

# Clippings: L'ÉVANGÉLINE in Images

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*The printing press was at first mistaken for an engine of immortality by everybody except Shakespeare.*

-Marshall McLuhan

*Before printing was discovered, a century was equal to a thousand years.*

-Henry David Thoreau

In the 14th and 15th centuries, due to the lengthy and expensive process of hand transcribing texts, literacy was reserved for the privileged church hierarchy and the ruling classes. Long before the newspaper as we know it, political, military and economic news was handwritten<sup>1</sup>, copied by a team of scribes and read out loud, most often by a court messenger.

The woodcut, printmaking's oldest technique, arrived in Europe in the early 14th century and was till then used mostly for utilitarian purposes such as printing motifs on textiles or devotional and popular prints.<sup>2</sup> Books and newspapers soon began to be produced by this method, requiring a hand-carved block for each page that could be repeatedly inked and printed. Though an advancement, this method was tedious and somewhat problematic due to storage restrictions and its unforgiving nature. If a mistake was made during carving, the block would be ruined and the woodworker would have to start from scratch.

The global spread of the printing press is credited to the German blacksmith and goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg who invented the mechanical movable type printing press in 1450.<sup>3</sup> This method allowed for much faster printing and large editions as the letters were stand alone and could be arranged and rearranged to create a new page of information. This invention is central in the rise to the Age of Enlightenment through the democratization of knowledge and the wide dissemination of information and images, bringing otherwise dispersed communities together. Furthermore, the printed newspaper, with vignette woodcut images, altered society's predisposition from an oral-/aural-dominated culture to the visually-dominated one we know today.<sup>4</sup>

Hand-cut wood engravings and hand-drawn etchings eventually gave way to photographic etching in the late 19th century. The images in this exhibition are printed in such a way, reappropriated photographic plates spanning the 1950s to the late 1970s

from the archives of the Acadian newspaper L'ÉVANGÉLINE. The plates, on loan to Imago from the Musée Acadien, were turned over to six print media artists with carte blanche.

Each of the artists inspected the six boxes of numbered envelopes containing plates in search of their projects. Some printed the plates, others used negatives, clippings or scans as a springboard to other ideas. The images, now out of their original context, are reinterpreted and given new meaning.

## The Everyday

Marjolaine Bourgeois found original L'ÉVANGÉLINE newspapers from 1944 and the first thing that caught her eye was an Eaton's ad. This ad awakened the childhood memory of an exciting annual event: the delivery of a big brown box from Canada's largest department store to her families' door in the Magdalen Islands. Bourgeois remembers the delight of going through the new clothes and trying them on.

A lot can be understood about a specific era by analyzing advertisements: they reflect society's changing ideologies. Alongside the Eaton's ad, Bourgeois noticed an array of advertisements offering women products to help cope with womanhood and the pressures of being a housewife.<sup>5</sup> These images made Bourgeois reflect on these past generations of women, specifically her mother, her aunts and her grandmother.

Being primarily a textile artist, Bourgeois made one-dimensional dresses with photocopy transfers of ad clippings and created three figures: Eva, Angélique and Aline. These figures are paired with everyday objects such as a paper airplane, a box and a book, each made of or covered with newspaper. Unlike today, the newspaper was reclaimed to serve many different, utilitarian functions. The transfer technique Bourgeois used reverses text, making it purposely difficult to read. The observer is invited to use a mirror to look at the installation thus inserting him or herself into the piece and creating a rear view perception of a different sociohistorical context in our not-so-distant past.

Mathieu Léger sees L'ÉVANGÉLINE's importance to Francophone Acadian Society as being multifaceted, from bringing dispersed communities together via a daily paper to its use as insulation in many homes of the era. In the gallery space, we see a sliver of a pile of newspapers coming out of a wall with a neat pile of letterpress prints on the ground evoking the image of stacks of newspapers tied with twine, ready for delivery. The words *Viaticum via fenestra*, which mean 'traveling through a daily window', and *Viaticum diurnalis*, which translates to 'daily voyage', appear as un-inked, repetitive letterpress embossments, a technique that was originally used in the printing of newspapers.

Léger is interested in the performative aspect of the distribution of information, seeing the paperboy's job as a political, cultural and social responsibility. A second component of his project involves a daily performance.<sup>6</sup> For the first week of the exhibition, the artist will walk at the same time everyday, encircling the Musée Acadien on the Université de Moncton campus. But here, nothing is delivered, which could point to the death of print

as an object and the slow dissolution of the newspaper. The creation of this private footpath or geographical print through daily ritual speaks to Léger's interest in accumulation, repetition and circulation.

## Myth Weaving

Alisa Arsenault selected four 4x4 negatives depicting the Aberdeen high school. Built in 1898, it was ravaged by fire and rebuilt in 1916 and remained a school until decommissioned in the 1970s. At this time, artists began squatting in the space. It became a co-op in 1986 and is now known as the Aberdeen Cultural Centre where Imago is located and Arsenault has her studio.

