



Shelley Ouellet was born in Edmonton in 1964, grew up in Red Deer and has lived in Calgary since 1981. In 1991 she received a B.F.A. in printmaking and painting from the University of Calgary. Since that time she has developed a process of art making that involves the production of elaborate installations based on the appropriation of popular culture, complex systems of mathematical organisation and diverse notions of community. Her work has been widely exhibited in Canada, and currently she teaches in the MADT program at the Alberta College of Art and Design.

Image Credits:

Front, Margaret Standing 229 x 122 cm Fibre Based (silver print)
Inside, Margaret Sitting 229 x 122 cm Fibre Based (silver print)
Back, Margaret and Jessie (Florida) 140 x 140 cm

This is a Stride Gallery brochure written by **Shelley Ouellet** who has been chosen by the artist because of her particular interest in the project. These publications provide regular opportunities for diverse writers to publish work that furthers critical discourse about contemporary art.

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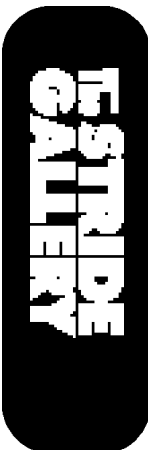
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look at all troubled by any of this business of aging. In fact her face reassures me that my looking does not bother her a bit either. Good for her. She reminds me of my own Margaret, my great grandmother. Ramrod spine, proud face and a naughty giggle when conversations got a little blue. I look at Evergon's mother and I think of my grandmother and my mother and all the other ladies I watched age as I grew. And I think about the young women who may watch me the same way. Most of us insist on denying the whole process and fight it every step of the way with buckets of cream, miles of exercise and denial of pleasure. Maybe Margaret did as well and now she wants to offer us a little octogenarian advice. Aging is living so enjoy it and wear it well.

Shelley Ouellet, 2003

biographies:

Evergon's photographic work has been shown in over a thousand exhibitions in Canada and abroad since the early 1970's, including a retrospective, Evergon 1971 - 1987, at the National Gallery of Canada. He taught at the University of Ottawa from 1974 to 1993 and now lives and works in Montreal, where he is Associate Professor of Photography at Concordia University.



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Evergon

Margaret and I

In 1990, my younger, gay brother died of AIDS and other complications. In 1992, my Mother, Margaret Lunt, modelled as Ramba Mama in my work, Ramboys: A Bookless Novel. In 1993/4, because of her modelling and because of her relationship as my Mother, she participated in the TV special Evergon on Adrienne Clarkson Presents. Immediately after the viewing, my Father went on a tirade because photographs of my Mother's bared breasts had been shown on television. She had not told him of the modelling session and he had not seen any of my exhibitions since 1976. Two days later, he was admitted to the hospital with a heart attack, brought on by anger and rage.

Three years ago, my Father died of cancer. In the Fall 2000, while driving Margaret to Montreal to be with me for two weeks, she suddenly stated: "You don't photograph me nude anymore." I had never photographed my Mother totally nude. So during that visit, we completed a 'nude Margaret' photographic shoot. These images of Margaret, started during that visit, have continued on each successive visit. She is well aware of the power that these nude photographs have. They profile her as a strong woman within her aging body. The mirroring image of myself has been a response to the images of my mother and to our relationship as the sole survivors of our family and mirroring compatriots. Although, I can see my behavioural and physical traits inherited from my Father, I see and feel many more traits from my Mother. Margaret is now eighty-two. I am fifty-five.

Evergon

When I emerged from art school Evergon was already one of the definitive art Super Stars. His photography, exhibited all over the world, was technically superior, gorgeous and just naughty enough to cause trouble with homophobes everywhere. In spite of national and international fame, his work was also very accessible here in the isolated prairies. The exhibition Evergon 1971-1987 toured the Nickle Arts Museum in Calgary and the Edmonton Art Gallery in 1990 and his work was featured in Landscape to Gender – Changing Contexts at the Walter Phillips Gallery in Banff in 1992. He taught as a visiting artist at the University of Lethbridge and even my mother knows who Evergon is thanks to the CBC's Adrienne Clarkson Presents.

When I worked at the Banff Centre, I must have walked beneath Evergon's clutching Ramboys in his Night Watch a thousand times. I always imagined this Evergon character, God of the gods, arranging the claustrophobic tableaux of boots and horns and

skin for a giant god-size Polaroid camera. When I met him last spring, I was surprised that he looked kind of how I had imagined. It was then that I heard the story of how Margaret & I came to be.

There are three truths we all share between birth and death. We all have a mother. We all want love. We all do age. Evergon's series of larger-than-life (7.5' x 4') nude portraits of his mother deliver these truths in stark black and white.

Evergon's work has always been about sex – loud and proud. So where does Margaret fit in with all this? Before you make the "oedipal" association, look at these images again. Nudity does not necessarily mean sex and some families do not believe that our privates need to be kept private. Margaret is the subject of a classical figure study. Unlike Evergon's Ramboys from the early nineties, she occupies the space without decoration or company. She is neither costumed nor veiled, but holds the centre of the picture with authority and confidence. The only props are the aids to keep her mobile, which she uses with strength and nonchalance. Naked, she stands or sits, in each image as unselfconsciously as if she were wearing a housedress and gardening gloves. Evergon's presence is apparent here not in leather work-boots, rippling muscles and horned helmets, but simply in Margaret's matter-of-fact, motherly gaze into the lens. From infancy we learn to understand the vocabulary of our mother's glances and the nuances of this language are never as clear in any other human being as mother's "smarten up" glare. We are placed amid the silent exchange between mother and son and their relationship resonates from in front of and behind the camera. She trusts him and she trusts her own instincts. She knows exactly what he has been up to for the last thirty years and she not only supports it, she is downright proud of him.

In his work, Evergon has manipulated the lexis of heterosexual male eroticism by shifting the gaze from the nubile girl and uncovered innocence to sexy men, dirty deeds and convenient dark corners. In collaboration with his mother, they conspire to refocus the gaze yet again. His photography is often described as homoerotic, suggesting that gay men are the only ones getting off on seeing where his lens has been pointed. I beg to differ and I bet Margaret does too. Evergon isn't the only one to fantasise about playing dress-up with pretty boys, collecting the undies of conquests or nipping into the alley for a quickie. Our sexuality is an important part of our life and Evergon has made a career of exposing his. Margaret is very aware of the contrary nature of her son's images and his lifestyle. She is equally cognizant of how nude photographs of his eighty-year old mother will be read within the context of his work and portraiture. Her instigation of

this assignment reveals a sassy attitude and this old lady seems more interested in joining a critique of popular culture than she is in doilies and bridge mix. In a society where slender, youth is venerated, Margaret looks upon us sagely. While images of the lithe bodies of fantastical young women and men sell us everything there is to be advertised, images of Margaret's body are evidence of a real life. She has delivered and nurtured two men and loved another. Evergon and Margaret invite us to look at a real woman and to see the beauty of her long life in every bump and dimple.

These portraits are like magic mirrors. They reflect the passing time and the cycle of life through the place we all come from – our mothers' bodies. Eighty-year old women (or men) are not often at the gym or in places you may have the opportunity to see them naked and I have scanned these photographs with childish curiosity. As my own nipples turn to plumb bobs, I selfishly study the tug of gravity on Margaret's body. She doesn't

