

Artist to Collect

Ysabel LeMay





previous spread, Life 1, archival pigment print, 59" x 84"

above, Wander, c-print, 24" x 72"

Pure Divinity

written by Brett Anningson

There is something different and alluring about Austin, Texas. It is young and hip, the current music capitol of the US and just a cool place to hang out. It is also where you will find Ysabel LeMay working on her latest series of hyper-collage.

"To be short and sweet, I recently moved to Austin after spending the last six years in Florida," she explains. "I am originally from Quebec City

and a nomad by nature. I do have a sense of wanting new experiences and so I keep doing different things; a little butterfly tasting life."

Not only is Austin a great place to live, it also has an ecosphere Ysabel had yet to experience, the desert. "For me, it is all about the joyful moments," she says, "a healthy lifestyle, constant movement that provides new experiences... I get inspired when I place myself in a position of receptivity – where I can receive ideas and improvise with them. My work is highly instinctual. Just like a jazz player, something sets the tone and I go from there."

Describing herself as self-taught, Ysabel's current creations appear to be amazingly intricate nature paintings. It is only upon closer inspection that you realize each work is composed of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of photographs intricately rearranged to create something new.

"It is a spiritual pursuit," says Ysabel. "I am really trying to capture Nature's divinity which is all around us. It is living, transforming and it never ceases to inspire me. I let her lead throughout the

rhythm of the seasons. By means of my camera, I attempt to capture her subtleties and beauty in its purest form, as I interpret to you her divinity as I sense it. A leaf may appear commonplace at first glance, but when our eyes linger over it, the mundane becomes something of wonder. There is so much beauty in this world! We need only to take time to surrender to the spectacle. My art is a tribute to Nature. It is an offering; a moment of contemplation."

The Outward Journey

Growing up in rural Quebec in a family of musicians, there was not really a lot of exposure to the world of visual art. Ysabel sought it out as much as possible, but it was more that she was inspired by the world around her and the way she saw it.

"I connected with the power of nature at a very young age," she recalls. "My parents have a cabin on a very isolated patch of land north of Quebec City. We used to spend some weekends away from the civilized world, and were immersed in

the beautiful, wild landscape. Our time there was all about pleasures and adventures in the woods. I also noticed how the land had an impact on the spirit of my family. A more harmonious and playful energy was bringing us together. To this day, I associate nature with joy."

High school offered few options for artists, and Ysabel thinks that choosing to be in the Illustration and Graphic Design program in college was her way to avoid going through a very linear form of study. "I was terrible at school, until I became an art student," she jokes. "Living in a small town where fine arts were nonexistent, my only connection to art was through art books, which I referred to when I needed inspiration for my work as a designer. I started to work full-time in advertising at 19, a very young age. First as a graphic designer, but I rapidly made my way up to become an art director and, finally, creative director. For the last nine years of this career, I was the owner of an advertising agency. This is where I really learned the skills of self-management and discipline, which are essential to my life as an artist."





previous spread, Life 3, archival pigment print, 59" x 84"

Then, 11 years ago, in search of a more creative and fulfilling life, Ysabel began her journey into fine arts. "My husband and painter, Carmelo Blandino, put a paint brush in my hand and I never looked back. Painting was a vigorous eight years of training for what would become my true passion – photography. Most specifically, digital composite. For the last three years, I have devoted my entire life, my soul and much more to develop what I call my 'true voice'."

The turnaround came in stages, an artistic nomadic journey to mirror her physical travels. She was first introduced and enthralled by visual art in college, but the art history and realism of that world left her cold. It was upon seeing a contemporary piece by Joan Mitchell that the creativity within burst forth and Ysabel instantly related to the intelligence and psychological effect of the work.

It was this she took into advertising.

"Through graphic design, I was exposed to great illustrators – the advertising and the artistic world started to merge together and I saw the potential of doing more and more. At first I had this limitation in advertising, you had something tangible. Art, for me, was all about pushing the boundaries of what we are used to seeing, about bringing new life forms into the world. I talk a lot about life intelligence and collective consciousness. I saw that and experienced it through art. That gave me the courage and drive to explore fine arts. It was a total connection between my spiritual expansion and my desire to do something more interesting creatively."