The chosen negatives depict children playing in the park and standing in line waiting instruction from their teacher, a nun. Arsenault scanned the negatives and began a long process of tracing the figures in Photoshop. This ritual is common in her work: she appropriates the people in the pictures by tracing them, building narratives around them until they eventually feel familiar to her—fabricated memories. These contour drawings were then made into large-scale screen prints with some of the figures appearing as shadows, an effect created by embossing the paper. This spectral quality is heightened through printing sections of the photos with white ink on white paper, making the image appear and disappear depending on the light or the observer's position. These ghostly figures not only represent the people who may or may no longer be with us but also provide reflection on the diminishing role religion plays in our educational system and its lingering trace of influence on today's younger generations.

In the most recent box from the 70s, we begin to see plates of local celebrities such as athletes and musicians, elements that often appear in Remi Belliveau's work. Belliveau's starting point was an image of the legendary Grand Prix wrestler and Memramcook native Leo Burke. Belliveau quickly began creating a link between Leo, two boxers and a female wrestler all of the last name Burke<sup>7</sup>, making them an imaginary family. Belliveau built an altarpiece based on the Ghent Altarpiece<sup>8</sup> by Hubert van Eyck and replaced the religious iconography with the celebrity athletes in order to celebrate the mythic figures and to attribute a kind of divinity to them. The gold-leaf frame of the screen printed retable-type altarpiece is accompanied by a shelf displaying take-away prayer cards depicting a painting of Leo Burke in wrestling attire.<sup>9</sup> Here Belliveau is questioning traditional Acadian themes found in the boxes of plates such as genealogy, blue blood, the strong man and Catholicism.

In most of his work, Belliveau uses classical European painting and religious art as a base, replacing the content with other elements of history, folklore and popular culture. His large-scale screen prints are digitally manipulated to lose information and are purposely printed on acidic paper. He uses the cheapest available non-archivable materials because he wants his work to deteriorate with time. Belliveau not only questions traditional themes in the content of his work, he questions the process, conventions and the precious nature of printmaking and art in general.

## The Assumption

Angèle Cormier selected a plate depicting a painting of the Assumption of Mary. The virgin Mary remains, for most Acadians, a very central figure in daily life, from the celebration of her assumption on National Acadian Day (August 15th) to her presence as the yellow star on the Acadian flag. The chosen portrait reminded Cormier of her paternal grandmother who had a similar reproduction hanging on her kitchen wall. This is where she would always find her grandmother, Herminie, when she visited—sitting, writing, praying. The image is fitting as Cormier's work is often intimate, enticing a sort of voyeurism into her private life.

Years ago, Cormier acquired her grandmother's scrapbook and wanted to incorporate some aspect of it into her project. The scrapbook contains L'ÉVANGÉLINE clippings and writings with prayers and dates to remember. Cormier printed her chosen Assumption plate 200 times. She then cut the prints and intervened, apposing paint and pencil to each and adding selected reproductions of her grandmother's writings. In the middle of the installation we see a boxed frame containing the rosary that was given to Cormier as a child by her grandmother. Although it is an object that she cherishes, she admits she never used it. Here, the 'garland of roses' takes on more of the status of a museum artifact. It is an object many of Cormier's generation associate with past traditions, looking upon it as an item of cultural and historical interest as opposed to a tool for daily prayer.

Most of the plates in the first four boxes were images of churches and religious figures as the church was the primary shareholder of the paper during this time. The plate Carole Deveau picked is of the first Marian Congress in Acadie, which took place in Moncton, Shediac and Memramcook on September 4, 5, and 6, 1931. Her original interest was the shape of the plate. The elongated copper plate contains an elaborate image of hundreds of people in a field posing for the camera.

After further inspection and a good cleaning, she printed it. This print was then scanned and blown up into a screen print. Knowing her great maternal grandparents lived in Memramcook around that time, she realized that they likely attended this very important event and were perhaps somewhere in the crowd. After many phone calls and investigating, she was able to trace certain missing parts of her genealogy and give names to those distant relatives, among them: Albina, Dométilde, Alva and Maximin. Since Deveau's interest most often lies in portraits of family and friends, she picked out people from the crowd that fit a certain idea she had of her distant family and cut and pasted them together and attributed the names to them.

L'ÉVANGÉLINE closed its doors in 1982, and the majority of the participating artists never knew the paper. L'Évangeline in Images is a synthesis in which the artists negotiated personal meanings through stories built on images stripped of their original text, time and place. The paper's impact through the years is undeniable as it provided the Acadian society information in their language and a connection to the outside world

all the while pulling their dispersed population together: Unir et instruire pour agir (Unite and Educate for Agency).

1. Also known as Avissi, reporti, gazzette, ragguagli, nouvelles, advis, corantos, courantes, zeitungen.
2. The earliest example of mass media, popular prints contained images, popular history, political comment or satire, news and poems.
3. Bi Sheng invented the world's first movable type printing in China between the years 1041 and 1048. The letters were made of ceramic materials.
4. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 331
5. Namely a product called 'Mother's little helper' also known as Valium.
6. The title of this performance piece is *Over Seven Days Walking*.
7. Jackie 'Golden Boy' Burke, Mildred Burke, James 'Deaf' Burke.
8. Also called the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb.
9. The back of the card shows a passage from the American novel *Moby Dick*, which refers to Leo Burke.