

MAGAZINE



[Home](#) | [Features](#) | [Correspondents](#) | [Exhibitions](#) | [Artists](#) | [Recommendations](#) | [Videos](#)

Contemplating Time with Les Filles de la Croix

By [Alexia Naidoo](#) on April 20, 2015



Dominique Rey, *Sr Carmen* (2009), colour photograph, 61 x 91 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Continuing her exploration of the concepts of sisterhood and women who live on the margins of the dominant culture, Winnipeg artist Dominique Rey spent a decade immersing herself in the lives of a disappearing order of nuns: Les Filles de la Croix. As a multidisciplinary artist with formal studies in painting, photography, and new media, Rey is always searching for the best medium with which to express her subjects. The artist's work, which often looks at marginalized communities and concepts of "other," has been shown in Canada, the United States, and Europe.

Visitors to the [MacLaren Art Centre](#) in Barrie, Ontario now have an opportunity to see into this world through Rey's exhibition, [Under the Rose Arch](#). "In many of my projects," said Rey in an interview with NGC Magazine, "my intention is to immerse myself in their world — not to further objectify them, but to dig deeper and pull out the complexities of their lives as a group and individually."

Rey, whose work can be found in the National Gallery of Canada collection, was able to gain access to the nuns' world because two of her aunts were part of their order. She began at a convent in Winnipeg, where she worked two days a week as an artist in residence, creating photographic portraits of the women.

"They were quite compelling and beautiful images, but I felt as though all you would see were elderly women in habits, without going deeper," says Rey. "So, I decided to explore what I was experiencing in this world. The main thing was slowness and attention. They had this energy towards other human beings. I thought that was a rare gift, because of all our distractions and the speed at which we live our lives." Rey says she wanted to return this gift to them, and decided to spend time with each nun, painting her portrait in watercolour.

Rey also started photographing the convent in which they lived. Because the order has few young initiates to replace the aging nuns, only a small number remained in the vast building. "It's mostly about these empty spaces. The objects and architecture, which were old but in pristine condition, became metaphors for the care they gave towards the world," says Rey.

She realized, however, that she was only capturing one facet of a much larger picture. Les Filles de la Croix originated in France after the French Revolution, and quickly spread throughout the world. Today their number has vastly decreased, and the few younger members aren't sufficient to keep it going.



Dominique Rey, *Untitled #3 (Photo Assemblage)* [2014], c-prints mounted to acrylic support, 213 x 102 x 170 cm. Courtesy of the artist

Rey decided to spend time, not only at the order's mother house in France, but also two months in Brazil and Argentina. She says this brought a greater complexity to the project, because in South America she witnessed a larger number of younger nuns who were actively engaged in helping the sick, the homeless, and people in the sex industry. Rey returned home with a massive archive of materials and spent considerable time contemplating how she was going to transform the images.

In one of the projects, she chose photographs and cut them into pieces, using the imagery to create collages and photo assemblages. "I let the negative space of the page dominate and I played with the notions of weightlessness, precarity, and slowness. And I realized this was a way for me to make sense of my relationship with these women, and the sadness that I was acting as witness to their disappearance," she says. When Rey made the collages, she also realized their sculptural potential, and that led to the three works on view at the MacLaren. Photos were mounted on acrylic sheets, then laser-cut and assembled.

The exhibition also includes photographs and an HD video installation that "speaks to the individual subjectivity of the nuns."

"The camera lingers as the nuns look back at the viewer, giving it a strong meditative quality," says Rey. "I wanted to give the viewer the sense of time that I myself experienced when I walked through the doors of the convent."

[Under the Rose Arch](#) is on view at the MacLaren Art Centre in Barrie until June 28, 2015.

About the Author

Alexia Naidoo

Alexia Naidoo is an Ottawa-based freelance journalist specializing in hi-tech, politics and the arts.