

The 50s / La cinquantaine

Alone with the photographer, together in groups, and in precious solitude, the women in these photographs are in their 50s, thirty years into "second wave" feminism in Canada. Many of them are mothers; all of them work.

What do we see when we meet their glances through the camera's gaze? Above all, we note strength, then a bit of skepticism, some humour and... in the image of an over-sized ball and chain which dwarf their creator... a merciful reminder of the "unofficial story" of women's lives. A sequence of portraits of individuals is bracketed by photographs of women in solitude enjoying nature's curative embrace.

Here, on the other wall, women in their 50s share autonomy of celebration, sometimes on the very periphery of the two-by-twoness of Noah's Ark. Panels of pictures of women in groups show an interplay of feasts of pot—lucked extravagance, intellectual exchanges, and women hiking together in exploration of multifold ways of being true colleagues. Energy flows through a telephone, a poker game, intense discussions and the final clowning chorus line of confident women playing in a lake.

Many of the children have moved on. Husbands and lovers have left and stayed, been replaced...or not. These women in their 50s seem to be hitting their stride with solidarity and gusto.

Judith Lerner Crawley catches her subjects in unguarded moments of self-expression and interaction. Her lens captures the intensities of women's times together. Only rarely, though, in the most fleeting of shadows, does her camera record the anguish each of these women has experienced and comprehended on the way. "The fifties" records the "up" side of that most precious hiatus between middle age and the inevitable voyage towards serious aging.

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