

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Summer in Montreal: A Gestalt

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, June 4th, 2014

“Many will look, but a few will see”.

Professor Philip Thiel, in architecture school, would use that expression to differentiate the act of looking, as casting one’s eyes on something or someone, from the act of seeing, as understanding that thing’s or person’s essential traits, character or form.

That level of understanding is what he aimed at having us reach for, when teaching us free hand drawing ... a level which I find applicable to photography.

“Public soles and private souls”



When I took the photograph above I was looking at the whole scene of people at a coffee shop on a rainy day in summer.

Summer in Montreal is experienced and expressed most vividly by the liberation from winter footwear and by the renewed public sociability of the body.

I grasped the essential social moment of the scene only when I saw it expressed through a specific photographic framing: the visual gestalt principles of similarity and proximity establishing the feet as the foreground elements of the photograph, which are then tied visually by the Y shape of the flooring in the background.

When I sent this photograph to my friend and colleague Douglas Johnson he wrote back suggesting the following caption:

“Public soles and private souls”

In a very real sense his caption confirms the photographic expressive value of a moment of summer sociability.

An Invitation

I invite the reader to enjoy, look around and see how summer sociability expresses itself in his/her neck of the wood.

I will be joining you with Urban Field Notes (thoughts and observations) concerning “commons” territoriality and sociability in the city.

Photos and collage credit Maurice Amiel

This entry was posted on Wednesday, June 4th, 2014 at 9:10 pm and is filed under [Architecture](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.