
A man with dark hair and a beard is lying on his back on a bed of dry leaves and twigs in a forest. He is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt and dark pants. His right hand is resting on his chest, and his left hand is near his head. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The scene is dappled with sunlight and shadows from the surrounding trees.

Pierre St-Jacques | Narratives



Pierre St-Jacques

Narratives

selected video work 2005-2014

Pointers for a Nebulous Direction

where narrative is treated like an object

There is a great attraction for artists to lie. Lie about a great deal of things big and small. Some will elegantly tell you that it's a lie that reveals the truth, while a small group of brave ones will simply tell you that you are wasting your time trying to understand it when you should just see if you like it.

My process as an artist, with its path and changes over the years, has seen me espouse both these point of views, and more surprisingly, has seen me in recent years embrace them simultaneously. I've always felt somewhere in some dark recess of the soul that this art stuff is just something to do. A certain sense of 'why not' just pushes forward and one goes along, there is not much sense fighting it, especially in the studio. For no better reason than that things get done and then get shown.

Over time this push takes on different aspects, and I've seen myself slowly becomes friends with it. It changes its features, as if one is turning and inspecting its various facets. The change can come quickly, like a revelation or an inspiration, or like a slow evolution of one's work. But for me the important part to realize is that at every stage, whether it's at a place where ones is dealing with theory or whether it's a looser emotional representation, we are taking on the same thing, and that ultimately all the other stuff, all the other facets, are all there simultaneously and they're all supporting the one facet we're focusing on.

My first encounter with the new French novel was one of those early moments where this push took a sudden turn. Very much like a painter who is by no means constrained to simply represent what the eye sees, these authors upended the conventional narrative structures. It wasn't just that these authors were telling strange new 'stories' that excited me, it was that, like a visual artist who abstracts things to reveal ideas or feelings, they manipulated and abstracted the ideas themselves. I found it fascinating how liquid and simple their handling of images were, and it led me in a direction where I began to take greater liberties with how my narratives were constructed.

"Project for a Grey Dress in New York" among these efforts is the most direct. Taking a very short one page passage

from Alain Robbe-Grillet (Grey Dress = Robe Grise) it repeats the same action, the same sequence, a man goes up the stairs to see a woman in her apartment, over and over, but each time, because of a certain inflection, because of a certain shadow or editing cut the result from the viewer's reading is very different. It veers from the threatening to the romantic and back again.

This exploration of the structure of the narrative was and still is an important part of my work. It's an enjoyable intellectual puzzle, which with several video screens projecting simultaneously, can yield a rich visual feast, a fuller

representation of experience. While enjoying where I was with my work and feeling engaged, something invariably happened that changed my direction. Whereas the theoretical underpinnings of the work were sound, it occurred to me slowly and over time, that the strength of the work did not lie in just this manipulation of structure, but rather that there was a very emotional aspect that brought things into a new light. In fact upon re-reading some of the French New Novels, it is clear that while their emphasis, technically, is not on character or plot, there is still a great deal of, if not emotion then, atmosphere in these works.



Shooting A Gathering of Shifts - Beach
Photo: Corey Williams

Of course once an idea sets in, one starts to see it everywhere. A glance on the subway, the way the person at the other table holds a spoon, all became for me little triggers into potential greater narratives. These were the short moments that were filled with intensity, and that emotional mass, as it were, was exactly the type of thing that one could use as a signpost that could weather any structural and narrative manipulation. A new facet in this push that I feel as an artist had been glimpsed. These little daily moments that we all experience, these glances or gestures, in which there is a connection made with another are the small doors that open up into a large new world that, if only for a second, makes us glimpse as what it means to be human.

Many of the videos to come were to take on this theme. “And/The”, “A Hidden Place for Fragile Things”, “Make Believe” and “A Gathering of Shifts” all attempt to to construct these actual little doors. It is in these rooms of experience that over time I began to see that the whole business of ‘being human’ is a many layered thing. That while there was this crisp and beautifully defined ‘moment of access’, that focal aspect was surrounded by a haze of thoughts, barely observed objects, and a host of other inputs without which there would be no depth, no flavor. As I successively made these videos, this nebulous, murky concept became of greater and greater importance.

