

# street level

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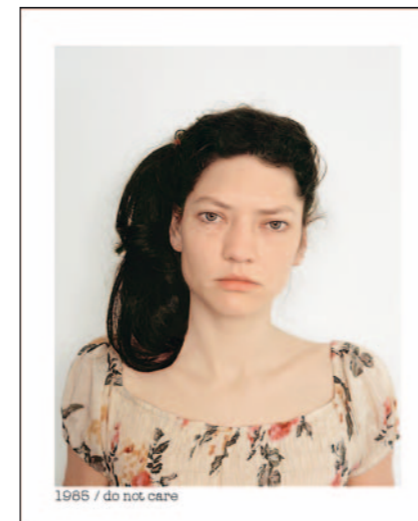
This is number 27 in an ongoing series of small publications profiling new work exhibited at Street Level Photoworks.

Among her shows **EJ Major** has exhibited at the Minnesota Centre of Photography in Minneapolis (2008) The Australian Centre of Photography in Sydney (2007), Clampart, New York (2007), PDNB Gallery in Dallas (2007), Bildmuseet Umea in Sweden and at Darmstadter Tage de Fotografie Germany (2007). A recent article on the series *Love Is...* was published in Magenta Magazine (Canada) and *Marie Claire RIP* has been profiled in European Photography, Fotograf Magazine CZ, The British Journal of Photography, Glasstire, Dallas and ArtInvestor Magaine DE.

**Catherine Somzé** (Brussels, 1977) is a freelance art historian and media critic based in Amsterdam. She contributes on a regular basis to Tubelight, Next Level and ZOO Magazine. She is the author of *Who's Afraid of Leni Riefenstahl?* (Veenman Publishers, 2008).



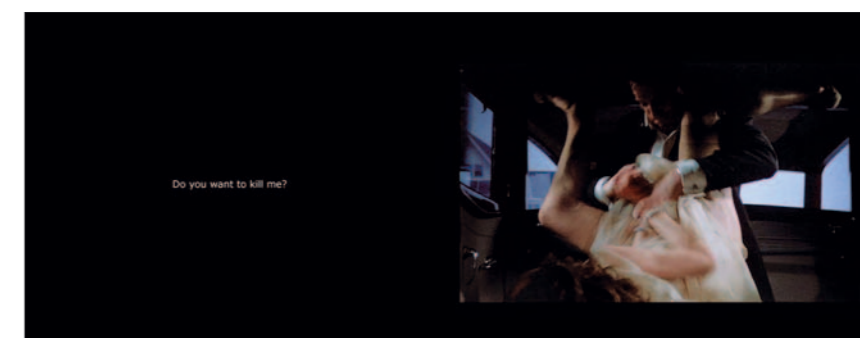
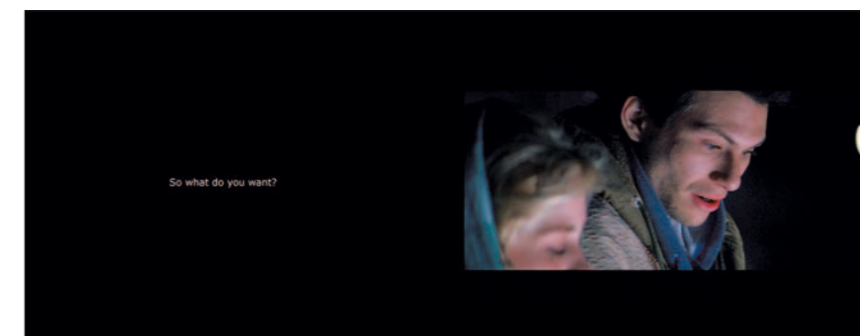
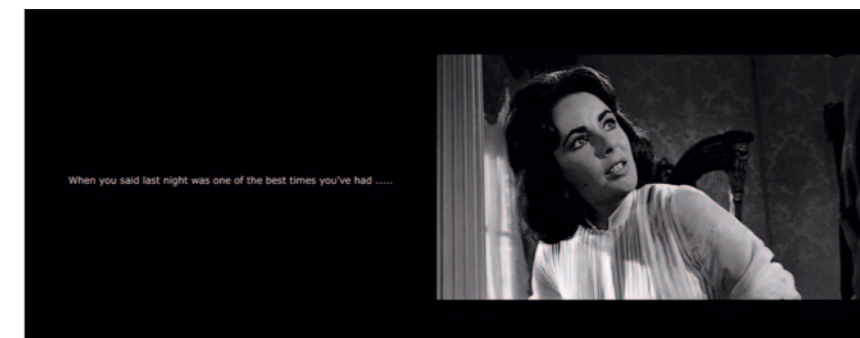
**Images:** Front cover- *Marie Claire RIP* 2006: 1983 / can ride, 1985 / do not care, 1986 / dread it, 1989 / hear rain. Inside flap: *Try to Do Things We All Can Understand* 2003 – 2005. Image sequences generated randomly from 348 scenes and 348 dialogue excerpts. Inside: *from a distance* 2007- from\_a\_distance\_p137. *Love is...* 2004 – 2006- Love is... / 0001, Love is... / 0079, Love is... / 0172, Love is... / 0177, Love is... / 0206, Love is... / 0314. Back cover: *from a distance* 2007- from\_a\_distance\_p046, from\_a\_distance\_p052.



