



Reframing Women in Nature: Lucy. 2009, Way's Mills, Quebec.

Rachel Tetrault



Reframing Women in Nature: Rachel. 2011, Mont Royal, Montreal.
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RACHEL TETRAULT

By Eliana Stratica Mihail

Rachel Tetrault (b. 1988, Vancouver) moved to Montreal, her parents' hometown, for her university education. She is in her final year at Concordia University, in the Bachelor of Arts program, with a major in history and minor in photography. Her two areas of study coincide with her two main interests that also form her artistic practice: history and photography. Tetrault's art projects generally deal with the representations of women in art, and historic and social injustices in relation to the landscape. After graduating, she plans on working on a photography project about social injustices that occurred on Canadian land, such as residential schools for Native peoples, and Japanese internment camps. Tetrault is also a painter, whose subject matter is similar to that of her photographs, albeit more personal: the landscape and its connection to humans. She participated in two exhibitions, one at Ctrlab, Montreal, in *Vacation to Tokyo: Concordia Photography Collective* (March, 2009), and at Concordia University's Gallery X in *Inside/Out* (October, 2011).

Rachel Tetrault's series *Reframing Women in Nature* challenges traditional representations of women and nature, by empowering women and showing them as actively engaged with the landscape. The series counterbalances colonial representations of nature in American photographs by Alexander Gardner (1821-1882), Carleton E. Watkins (1829-1916), and Timothy O'Sullivan (1840-1882), who often dealt with this subject matter as the 'other' that needed to be conquered by the Western white man. Moreover, nature has been associated for centuries with another social 'other:' women. As feminist and political scientist Colleen Mack-Canty suggests, "Men were identified with disembodied characteristics such as order, freedom, light, and reason, which were seen as better than, and in opposition to, women's allegedly more 'natural' and/or embodied characteristics such as disorder, physical necessity, darkness, and passion."¹ Rachel Tetrault thus challenges the culture/nature dichotomy, and women's traditionally perceived passive nature, by photographing

¹ Colleen Mack-Canty, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality," *NWSA Journal*, 16.3 (2004), 155.

them in the forest, interacting with nature, and taking an active role. This imagery strongly contrasts traditional representations of women, such as American photographer Edward Weston's (1896-1958) *Nudes*, where women are presented as passive and naked, while the male gaze exerts power over them.