

WITH EVERGON AND JEAN-JACQUES RINGUETTE:
THE CHROMOGENIC CURMUDGEONS

November 22, 2017

Evergon, AKA Celluloso Evergonni, has been practicing art, as well as teaching it for close to four decades, and holds a Master of Fine Arts from the Rochester Institute of Technology. Primarily concerned with homo-eroticism, gay male culture, and art historical tropes, Evergon's work transgresses the historical representation of gender and sexuality. Although his work is largely photographic, for him the medium becomes one of fluidity, something to be teased. Since his first explorations with double exposure in the late 60s, Evergon has perpetually aroused notoriety for his gestural experimentation with photographic mediums.

Jean-Jacques Ringuette, AKA Gigi Angeletti, is an artist originally from Trois-Rivières, Quebec, holding a Masters of Photography from Concordia University; where him and Evergon first met. Known for his black-and-white portraiture explorations, his work has historically explored self-representation and the tradition of the artist represented as a clown. Diverting from the notion of photography being documentary and neutral, Ringuette works through referencing and re-staging, with an emphasis on the the devaluation of the subject.

Together, Evergon and Jean-Jacques Ringuette form a collaborative project know as the Chromogenic Curmudgeons. A portion of Two Old Friends Play Chess was first shown in Montreal, at the Galerie Trois Points just last year (2016), while the entirety of this body of work opened at dc3 Art Projects on September 8th, 2017. While the duo was in town from Montreal, Jessa Gillespie from dc3 Art Projects conversed with them about their history, the intricacies of their partnership, and new collaborative bodies of work.

Three years ago, Evergon bore a failing body and was confined to his home, yet the drive to create endured. Notorious for his defiance of illness, Evergon rekindled a long-standing artistic partnership with Jean-Jacques Ringuette, and together they began to lay down the initial strokes for what would become the *Chromogenic Curmudgeons*.

Assembling memorabilia from Evergon's home, the duo shaped spaces that fluidly depict both the artists and the observers. A rich thoughtfulness in texture, palette, and objectal narrative form images that become portraits of the artists themselves, and in turn provide the viewer with opportunities to see themselves reflected in the work.

Constructed directly for the eye of the camera, these painterly still-lives are composed in conversation over several days, resulting in landscapes built by the artist's subjectivity. Being large-scale photographic work, they subsume you into their worlds'; ones that are full of wit, emotion, provocation, and narrative. Their richness

takes form amid a process of responsive action and reaction, creating a joyful jousting match between the two artists.

Two Old Friends Play Chess was shown alongside a solo exhibition by Travis McEwen, *The Arch: Plans for a Heterotopic Space Opera*. Evergon taught McEwen at Concordia University, and post student-teacher relations, Evergon acquired a painting of McEwen's which now hangs in his living room. It just so happens that during the creation of *Fuschia: The Devil is in the Details* (a work within *Two Old Friends Play Chess*), Evergon and Ringuette decided to leave McEwen's painting on the wall, letting it be a part of the conversation. The duo was aroused by the coloration of the painting and how it influenced the narrative of their image. At my suggestion that the palette was reminiscent of the Baroque era, Evergon cheekily jumped in to correct me.

< **evergon** > *Well my dear, it's really more homo-Rococco than Baroque.*



Fuschia: The Devil is in the Details, 2015-16, inkjet on archival paper, 50 x 40 in, edition of 3.

Evergon and Ringuette conversed in tandem, seamlessly finishing each other's thoughts with a gracious attentiveness. It was immediately clear the affinity they hold for each other, and the mutual respect for the other's opinions and practices.

A little over 35 years ago, Evergon taught a class that Ringuette was enrolled in at the University of Ottawa. Following their student-teacher relationship, Ringuette started modelling occasionally during Evergon's Polaroid expeditions; a pioneering endeavor that took use of large-format Polaroid cameras at various institutions (originally at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts), producing 1 x 2 m prints. Along the way, Ringuette became an integral part of the creative process, and this spurred into action almost four decades of friendly collaboration between the two.

< evergon > *The late seventies & particularly the early eighties were the time of the beginning of AIDS. Several of the members of the eclectic-circus with whom I worked on the Polaroid cameras, were either ill or dead. It was not conscious at first, but I did start to ask some of the better students to join me on the trips to the Polaroid studios in Boston or NYC. It was a chance for them to participate in the shoots and to work on a camera that none of them would have access to otherwise.*

< ringuette > *He also just thought I was nice-looking. And I really was pretty cute back then.*

The sense of cheek between the two is not lost in the work. From the title,

Oh Ken! You're such a Gladiator, to

A long, long time ago, before the olden days, the great grey heron was transversing the full moon. Sixth sensing danger, it turned its head back over its shoulder as the golden talons of the bald eagle pierced into its back, its black sword-like beak pierced the eagle's heart. And the two fell, tumbling out of the moon.,

the metaphoric potential of the image swells. A boldness of language resounds through the images and the collaboration as a whole. The two have given each other many aliases and nicknames throughout the years, but currently existing as Celluloso Evergonni (Evergon), and Gigi Angeletti (Jean-Jacques Ringuette), or Big Hellion and Slim.

< evergon > *We just keep visually punning, playing & horsing around.*

Their partnership has spawned many impactful bodies of work, most notably *Ramboys*, works aiming to queer Western art iconography. *Ramboys* is the documentation of an imaginary race, part satyr and part urban hustler, and their male-to-male cruising grounds, called "Manscapes". More recently they exhibited their series, *House-bound: Portraits from the Winter Garden*, a gentle and humorous homage to their house-plants.

< ringuette > *I had been staring at this plant for days while working on our House-bound series, struggling to*

reconcile the composition. The test shots I had taken looked good, but not quite right somehow. Evergon came into the studio one day, rotated the plant an inch, and it was perfect. I was exasperated that I had been struggling so much, but I needed his mind in that moment to resolve the work. This is always how it is, an image would not be without both of us.

The Chromogenic Curmudgeons have been working in concert for the last three years, and have numerous collaborative projects still to be realized.



Install shot of *Two Old Friends Play Chess* at dc3 Art Projects, 2017.

Under the Watch of the Thalidomide Angel, 2015-16, inkjet on archival paper, 40 x 50 in, edition of 3.

Oh Ken! You're such a Gladiator, 2015-16, inkjet on archival paper, 40 x 50 in, edition of 3.

< evergon > *We have already done a complete extension of the House- bound series: Portraits from the Winter Garden. These new images are in the same sizes and vein. The work is called Housebound: Cut, Uncut, and Broke, which may be a description of the Chromogenic Curmudgeons. All along, we have also been working on a series of men and boys Rough-Housing. And there is another test pilot for Tragedies between nature, plants and conveyance vehicles. We have just finished printing our first book entitled The Book of Noods which is a text-*

But, for now, they will pause for a breath, together.

Jean-Jacques Ringuette will continue work on a project tasked with inventing narratives of the figure in nature and in out-of-studio environments. Evergon plans to dedicate his time to a 350-page monograph expected to come out this year under Black Dog Publishing in London, titled *Evergon: Lovers and Muses*. Evergon has also hinted at a large-scale retrospective exhibition taking place within the next few years, with the location remaining a tantalizing secret.

Four years ago, David Candler, Founder of dc3 Art Projects, sought Evergon out in the hopes of exhibiting his body of work, Margaret and I. That exhibition kindled a relationship between dc3 Art Projects and Evergon that would extend into the present showing of Evergon and Jean-Jacques Ringuette's concerted project, Two Old Friends Play Chess, which opened on September 8th, 2017.