

La vie est à nous
by November Paynter

The street is lit up by a warm red glow: 'La vie est à nous' reads a neon light framed by the window of Analix Forever. A positive phrase, so emotive and inspiring. A quote that seems to offer endless potential. It is all these things, especially when glanced upon hanging there alone, and for the passerby it burns on the retina and inspires the memory. Foremost a sign and title, the neon also takes on another role as it shrouds the space of Mario Rizzi's one-person exhibition at Analix Forever in colour. It is a sentence appropriated from two major sources by Rizzi to act as a canopy for a range of people's untold or more often unheard stories. While the reference to the 1936 film of the same name is not specific for Rizzi, he clearly carries a similar conscience to share with as many as possible the voices of the marginalised. Rizzi's use of the neon can also be imagined as a sequel to the vertical light installation of the same sentence and colour that opened Bertolucci's "Il Conformista" (1970) –but again this is ultimately not so important for Rizzi and hence the question introduced to the audience is whether this neon gesture, which hangs so bold and proud, can be read as a visual statement that plays with a saying for its own means.

Huddled under this malleable headline are three of Rizzi's video works and a selection of his photographs. "The Chicken Soup" (2008) and "impermanent" (2007) are substantial video pieces, to be viewed and reflected upon with dedication and compassion. Each film enters into the densely complex lives of Rizzi's chosen subjects and by way of the artist's embedded experience (Rizzi usually lives for months on location with the people he involves in his work) and precise editing, the protagonists' stories are elevated within a frame that feels very much inspired by their own personal feelings, and the spirit and nature of their situation. A cinema setting hosts "The Chicken Soup" and we are invited to enter for a while the lives of two women who were taken to Taiwan as migrant, virgin brides. While their stories are full of trauma, as they are first controlled by their broker and later their husband, mother-in-law or others, Rizzi also draws out each woman's beauty and hints at moments of hope despite their vulnerability, particularly in a scene where one woman dances for his camera. In the main space of the gallery the neon is balanced by the strong statement of "impermanent", a portrait of a 96 year-old man who dreams of and for Jerusalem, who talks of war and peace, responsibility and desire. Filmed in Amman, the film manages to merge one moment together with a lifetime and a whole century of shifting history and geography. As if he knows the title of the exhibition the protagonist of "impermanent" describes in his monologue that 'life is ours' to learn from, to shape and to share.

The photographs included in the exhibition individually embody a separate time, location and experience for Rizzi. Despite all the footage he has taken while working on videos, as well as the many photographic stills he has made or invited of others for books and research, it is extremely intriguing that each time-period in his practice is now marked by just one enduring image. There is a tenderness to this sparse, unembellished approach to imagery and it mimics the care that Rizzi takes when he works with others in his films. The fact that the photographs included in "La vie est à nous" are not shown alongside their accompanying film, video or book frees them from the danger of becoming the title image or poster pin up, and this is a concern that Rizzi challenges in a different way by means of his fabricated cinema poster for his video work "Murat and Ismail".

"Den Dolder" (1999), a photograph taken by someone else, shows a woman lying face down in the snow. Initially taken as part of a project in which Rizzi gave throw-away cameras to the patients of a psychiatric hospital (to use, throw or sell as they chose) he was only intrigued by the images that did not include a face. A book of these photographs was produced and yet the only human, albeit without a face, was this girl freezing herself as if life had stopped and she knew nothing else than to share her despair with nature by numbing her pain with its cold. "Paris" (2002) is also faceless, but the movement of the girl's hair shows she is very much alive and could spin around to face the

camera at any second. She is a friend of Rizzi's captured crossing the street, her vivacity making it into this hand-picked pile of images maybe because she acts as a counterbalance to "Den Dolder". Rizzi again inserts a moment of hope that within the frame of the gallery traverses time and space. "Drafting Moods" (2002) is also a lucky shot, taken backstage one evening after a theatrical performance. It is the only photo taken by Rizzi during this 2002 project where he again asked others to take images on his behalf. "New Orleans" (2008) is the interior of a temporary living situation inhabited by an illegal immigrant rebuilding a home in New Orleans. "Tarantella" (2003) a couple dancing as part of a project in Berlin where Rizzi created a space on the S-Bahn route for classes in life-painting, photography and dance. Finally "PINK!" (2005) is a portrait of a transvestite taken for a publication that included documents detailing acts of discrimination, police reports and immigration issues. "PINK!" again, is the one image that endures in this series, another photograph that needs no explanation as it humbly speaks a thousand words.

Perhaps this other side of Rizzi's very precisely tuned practice began with "gling-gló memo" (2001), a film edited mainly from found footage of which some sections include the artist as a child. There is no dialogue and the editing contains repeats and turns around in and about itself as if Rizzi himself has entered a conundrum and a maze of his own past that he is trying to solve. The work closes on an image of Rizzi and two of his cousins. The women wear very similar dresses and this repetition naturally exaggerates the effects of Rizzi's labyrinthine editing. But at the same time he holds this frame, he pauses the work right here, as if the tangle has become too much and by extending this one moment in time something more, something clearer, an answer may emerge. This one image, the final still, is then lifted from its impossible condition within the film - where it exists as both past, present and memory - to join the other markers of Rizzi's practice on the walls of the gallery. Here it takes a special place as the only filmic still that is liberated from the cycle of moving-image, and again very tenderly Mario gives it the opportunity to exist outside of its journey and in this precise and only case, his own personal story.