The biannual exploration of contemporary photography known as Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal, while slightly scaled down for this eleventh edition, remains an example of strong curatorial focus and international exhibition possibilities. Curator Gaëlle Morel organized twenty-four individual exhibitions and “public space interventions” of artwork from thirteen countries including Canada, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, and the United States. This year’s theme was “The Spaces of the Image,” and work explored the issues of scenography, mechanisms and staging in contemporary photography, and more.

Several of the artists engage in a process of appropriation or destruction (or what Morel terms “withdrawal”), questioning elements of photography as both space and history. Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige of Lebanon (Morel terms “withdrawal”), questioning elements of photography as both space and history. Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige of Lebanon and Paris, for example, who exhibited several pieces, work in many media to explore the notion of latency. In Faces (2001), they redacted photographs taken from posters of martyrs in Lebanon. They restored parts of the faces of these men—weathered and diminished by time—returning an eye or a hint of a mouth, commenting on the public function of the gaze on private memory and forgetting. It is as if these men were fading in and out, sending a silent message from another world. In Circle of Confusion (2001), Hadjithomas and Joreige installed a large-format aerial view of Beirut in 3,000 fragments. Commenting on the lack of documentation of the history of the city, they invited gallery visitors to take one of the individual pieces, revealing a mirror behind, where those who are disassembling can see themselves taking part in the destruction. As the pieces are removed, the city becomes more fragmented and memory is challenged.

Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz’s Aliento [Breath] (1996–2002) is a striking work also exploring the theme of disappearance, and also with the added dimension of interactivity. When viewers breathe on the metal disks mounted on the wall (which have been printed with a grease photo-silkscreen process), the faces of victims of political violence in Colombia (some named, some not) appear. These visages fade just as quickly, reminding us of the importance, and effort, of remembering.

Canadian Shelley Miller uses perishable materials to re-present vernacular objects. In Cargo (The Wealth of Some and the Ruin of Others) (2009), Miller recreated—in sugar—a motif of clipper ships using the aesthetic of traditional Portuguese blue-and-white ceramic tiles, referencing the sugar trade and slavery. After the piece, which won The Contact Image People’s Choice Award, melted as it weathered, it was replaced with a photograph that is scheduled to be on view until 2013.

In Madonna de Bentalha (2001–02), one of the most unique pieces on display, Pascal Convert of France transformed a photograph of a grieving woman taken after a massacre in Algiers in 1997 into a wax sculpture. A form of simulacra, Convert’s life-size interpretation of what has been widely considered a modern Madonna image is accompanied by a video documentary explaining the history of the original image, exploring the nature of documentary truth in images of war and personal suffering.

In The Sound of Silence (2006), Chile-born Alfredo Jaar creates an immersive video installation exploring the life and death of South African documentary photographer Kevin Carter, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his photograph of a starving young child in Sudan, a vulture hovering behind her. The 8-minute video is text-based and silent, with Carter’s shocking, singular image prefaced by a loud flash of light that critiques silence and personal and social culpability. As Jaar writes, “No one knows what happened to that child but the image has a 12-digit reference number and is controlled by a large corporation owned by the richest man in the world.”

A number of the exhibitions took a documentary and/or installation form. Canadian photographer Robert Burley has documented the razing of Kodak photography plants in the United States and France (the birthplace of photography), a trend indicating the death of photographic film. His Photographic Proof (2008–09) is a large-scale Polaroid photograph affixed as a site-specific wall mural to the Canadian Centre for Architecture, using a new emulsion transfer process. This project investigates the trace of memory through the ironic presentation of people taking digital photographs of the destruction of a means of production that for a century made silver gelatin prints, exploring how the two technologies are working together.

Israeli artist Yael Bartana created the dual video projection Summer Camp + Ascendant (2007). Playing back to back are the 1935 Zionist propaganda film Ascendant and Bartana’s documentation of the construction of a building on Palestinian land by an Israeli peace organization. As the audio tracks merge, the narratives converge, highlighting the continuous importance of remembering.
of land to Israeli identity as well as the disparate ways this has been approached over the decades. Another video, *Kings of the Hill* (2003), depicts the popular pastime of racing trucks up sand dunes, documenting humans re-envisioning of natural space for their ritualistic entertainment and edification.

