

Washed up in a city of loneliness

Adam Simms's solitary figure

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Anaked man lies on the ground under a night sky. His face is hidden and his posture is indifferent, beaten down. He is an anonymous figure in a barren tableau that echoes loneliness and disinterested despair.

The exhibition *Washed-up* contains 12 conceptual photographs taken by Adam Simms in locations around Montreal and is on display at the art deco store/gallery KA Vie Art.

Depictions of the city as a place that can overwhelm and ruin its denizens are nothing new. Simms, however, isn't just trying to reveal the ugly face of urban life. He is trying to draw out analogies between the ocean and the city.

"The primary parallel that I pull between the ocean and a city is loneliness," he said in correspondence. Both are teeming with life, but they can also be vast and lonely places. The artist represents these sentiments by shooting empty parts of the city that are often filled with people, but that are now only occupied by one broken man.

Consumption is another shared behaviour between the city and the sea. They both devour large quantities of matter and expel their refuse, which washes up on their respective concrete and sandy shores.

Originally from Newfoundland, Simms used to walk along the water's edge and come across items the tide had left behind. "The mouth of the sea could consume anything, but the things it returned were all tor-

tured with characteristics of struggle and abandonment," he says in his artist's statement. He recreates this behaviour in the city, replacing the oceanic debris with the nude male and using the hard-edged surfaces of urban architecture as the shoreline.

Simms chose to represent the ocean without ever showing it, which he says is "very representational of what it feels like to grow up next to the ocean and now live in a city without the ocean." The photos that have a wide field of view and take in the cityscape succeed more in mimicking the immensity of the sea than the ones where the body is placed close in the foreground and the sky cannot be seen. The photos were shot at night as a means of accentuating the dramatic atmosphere and highlighting details using the city lights. It was also the most convenient time to shoot the locations without anyone else being in the shot (or being alarmed by the naked man lying on the ground).

One particularly beautiful photograph stands out because instead of laying the

man out on cement or asphalt, it nestles the nude in a small grassy field surrounded by autumn's copper-coloured bushes. The eighth photo in the series' sequence, it gives the city a softer, more nurturing persona and seems to represent a refuge for the down and out.

Simms moved to Montreal in 2004 to pursue a Fine Arts degree in Design Art at Concordia University while also working as a software designer. Through photography, he found a way of exploring the city and capturing how his maritime upbringing has shaped his view of urban life. He chose his locations by chance, walking around the city on the lookout for interesting areas, but the way he framed his shots was very specific.

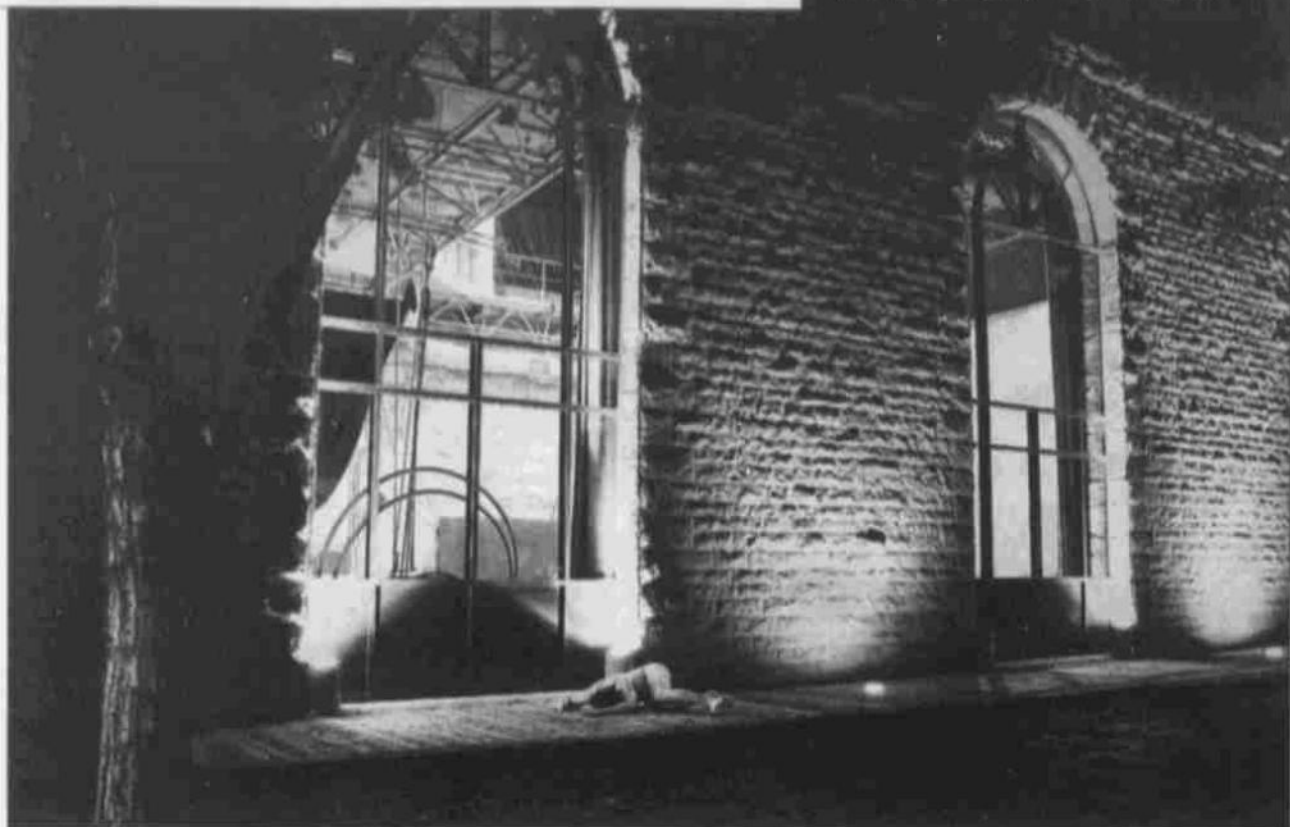
"My profession is design, therefore, I am quite conscious when it comes to lines and shapes, and this is quite evident in the series." Parallel lines figure prominently in these images, as do arcs and flat fore-

One interesting fact about the exhibition

is that it turns out that the photos are actually a series of self-portraits. The figure represents an anonymous man, but the model is actually Simms. "That seems to bring quite a surprise from the viewer."

Connecting the city and the sea with their similar capacities for isolation, consumption and destruction is an interesting examination, given that the ocean is often portrayed as a majestic and serene place. In this series, the city retains its majesty in the empty darkness of night time while exposing its human debris in a singular and vulnerable manner. Often represented as a cluttered and overpopulated place, the city stripped bare is shown while the tide is out. Simms's compositions do a good job of articulating his view and offer audiences curiously coastal representations of Montreal.

Washed-up continues until Sept. 30 at KA Vie Art, 1410 Beaudry St. (just behind the Beaudry metro station). For more details, call 514-657-3535 or visit www.kavieart.com.



ADAM SIMMS

In his show *Washed-up*, Adam Simms connects the city and an unseen ocean and explores their similarities.

CULTURE