

ANNIE FRANCE LECLERC

Michel Hardy-Vallée



Caissy, Cuisinier

Annie France Leclerc

Digital inkjet print on matte paper, 50.8 x 76.2 cm



Christian, Photographer and Cameraman

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Folklore and lumberjack jackets are out, singer-songwriters have left the smoky cabarets for the limelight of TV singing contests, and now that the rural clichés of Québec’s identity are spent, Annie France Leclerc (b. 1986) is wondering what *pays* means since it has stopped being the province of *paysans*. No stranger to the regional—she was born in Sainte-Blandine, near Rimouski, and studied photography at Matane before coming to Montréal—she has begun at Concordia University what may be the project of a lifetime: to articulate in photography Québec’s identity. More immediately, she is focusing on the people of Matane, and their relationship to their surroundings. Divided between portraits of teenagers and portraits of young adults, her series of natural-light individual portraits *Les enfants de la Matanie* shows inhabitants of this Gaspésie town portrayed in a location of their choosing that they consider personally significant.

The portrait of Caissy, a cook, was taken in front of his home in the morning, before he left for work. Surrounded by shades of silver, grey, and pale blue, the orange ski tag, tartan hat, and the deep green winter coat say nothing that would be paradigmatic of “Matane,” and this impossibility to dissolve individuals in the soup of representativeness is the cornerstone of this series. The solid pose of the subject, inviting contemplation, and the surrounding space may equally evoke the portraits of August Sander (German, 1876-1964) or those of Alec Soth (American, b. 1969); but unlike Sander, Annie France Leclerc is looking for individuals, not types, and unlike Soth, she is looking for the democratic, not the extraordinary or the outlandish. Behind the balanced colour composition unifying the portrait, each individual element of the picture—the tag, the hat, the hangar behind—points outward and breaks apart the possibility of a smooth, coherent and unified story that would make this person immediately recognizable as a *Matanais* for a stranger, despite being one.

Memory is the greatest unseen in this portrait series: even though it is the pretext for every picture, the events that led to the places becoming significant for the subjects are never hinted at, nor are they made explicit otherwise. The portrait of Christian, a photographer and cameraman, creates instead an imaginative space in which to engage the viewer: the fur collar, down parka, unshaven face, and the looming peaks in the background readily suggest a mountaineer or a more

stereotypical explorer. Except that this is in fact a seaside landscape around Sainte-Félicité, near Matane. The unseen memory makes it a place the subject identifies with himself, yet this portrait of an individuality extended in space, not bound to the body but embracing the land as well, becomes for the viewers an intentional landscape that pulls their preconceptions out of their depths to be understood. Every person will only ever be seen through the glasses we have developed for ourselves.