## EJ Major



Design by: design@rhking.net



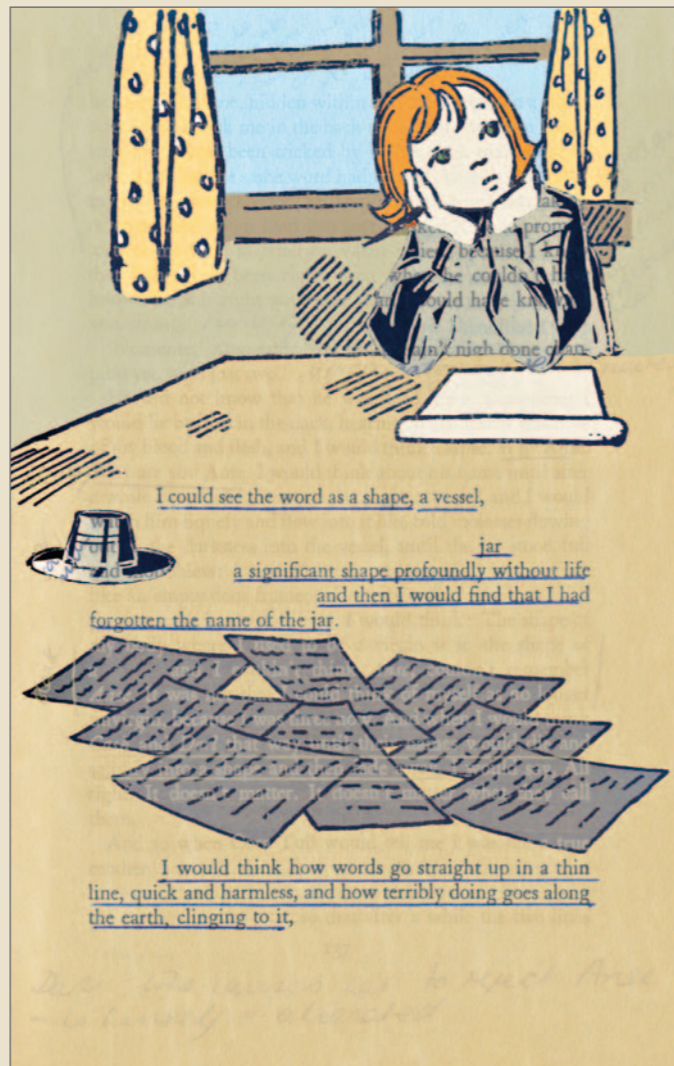
## Everything is...

