

The *Women's Image Library* exhibition emerged from a reflection on the place of women photographers in Artex's collection. Founded in Montreal in 1981 by art historian Francine Périnet and photographers Angela Grauerholz and Anne Ramsden, the centre continues its mandate to preserve and showcase a collection of over 36,000 documents encompassing all visual aspects of contemporary art from 1965 to the present day. We approached CONTACT's invitation as an opportunity to revisit the origins of our institution and to recall the commitment of its founders to preserving diverse artistic practices over time. While the list of women photographers in Artex's collection has grown over the past 45 years, there are some absences.¹ This exhibition allows us to activate our archives and see what they reveal about our era through the contribution of women photographers to the Canadian art scene.

Our choices were guided by the discovery of unexpected elements, such as a few original darkroom prints, or by the quality of the ephemera we found. Following this logic of delving into our collection, the exhibition presents *artifacts* understood as images that we could qualify as found objects, or more precisely, collected objects. In her book *On Photography*,² Susan Sontag speaks of the almost alchemical quality of photography: its capacity to reproduce itself endlessly through postcards, books, newspapers, and so on. We live in a world of images, or more precisely, in a world of images of images. In the exhibition's design, we use existing elements/fragments to create a new narrative from ephemera (posters, invitations, pamphlets, etc.) or publications from our collection and that of CONTACT.

With this in mind, we have charted images linking approaches, landscapes, and bodies, creating connections that trace the contributions of women photographers to the history of Canadian art. Across the documents presented, shared themes emerge. These include, for example, highlighting the daily life of a given community through a more documentary approach that includes portraits of people close to the artists or photos of intimate moments. There are also representations of the self in its multiple forms: the performed body; the body in nature; the body as a site of desire, sexuality, and motherhood; the queer body, as well as family or friendship ties. Other practices focus on uninhabited, dilapidated, and abandoned places. Some photographers set up their cameras outdoors to illuminate the landscape, which is being transformed by pollution and climate change.

¹ Eighty percent of our collection comes from the donations we have received from the community, which means that some artists are not represented in our collection or that some files are less complete than others.

² Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977

The themes that emerge from the collection of documents displayed in the space reveal diverse relationships between body and landscape, memory and territory, as well as intimate and collective experiences. This multi-layered relationality offers different ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking about the world and our surroundings. Each artist inhabits, transforms, and interprets their environment in their own way, through their body, their thoughts, and their camera. It is in this myriad of gestures and perspectives that a nuanced reading of women's photography is constructed. Together, these documents fashion a moving and living cartography of the territory we call Canada, a cartography of constant change, growth, and reinvention revealing how these artists shape not only our perception of the world but also their own relationship to it.

By presenting its documents outside its walls, Artexxe reaffirms its founding mission: not only to preserve, but to make visible. *Women's Image Library* follows in this tradition while raising new questions about the persistent absences—all invitations to continue the work of collecting, recognizing, and transmitting.