edge Gallery in St. John's, Newfoundland, Kim Waldron's exhibition *The Dad Tapes / The Mom Photographs* leaves the traditional gallery space in favour of Galerie Werner Whitman – a young, independently funded artist-run centre established in a Montreal apartment in 2006 and founded by its current director, Willie Brisco. Co-produced by Article gallery as part of their special projects, this site that exists on the border between public and private space could not have been a more appropriate venue for this exhibition. We can rightly ask: is it a gallery, an apartment, or both at the same time? This ambiguity influences our reading of the artworks and is fully exploited by the artist in presenting her work here.

Since 2002, beginning with the series *Working Assumption*, Waldron's artwork focuses almost exclusively on self-portraiture, inviting the viewer to think about the different contemporary social dynamics that she carefully stages while mixing real subjects and fictional situations. In her most recent project, using her parent's family film, video and photography archives she continues to employ representations of herself, only this time through the eyes of her parents. The exhaustive accumulation of visual documentation is spread over a period of time that extends from the artist's birth to her graduation from university. Her parents, both born outside Canada, produced these images to serve as memories, but also as a means of sharing their family experiences with relatives in Kentucky and New Zealand. We can see Christmas, Easter, Halloween and birthday celebrations as well as ordinary moments of their daily life.

The artist appropriates these images in order to reveal the elements of fiction and staging they contain. To do so, she offers us a photography and video installation in two parts. In her main projection entitled *Chronology*, composed of video and super 8-footage taken by her father and photographic images taken at the same time by her mother, the artist compiles approximately one hour of brief segments spanning 30 years. The filmed images precede the photographs by a few seconds, highlighting the nature of their construction. As is often the case with family photographs, children are first positioned then required to hold the pose and, naturally, smile.

*Sunsets*, the second part of the exhibition, is comprised of a video monitor and a mosaic of framed photographs mounted on the wall. All the elements in this section have a common subject: the sunset viewed from the family's country house. The installation in this

apartment/gallery is relatively banal. It is actually quite common to see this type of image in people's homes, as these pictures could have been mounted in this same manner in any other apartment. With this body of work, the artist presents her parents' shared interest for the beauty of dusk, but the mere quantity suggests that she is also exposing an obsession.

Through this installation, the artist offers us a private collection of moments that her parents chose to preserve. However, in doing so, she underscores the impossibility of capturing such moments. These last thirty years of archived instances, assembled one after the other for this exhibition, clearly demonstrate how time escaped them. If our past and our memories truly are integral parts of ourselves and determine who we are, the artist proves that they, unfortunately, cannot be physically or materially reconstructed as anything more than pale copies of what they once were, despite the importance we grant them.

What is also particular about the moments and events the artist chose to show us is their archetypal nature. Who hasn't attempted to capture the sunset in a photograph? Not all North American families have as strong a determination to document their lives, yet it is still a widespread phenomenon which most viewers can relate to. As long as we share the artist's culture and rituals, we easily project ourselves upon the characters she presents. Placing this exhibition in an apartment accentuates and fosters this effect. The artist plays with the site's ambiguity by exposing intimate aspects of her life and her past as if in a private home, surrounded by family. Nevertheless, this is a gallery and, on second thought, what she offers us is more than plain family pictures. Besides underlining the construction of these images, she reminds us of the impossibility of stopping and appropriating time, while telling us a story that strangely resembles ours.

This exhibition by Kim Waldron will also be on view in Nova Scotia at Eyelevel Gallery from September 6 to October 12, 2008 and in Toronto at Gallery 44 from June 5 to July 4, 2009.