In the video installation *Let’s Puff!* (2002), by Yang Zhenzhong of China, a young woman on a wall-size video screen blows through pursed lips, exerting more and more effort as her breath fades and she regains energy. On the opposite wall, which she faces, a panoramic video of a Shanghai street scene allows viewers to travel through the space at varying rhythms depending on the amount of air exhaled by the woman. The varied pace of this unspoken dialogue results in halts, increases in speed and moves into fast-forward, observing the process of urbanization in the metropolis.

Other artists experimented with the nature of photographic space. In *From Hand to Mouth* (1993), American-born French resident Jeff Guess looped a series of photographic images and hung the circular construction from the ceiling. Visitors were invited to duck under and step into the center of the circular panorama, engaging in a process of making meaning from images of appendages utilizing tools: a hand holding a cup or a fork, playing a keyboard, touching a ball, typing. The piece serves as an engulfing, stationary filmstrip, with no privileged place or space of beginning or ending from which to experience it.

In *Street Scenes* (2006–08) and *Bus Stop* (2003), American Jim Campbell uses still images, an opaque screen, translucent filters, and grids of moving, singular lights programmed to emulate the presence of human figures populating urban landscapes. These static photographs come alive with fleeting, haunting specters of humanity—intangible yet real—challenging notions of existence, memory, and latency.

Canadian Michael Flomen’s billboard *The Blue Flyer II* (2009) floated in the Montreal skyline. Flomen, using photosensitive paper (but no camera), captured the bioluminescent light of fireflies, which came to inhabit the night sky on a large scale. Nature is both contained within the horizontal frame of the billboard yet connected to the urban environment.

Canadian Pierre Tremblay documents his daughter in *Dernière soirée de l’été – Oonagh – les Grands lacs* (2008) using still images and a Zeno panel. As the viewer moves along the horizontal frame, a young girl dances as if in a moving image, a portrait come to life. Allowing for viewing from multiple perspectives, this piece plays with kinetic effects, with new technologies echoing old in the form of a modern photographic flipbook.

Yveline Loiseur of France abstracted a single image and applied it to a small gallery room in an endlessly repeating pattern from an architectural model as the polyptych *Grand Air* (2007). This confined space, with its graphic element melted into the walls, blurs ornament, architecture, and photography—turning inside out in a playful manner.

In his series “Journal panoscopique” (1999–), Canadian Luc Courchesne creates small discs with photographic images he took with a Panascope camera, resulting in deformations and anamorphoses of land and landscape. These distortions, along with an element of interactivity, question the reality of and perceived meaning of space. The viewer is invited to spin each circular image, thereby experiencing their new surroundings at a faster or slower pace, remaining readable or blurring into invisibility, as if the whole world is encompassed within.

Other extracurricular activities promoting photography to a diversity of audiences included a youth photography contest, artists’ talks, and a colloquium. In “Before the ‘Painting Format’: Large-Format Photography of the 1970s,” photography historian Olivier Lugon of Lausanne University argued that quality photography can compete with painting in the gallery space. Natalie Boulouch of the University of Rennes presented “The Slide: An Image at the Edge,” following the changes in the aesthetic value of the slide in photographic history. French critic and curator Garance Chabert offered “The Artist as Iconographer,” focusing on A. Froment, a French photographer living in Dublin who uses cinematographic tropes. André Habib of the University of Montréal and Viva Paci of University of Québec at Montréal, in their presentation “Exhibiting: Between Photography and Cinema,” examined the notion that the process of exhibition is similar to the relation between the two media. Florian Ebner, Director of the Museum for Photography in Braunschweig, Germany, used the example of postwar Berlin to explore “From the Depths of the Archive to Public View: Interpretation and Installation of Historical Photographs. Photographer Robert Burley, in “The Disappearance of Darkness: An Artist’s Paradox,” explained the process of creating his image *Photographic Proof* and offered a brief history of the rise and demise of photographic film.

The impressive accompanying publication, also titled *The Spaces of the Image* and edited by Morel, documents all of the individual shows in the exhibition and includes text of several of the contributions by critics and art historians from the colloquium. It is handsomely illustrated and produced and all text is printed in both English and French.

Karen Vanmeenen is Editor of Afterimage.