



Thomas Corriveau, *Noyade*, 2008, from the series *Autofictions*, 2005-2008, Inkjet print on paper, 96 x 120 cm

Thomas Corriveau

Autofictions
Galerie Graff

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We are living in a telematically attuned present tense. We are bombarded, even besieged, by endless streaming images and data feeds coming in from all sides, all the time. How we fend off the barrage or negotiate détente with it shapes the condition of our being here, in an image-fraught universe.

Coming to terms with our entrenched “telematic culture”¹ has meant cultivating a new set of behavioural norms, ideas, media, ethics, and – for artists – expressive means. Either one grows a thick epidermis and returns to the art of yesterday, or one cultivates open pores and uses technology to pursue the art of the future. Thomas Corriveau has open pores, all the better to absorb by osmosis and creatively transform the wealth of images into the supplest integers of an aesthetic wholly and uniquely his own. Effectively, he becomes not servant, but proprietor.

In his new works from the series titled *Autofictions* (*Self-Fictions*), Corriveau creatively redirects and mediates the flow of data, choosing images from the Internet, newspapers, and other archives – from the trash stratum to the iconic. He then mediates them, appropriates them, exercises control over them, and makes them his own with ingenuity, gusto, playfulness – and a certain measure of the macabre.

Corriveau’s expressive means are impressively varied. He elides photography, drawing, painting, and digital printmaking in the construction of his works. He begins by identifying a pre-existing image that possesses, for him, real immediacy, and that has visceral impact; images that he recognizes as highly charged or somehow iconic, he will appropriate and infiltrate accordingly, transposing his own image within the *mise-en-scène*. He then

methodically divides the image into a multiplicity of coloured zones. These are meticulously and laboriously redrawn. He often employs a geometric grid, as he regulates the composition, and then reorders these re-drawings using digital technologies. While photography rules here – the image is the crux, the inspiration, after all – Corriveau the draughtsman is triumphant.

His face does not scream out at us, even if it does appear, at times, to be screaming. Sometimes, we identify it only after we have digested the overall work. Then, uncannily, the artist’s face emerges from the backdrop with a spooky ubiquity, a Woody Allen Zelig for today. Whether the image is appropriated from art history or from across the full array of the popular culture, the instant of recognition is accompanied by a powerful sense that Corriveau has subsumed and somehow owns it.

I mentioned the macabre earlier. One of the most delightful works in the show was Corriveau’s fictional obituary, with his birth date (1957) and death date (the date of the vernissage of his exhibition). The portrait of the artist drowning derives from found images of someone swimming, which the artist transformed into a harrowing record of his own death by water.

These works were decidedly not clever fictions that merely offered a vicarious thrill for the informed viewer. While Corriveau is the protagonist of his own self-fictions, he

effectively interrogates the nature of our relationship with representation. He has spoken eloquently of seeing himself as the proverbial ghost in the machine, working away invisibly in the innards of his computer, using telematic means to defeat the hegemony of telematics in a world gone increasingly awry and insane.

Corriveau explores the meaning of the self-portrait in a very innovative and intuitive way. In the exhibited works, his choices were always right on target. But he is no narcissist. Nor is he a solipsist. If he were, his work would be hermetically sealed off and empathy would not be possible. His work is all about the communal sharing of images. He knows that today, we



Thomas Corriveau, *Boxeur*, 2008, from the series *Autofictions*, 2005-2008, Inkjet print on paper fixed on canvas, 109 x 109 cm

do not think, see, or feel in isolation. When we look at his John Wesley Harding work, we think of that album and what all the changes that Bob Dylan went through meant to us. Similarly, the Munch masterwork *Self-Portrait, Between the Clock and the Bed* (1942) means so much to many of us and triggers memories of seeing it in situ, as does that same Munch work subsequently mediated by Jasper Johns. Both are icons of art history. Here, we have both Munch and Johns mediated by Thomas Corriveau, whose presence as the figure is recognized only after all that historical processing. The artist has tapped into our collective memory by identifying the power that images hold over us.

Corriveau has a sly, subversive – maybe even anarchistic – sensibility. One might more appropriately say, then, that he has a survivalist mentality, and that these *Autofictions* are portraits of a wily survivor: namely, himself.

1 British artist and theorist Roy Ascott invented the term “telematic art” to describe the use of online computer networks as an art medium.

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