

Canadian Art Online Review
The Make Station: Up Close and Personal
Gallery 44, Toronto June 5 to July 4, 2009
by Justin Mah

Quotidian details can get overlooked, no doubt, but not in “The Make Station,” an exhibit that thoughtfully situates the everyday at centre stage via the intimacy of family photography. Perceptively, “The Make Station” elucidates how familial images come to be embedded with personal meaning, value and, most palpably, love.

For *Chronology*, the principal video projection in the installation *The Dad Tapes/The Mom Photographs*, Montreal-based artist Kim Waldron has mined her family’s visual archive. The 52-minute video of short clips compiles 30 years of Waldron family history—tracing the artist’s life from birth to graduation via the obsessive and synchronous recordings of her father’s videotape and her mother’s point-and-shoot camera. In the video, Waldron weaves both together, collapsing them on top of each other in such a way that they invariably call attention to one another, making us conscious of perspective and critical of what has been recorded. Add Waldron’s parents’ unrelenting (and not uncommon) compulsion to chronicle family life, and the work suddenly becomes a stark reminder of impermanence, of time falling through the cracks; even vibrant birthday parties are poignantly encumbered by a looming sense of mortality.

J.J. Kegan McFadden’s unclaimed archive features dozens of Instamatic photographs of familial life dating from the 1950s through to the 1970s, all reportedly found by McFadden at a Winnipeg photo lab. The idiosyncratic nature of the photographs—lovingly containing instances of soft affection, quirky endearment and age-old familiarity within the unguarded poses, faces and smiles of the subjects—suggests a shared intimacy between these people and their photographer. The manner in which McFadden has repurposed these images—categorizing them into horizontal groupings under various subheadings—foregrounds the quality of closeness expressed in them, and draws attention to the way in which we, through selection, hold and assign significance to particular images, while simply discarding others.

Margarida Correia’s pair of chromogenic prints, entitled *Dehumidifier*, offers up a quiet exploration of family through artist friend Paul de Jong. The first print is an image shot inside Jong’s childhood home in Rotterdam; it depicts, in portrait style, a vintage, mustard-coloured dehumidifier. The second print is a re-photographed section of one of Paul de Jong’s family albums. The reason for singling out the dehumidifier, according to Correia in her artist statement, is her fascination with the ability of objects to offer “clues regarding the lives of the families who treasure them.” Like the individuals found in McFadden’s photographs, the objects in Correia’s similarly exude a kind of warmth that is indicative of the photographer’s proximity to her subject. These express rather beautifully how inanimate objects accrue unforeseen value, sentimental or otherwise, over time.

“The Make Station” immerses us in a unique variety of nostalgia—the unsparing kind. Its artists render bare in cherished images of loved ones a sense of both presence and absence, joy and loss. As viewers, we experience the subjects at an emotional distance. The scene, however, is not an unfamiliar one—there is something universal flowing from them, something both quotidian and magical.

(120-401 Richmond Street W, Toronto, ON)

* www.gallery44.org