

# HYPERALLERGIC

Art **Reviews**

## The Many Lives of Things at Montreal's Photography Biennial

For its 16th edition, MOMENTA expands its approach to present a more interdisciplinary examination of our relationships to objects.



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Celia Perrin Sidarous, "*Xenophoridae*" (2019), inkjet print (courtesy of Parisian Laundry, Montréal and the artist)

MONTREAL—This fall, MOMENTA opened its 16th edition with great ceremony: the artistic venture celebrated its 30th anniversary and cemented their reinvention as the “biennale de l’image” for the second year in a row (it was founded as Le Mois de la Photo). Known in the Canadian and international art landscape as a photography biennial, this edition focused much more on objects. In fact, to my astonishment, MOMENTA 2019 presented a greater number of objects than what one would expect for an image-based biennial, be it photography- or video-focused.



Laura Aguilar, "Grounded # 111" (2006) from the *Grounded series*, archival pigment print (courtesy of the estate of Laura Aguilar)

The curator of this edition, María Wills Londoño, proposed the theme *The Life of Things* to explore “the nature — or even the personality — taken on by objects conveyed through images.” 39 artists from 20 countries are spread across 11 venues around Montreal (as well as at the Musée d’art de Joliette, about an hour north-east) are presenting works that ponder the relation of objects as part of identity and personal beliefs. Developed in collaboration with Director Audrey Genois and curatorial assistant Maude Johnson, MOMENTA 2019 seeks to enrich our relationships to objects, presenting these as complex, even though we can be ambivalent towards

them. Society indeed crumbles under tons of things that we need (or don’t), that we consume, keep or dispose of. Writing this review on the eve of **Montreal’s Climate March**, I have to question the appropriateness of this glorification of the accumulation of *things* in an artistic context.



Patricia Domínguez, "The Isle of Dogs; a curse in reverse" (2017) (installation view)  
(courtesy of MOMENTA | Biennale de l'image and Galerie de l'UQAM, photo by Jean-Michael Seminario)

The central thematic exhibition is presented at two main venues — Galerie de l'UQAM and VOX, Centre de l'image contemporaine — with the vast majority of artists (22 of the 39) showing work in both places simultaneously. The exhibition is divided into four "components" (themes) that are made to "generate conversations." The former, a university gallery explores the components "Cultural Objects and Material Culture" and "Thingified Beings or Humanized Objects," while the artist-run centre examines the "Absurd as Counter-Narrative of the Object" and "Still Life in the Age of Environmental Crisis." These components are also extended to the other venues.



Maeve Brennan, "The Drift" (installation view) (courtesy of MOMENTA | Biennale de l'image and VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine, photo by Jean-Michael Seminaro)



Hannah Doerksen, "MAKING A RELIGION OUT OF ONE'S LONELINESS" (2019) (exhibition view) (courtesy of MOMENTA | Biennale de l'image and Centre CLARK, photo by Jean-Michael Seminaro )

Wills Londoño's curating brings into conversation the consumerist and symbolic dimensions of objects, considering them "beyond their materiality to bring forth their potential for being power structures in themselves." What do we do with such a statement when the collection of objects goes beyond this capitalist pursuit? Hannah Doerksen's "MAKING A RELIGION OUT OF ONE'S LONELINESS"

presented at Centre Clark, is one of the strongest works at MOMENTA because it precisely goes against the idea that an individual's collection of objects is the proof of their existence. Although her immersive installation is interested in the redemptive role of things in situations that isolate human beings, the sanctuary she created and the objects selected for the altar call for shared secrets and anecdotes, childish laughter at semi-nudes, late-night chatters under neon lights. The variegated objects in the room, the suspended nude torso, the neon palm leaf light all give a sense of treasured goods and uncovered objects brought at a sleepover.

Closer to the original pursuit of the biennale, when photographs are presented, they disturb the concept of images as being a facsimile of reality: in **Celia Perrin Sidarous's** *The Archivist*, feels closer to the original intent of the biennial for its presentation of photographs that disturb the concept of images as a facsimile of reality. Her work, which is on view at the McCord Museum, manipulates and re-stages images, making history anachronistic, overlapping the past and the future. Perrin Sidarous also selected objects from the museum's collection and placed them next to her own creations: she brilliantly invites the viewer to get lost in a library of her own making.



Celia Perrin Sidarous, "L'archiviste" (2019) (exhibition view), (courtesy of MOMENTA | Biennale de l'image and McCord Museum, photo by Jean-Michael Seminario)

This edition of MOMENTA seems to take the stance of acting as the only and most relevant biennale in Montreal (since the Biennale de Montréal fiasco): making room for a wider array of media makes for a more complete event, representative of broader array of artistic practices. Was this theme selected for that goal only, or are we truly moving away from the selfie era? In a selfie-obsessed society where without an image, where everything that happens requires the proof of an image, is the point of MOMENTA 2019 to make the case for the declining power of the photographic image as the true representation of reality? Or, *au contraire*, do objects define a lived life?

MOMENTA 2019 continues through October 19, 2019 at various locations in Montréal, Canada.

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