Short essay on the work of EJ Major by Catherine Somzé

Writing about her latest work *from a distance* (2007), the London-based visual artist EJ Major muses, “The aim was to create a piece (...) that dealt with both the failure of language and its suggestive possibility.” Among a variety of interests to be outlined throughout Major’s body of work, the question of language appears as prominently topical. Such issues as the semantics of images, the importance of language in structuring the experience and the very act of perception pictured as an *inscription*, become articulated throughout her various series and projects around the dichotomy of text and image, upon which Major not merely plays but also thematizes, literally embodying the tension between sign and object.

In the series *Try To Do Things We All Can Understand* (2003-2005), dialogues have been divorced from their original matching film scenes (348 scenes from 29 films), with both being independently presented on several different screens. The disconnected texts and images are displayed so as to create a virtually endless series of new meanings brought on by random association. Besides the reflection on the language of film narration implicit in dismantling the space/time continuum of the various filmic diegeses appropriated for this work, the piece becomes a catalyst for generic emotions embedded in films to emerge while also offering viewers the chance to appropriate and interpret them in their own way. On the other hand, as a result of its collage-like, fragmentary aesthetics, *Try to Do Things We All Can Understand* also conjures a powerful sense of loss. Staged anew, films no longer embody the idyllic unity of sound and image, part and whole, memory and history, which secures their power of identification. Impairment and rupture function here so as to better unveil other aspects of their semantic economy.

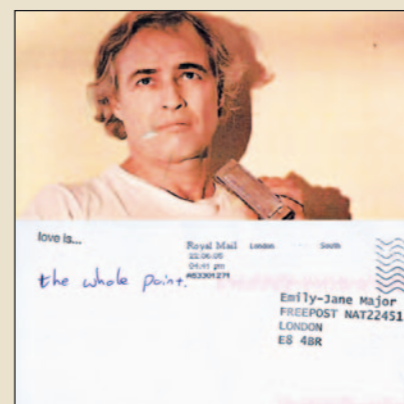
Whereas in *Try to Do Things We All Can Understand*, images are separated from the spoken word, in the series *from a distance* (2007) printed illustrations from a popular publication are put into poetical play with words. Both manipulated and staged anew, *from a distance* is not only a demystifying reflection on the gender politics of youth movements and more generally of children’s education – a kind of



ideology-critique— it is also a poetic comment on the tradition of book annotation, that is, an intervention whereby a text is both appropriated and provided with new personal meanings.

Out of her various projects, the series of photographs *Marie-Claire RIP* (2006) has been the most mediatized one. These 12 self-portraits in the guise of a staged index documenting the downfall of an unknown drug-addict constitute a reflection on the ideology of photography and on the cultural inscription of the female body. The extreme realism of photography justifies the belief in its worth as evidential truth; it provides a ready technology to create the regimes of visibility needed to legitimate the alleged deviance of stigmatized identities – identities that are said to jeopardize the codes and conventions of social normalcy such as that of drug addicts. It can be argued that photography does not so much represent as it *performs*; it serves to symbolically inscribe a mark on the social body. On the other hand, here we find that this act of *marking* also takes place on the female body itself, that of the unknown woman we see embodied through Major’s features. The female body becomes the blunt of a violent *écriture* as a result of drug abuse, the symptoms of which can be said to match those of other disorders (anorexia and domestic violence for instance). Beyond the specificities of its production history, the series *Marie-Claire RIP* highlights and critiques the deed of this double *inscription* on the female body – that of the symbolic violence perpetrated by the photographic apparatus and that of the direct physical violence of drug abuse.

The most participative and hopeful work created by Major, *Love is...* (2004-2006) results from collecting the writings of unknown citizens on the universal subject *par excellence*, love. Here once more, the semantic economy of film and photography is tested and consequently transcended. Free-floating images in the archive of our collective imaginary become the incentive to trigger a reflection on essential aspects of life, and at the same time to seamlessly interrogate the meaning of images and their cultural function. Decoding and writing (on) images, picturing meaning, and questioning our habits of perception – all these aspects of Major’s artistic endeavor point at the inscription to be read all through her work: that we are constructed in language, and that even the most ordinary images are texts which need to be interpreted.



Try To Do Things We All Can Understand