

TOP 30: SOUVENIRS  
AND SUITCASES

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**BY JULIEN BOIS**

**YYZ**

Multidisciplinary artist Julie Lequin's latest piece, *Top 30*, presents her personal take on the ups and downs of aging. From her childhood in the small town of Sorel, Quebec to her graduate years in California, Lequin examines her past with nostalgia and a good dose of humour. For each year, the artist explores themes of day-to-day life, re-enacting colourful events (both happy and unhappy) and presenting songs engraved in her memory. The excerpts on this exhibition focus on the firsts and lasts chapters of the whole project. The work presented begins in French language and ends in English, illustrating her personal course as a Quebec-raised, California-educated woman. Every chapter is presented as a three-channel video, each part of the image displaying a particular aspect of her personal trajectory.

Along with the videos, anecdotes from Lequin's daily life are shown through series of watercolours works which depict the houses she once lived in or other anonymous backgrounds (forest age 29, beach age 30). These stand in for the years she spent traveling from an artist residency to another, without a place to really call home. From the joys and anxieties of childhood to those of acclimatising to new cities and settings, the artist narrates fragments of her life, slightly distorted through the process of auto-fiction. The result is a cartoon-like experience, oscillating between moments of joy and tears. The vivid illustrations underline emotions behind the narratives of everyday triumphs and failures. From her early years to a recent past, the artist remembers painful events like getting her tonsils removed (age 7) or getting her house broken into (age 27), but also blissful ones like sunbathing through the window (age 1) or finding a hidden gem in a thrift store in Nebraska City (age 29).

Adaptation is a central theme in Lequin's work, be it *Top 30* or her previous videos. Moving to new places and constantly

having to make friends (*Skateboarding Stories*, 2003), having to learn and improve a new language (*Speech Lesson*, 2005) or dealing with solitude in a foreign environment (*Submission to This American Life*, 2007) are all universal tales of contemporary nomadism, a central leitmotif in our globalized world. Yet, throughout her works, Lequin puts her personal narratives behind this theme, making it hers. *Top 30* is no exception and presents her exceptional reading on her peculiar life experience, recalling hops between schools, «art camps» and «home.»

Lequin's first-person account rehabilitates icons from pop culture, linking her intimate existence to the viewer's own with references appealing to all generations. The artist creates a feeling of familiarity by using images carved into our collective imagery to stage her episodes, be it characters from an American «soap,» James Last's record sleeves, standing ashtrays or *Care Bears*.

In the center image, musical devices, often bygone, remind us of the changing nature of the technology which with we grow. From a toy-turntable to a laptop, the accessories are used to present us a song in habiting the artist's memory. Once again, Lequin's recollections blend with those of the public who see familiar objects appearing on the screen. The songs announce and mark out the milestone transformations in Lequin's life; nursery rhymes (age 0 and 1), Jean Lapointe's unforgettable *Chante-la ta chanson* (age 3), the French theme song from the anime *The Mysterious Cities of Gold* (age 7), the *Arcade Fire's* *ballad In The Backseat* (age 26), *Goodbye Song by The Moldy Peaches* (age 29), etc. These songs express the inevitable changes of her musical interests, moulded by experiences with the mundane and the extravagant, the conventional and the marginal artistic milieus.

Like the stories Lequin presents are altered by the auto-fiction process, the songs are also transformed yet through another method.

From their original suggested support in the middle frame, they are re-interpreted by an amateur singer in the third tier of the image. For each chapter, the artist recruited a pregnant friend (age 0), a fellow artist (Montreal-based rapper Donzelle, age 1) and relatives to perform the pertinent song a *capella*. The effect is as if they were singing over the musical device, with the latter magically muted. As the performer is the age the excerpt depicts, the viewer can relate to the different emotional reactions associated with the music chosen by the artist and the fragility or pride of the interpreters.

In the last video, Lequin reports on her conclusions after thirty years of existence. Back in Los Angeles, she realizes the high expectations she's erroneously put on her friends and the unconditional love of her mother. Ending with Julie herself singing Luc Plamondon's *Les uns avec les autres* from rock-opera *Starmania*, she makes a point in expressing her individuality and the necessity of self-reliance. Buying her own birthday cake she repeats words of wisdom from her mother: «On n'est jamais mieux servi que par soi-même.»<sup>1</sup> Shaped by our journeys and encounters we are nevertheless alone when it comes to dealing with life. As Plamondon wrote: «Au bout du compte/ on se rend compte/ qu'on est toujours tout seul au monde.»<sup>2</sup>

Notes:

- 1 «You are never better served than by yourself»
- 2 «In the end/ we realise/ we're always alone in this world»

**JULIEN BOIS** is an international relations Master's candidate, web-entrepreneur and art enthusiast. Specializing on China and intellectual property issues, he has written in Paris-based journal *Monde Chinois* (Spring 2011) and collaborated on University of Ottawa's book *China in the 21st Century: Multidisciplinary Perspectives from students in Canada and China* (forthcoming).

**JULIE LEQUIN** is a French Canadian artist. She received a BFA from Concordia University and an MFA from Art Center College of Design. In 2007, 2nd Cannons Publications published Lequin's first book and DVD project *The Ice Skating Tree Opera – Director's Cuts*. Her work has been screened and exhibited internationally at venues such as the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum in California, La Centrale Powerhouse in Montreal, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Art in General and White Columns in New York City. Lequin is the 2011 recipient of the Joseph S. Stauffer Award, an honour given by the Canada Council for the Arts. Lequin is happily living and working in Montreal.