Her husband helped her break free from that structure by handing her a paint brush and saying, just paint. It was freeing. For eight

above, Arcadia, c-print, 32" diameter



Phenomena, c-print, 24" x 72"



The Gift, c-print, 36" x 56"



Heartbeat, c-print, 36" x 72"



City of Angels, c-print, 23" x 72"



Sanctum, c-print, 45" x 72"



Azul, c-print, 36" diameter

years, she painted and made a name for herself. "The thing is," Ysabel explains with a laugh, "I hated painting."

One day, as the story goes, there was a guy doing a documentary on Ysabel's life as an artist. He was done for the day and handed Ysabel a camera and said, "Go ahead, play with it." The next day, Ysabel showed him two of her photographs and he looked at her, paused, and told her to keep the camera.

"I felt an incredible connection to the medium," she says. "It was easy. I did not have to control the elements in the same way. It just felt right – and the development of the style was almost instant. It may have been because of lack of experience, or maybe pure accident, or my desire to simplify my life as an artist... but I sat down with my digital camera plugged into Photoshop and started playing. And this is what came out. Photography

has allowed me to go deeper into my imaginary world and have it come rushing out of me."

Studio in a Suitcase

Her work has a maximalist style, which is surprising when you see the minimalist nature of her studio and life. Ysabel likes to work in an environment that is visually clean and without too much stimulation. This allows her to reach inside to find her own vision for the piece. At the same time, she listens to music because it connects her to the emotional side of what she is doing. She jokes that, with her lifestyle, her studio needs to fit in a suitcase.

"Two things that always got my blood flowing are abstract paintings and large scale works," Ysabel says. "Joan Mitchell was a great influence in my work. Her sensitivity and the power in her works still moves me to this day. With her aggressive and



The Poets, c-print, 32" diameter

colourful strokes, she was able to make the viewer experience a very precise emotion. I was also once incredibly rewarded by seeing the art of another particular artist. His name is Jérôme Martin. When I saw his exhibition Écrans series at the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art, a few years back, his large scale paper works had such magnitude of intelligence and beauty that I understood at that precise moment what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to reach that level of intelligence through my work and offer the same magnitude of excellence. This man changed the course of my life. I understood how, by being dedicated to excellence, I could impact the life of a few in a positive way. I hope my work offers a space where the viewer can connect with their higher self, the part in each of us that makes us realize our dreams and inspire people along the way."

This is what led her to large scale hyper-collage. Ysabel describes the process as highly instinctual and organic, allowing each piece to dictate its own destiny. From a single, simple starting point – an image, a colour, an emotion – she follows a meticulous process, first isolating and extracting the elements of the photos to get in touch with the essence and individuality of each plant. She explains that they all have their own energetic impact and provoke a particular emotion. These fragments are then woven together into intricate compositions creating wonderful other worlds.

"I see nature through my holographic lenses," Ysabel notes. "I am first taken by its splendour. Then I connect with its energetic field, which opens the gate of information and knowledge where creative thoughts manifest. By allowing its energy to run through me, I first perceive and



Ornatus, c-print, 48" x 57"



Ousia, c-print, 24" x 72"



above, *Repose*, c-print, 36" x 36"
right, *Meet Me There*, c-print, 36" x 36"

then visually demonstrate the magic of the living world. My interaction with nature allows me to understand more deeply my communion with it and others, and I believe its primordial power can help lift our collective consciousness. To quote Einstein, "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

Ysabel's work continues to develop; moving into a more three-dimensional portrayal. She is working with Concordia University on a technique that will transform her work into a moving, full-body animation. "When you are a person – there is a lot of us that is hidden," she says, "but we are bigger than we seem. My art allows me to see the more expansive me, the things that are beyond the physical level. That is what I want the viewer to enter into."

Discover more of the beauty of Ysabel's vision at www.ysabelmay.com. Ysabel is represented by:

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