

Capturing evanescence

GALLERY GOING

GARY MICHAEL DAULT

The new works of Montreal-based photographer Serge Clément, now at the Jane Corkin Gallery, are, paradoxically, extremely dark photographs about light. Clément travels a great deal, and his recent journeys throughout Europe and Asia have netted him mostly evanescence. No solid, pictorial, laboriously culture-defining views for him. Typical of the new work is a photograph called *Multilux, Hong Kong*, in which a dark figure (is it a sculpture?) standing in a window (is it a restaurant?) is defined mostly by the constellation of lights winking in the trees outside (are they trees?) and doubled in the glass. *Multilux*, for sure. And you can tell, from all the unanswered questions generated by these elusive photographs, how reluctant they are to provide much cold, hard information about where we are or what we're looking at. *Ascenseur Nuit, Hong Kong*, for example, shows two men sitting at a bar, their presence almost obliterated by the cascade of light and reflection that is the real subject of the photograph. For Clément, the figure holds no more claims on documentary precision than the passing scene does. In *Michi, Shanghai, China*, the head of the young woman who is ostensibly the sub-

ject of this portrait has inexplicably become a hot blaze of chandelier instead — as if poor Michi has been hereby transformed into Clément's photographic muse and taken her place as an angel of light. \$450-\$3,500. *Until Oct. 23. 179 John St., Suite 302, Toronto. 416-979-1980.*

Nelson Osborne French at Visual Arts Ontario

Nelson Osborne French's exhibition is called *Anonymous City* — a city he has made both more complex and more ordered than it is by the cunning (and sometimes the overingenuity) of his mediations. For his spacious new digital, duotone, heat-transfer prints, French has doubled and reversed each of his urban views, so that each is symmetrical around the middle vertical, like an architectural Rorschach test. This poses a couple of problems. First, it transforms the city into a kind of architectural phantasmagoria, in which the grit of the real is transcended by the photographer's dreamy aspirations toward a higher urban poetry. Second, this revisionist lyricism leads perilously close to sentimentality, a tendency that billows toward mawkishness when French splits his photographs (in *Then & Now*, for example), so that one side shows, say, a heavily treed boulevard while the other, presumably as dispiriting contrast, gives us the Gardiner Expressway. The strongest works are the vertiginous views of



Clément's Michi, Shanghai, China.

city streets printed on backlit paper floor-to-ceiling columns — where photography and architecture meet. \$495 each. *Until Oct. 16. 439 Wellington St. W., third floor. 416-591-8883.*

John Scott's A Giant Called Trouble

Like trouble itself, the work of this transcendent Toronto artist is currently everywhere and easy to find. I've known John Scott for years and he is a wholly remarkable man. Frequently burdened by the murderous pain of advanced osteoporosis ("I can break a rib by turning over in bed," he once told me), Scott nevertheless continues to produce work at an astonishing rate. There appears to be an inverse relation-

ship between his physical affliction and his overcompensatory inventiveness. So prolific is he that he needs to show all over the place like this; it's like bloodletting. Right now there are five venues for his caustic, gamy, culturally acute and poetically arresting drawings, paintings and constructions. The place to start is the north loading dock of the studio-gallery-workshop complex at 401 Richmond St. W. Here stand two of Scott's diabolical vehicles, constructions with the headlong force of Old Testament prophecy on wheels. *The Avatar (The Deathless Boy)* is a dank, black hypermotorcycle that appears to have sprouted evil, brainlike hoses and cables and connections the way a Medusa's head sprouts snakes. It is paired with the horrifying, snub-nosed *Conqueror Worm*, a lead-clad motorcycle from hell that looks like Captain Nemo's Nautilus with tires. Scott's most notorious vehicle, his *Trans-Am Apocalypse*, a stock Pontiac Trans Am bearing the entire text of the Book of Revelation, is the inaugural exhibition at the newly expanded Lonsdale Gallery. At Archive Inc., Scott is showing new paintings on paper, and there are also drawings in the west window of Pages Books and Magazines and at Akau Framing Gallery, this last done in collaboration with Deborah Waddington. *From \$1,700 to \$40,000. Until Oct. 30 (except 401 Richmond, which closes tomorrow). Lonsdale Gallery, 333 Lonsdale Rd., 416-487-8939. Archive, 883 Queen St. W., 416-703-6564. Pages, 256 Queen St. W., 416-598-1447. Akau Framing, 742 Queen St. W., 416-504-5999.*

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