In these videos while things like perception, or how one person can connect to another were the main inputs to get going. The result was always other. When the piece was finished these ideas were still there but there was always something else that came in quite by itself, the ghost in the machine, and it was that ghost, that vagueness, that always, somehow, left the deepest impression.

In trying to connect with this haze my way of working changed. What had been a “plan-and-shoot” process became a more “shoot-think-shoot” process. With multiple tests and trials, more playing and seeing how it all comes together before tying it up in a finished piece.



*installation shot, Station Independent Projects, 2013
A Gathering of Shifts*

The nebulousity that is found in experience needed to somehow find it way in the work. There is a process in making my art that is akin to manufacturing clouds, where one must express a certain blurriness of experience, but one can't be vague about it. It is that exact blurry state, one that seemingly has very little going on perhaps but is full of everything which animates our consciousness. A man can just sit there, sit there and do nothing, and an epic will ensue. Imperceptible tectonic shifts beneath his feet, just under his knowing, the things he used to love he now hates, the things he used to hate he understands, all happening without seemingly any moving part, a slight of hand has brought it into being, and our man just sits there unmoving, part of the continual epic all around him. That simply difficult vision, that depth of experience, with it's crisp little doors and it's vast murky expanses has become my current dialog with my work.

The way that “The Exploration of Dead Ends” is conceived is a bit like that journey, a journey where the things clearly happening are as important as the awkward emotions, where the direction seems defined yet the place of arrival isn't. You walk along and your focus jumps elastically along with you, every second, from thing to thing, immersed in thought for a second the loved one beside you becomes a blur. You think about your vacation, then let the ghosts of past memories get the better of you before you return to the room you've

been standing in this whole time. It's realism in the same way that ‘Finnegan's wake’ is realism, or in a certain sense how synthetic cubism is about realism. Even though it is a story we can all feel we know, it certainly does not make for a traditional story. But I'm not here to tell traditional stories with this piece. I'm investigating what goes on inside, how that little human motor works.

Pierre St-Jacques
2014



The Exploration of Dead Ends

2012-2014

6-Channel video installation

15:00 minutes



Shooting The Exploration of Dead Ends
Photo: Joanne Petit-Frère















A Gathering of Shifts

2011-2012

5 video triptychs

5:21 minutes each

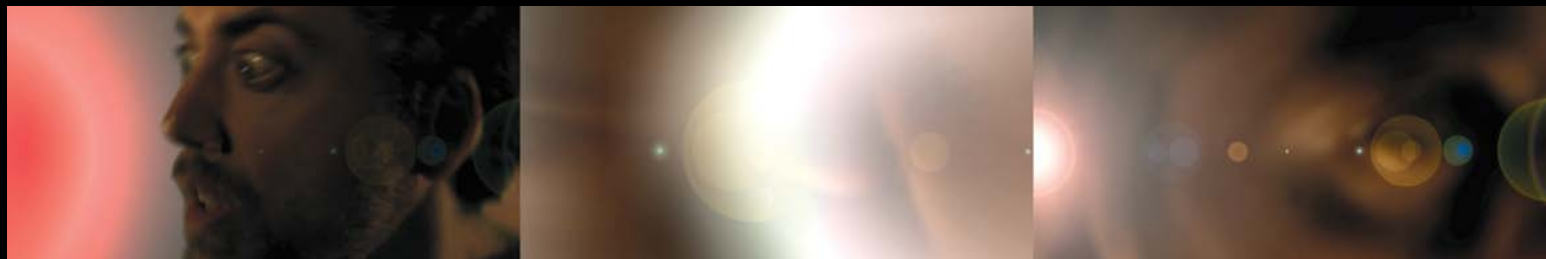


Left:
shooting A Gathering of Shifts - Beach
Photo: Corey Williams

Center & Right:
video tests for 'Head' and 'Beach'













Make Believe

2009-2011

27:06 minutes



Yes

2009-2011

6:50 minutes



A Hidden Place for Fragile Things

2008-2009

video triptych

12:15 minutes





And/The
2007-2008

video diptych
16:10 minutes





Project for a Grey Dress in New York
2005

12:30 minutes





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The Exploration of Dead Ends	A Gathering of Shifts	Make Believe & Yes	A Hidden Place for Fragile Things	And/The	Project for a Grey Dress in New York
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