

Who was David Kerr?

(...) His professional life was as a journalist for the tabloid newspaper *Midnight Globe* in Montreal and a freelance editor in Hong Kong where he spent the last third of his life. He lived in downtown Montreal at the height of the Crescent Street scene, which was memorialized by Vittorio in his 1973 monograph, *Un jour on Crescent Street*. In the suitcase, I found a portrait I made of David Kerr in his room. The photograph is as yet undated; it is winter (my parka has been thrown down on the bed). *Un jour on Crescent Street* is also there, beside a copy of *Cinema Québec* (1971-1978). Among the images hung or pinned above the bed are a framed cover from *Time Magazine* (14 March 1938), featuring his father, Davey Kerr, the legendary goalie for the New York Rangers, the first hockey player to be featured on the cover of *Time*. The suitcase, by the way, originally belonged to the father; it is monogrammed with his initials. Above the pillows is a reproduction of Renoir's *Lunch at the Restaurant Fournaise (The Rowers' Lunch)*, 1875 – rather the perfect dream space for Kerr's waking life in the cafés. In between are reproductions yet to be identified, with a figure of female decadence at the centre and a drawing, not Kerr's, I believe. These elements are emblematic of Kerr's life as a journalist, fantasist, and boulevardier.

A eulogy for Kerr, written by a friend in Hong Kong, describes him as an amateur photographer, but he wanted more from photography when I knew him. In his suitcase, I found a stack of frontal portraits – some of these figures I recognized as our drinking companions at the Bistro, people who would later play their parts in *Reality and Motive in Documentary Photography* and *The Stage*. Others were already cultural personalities (John Max). Kerr, I remember, placed an advertisement (was it in *Cinema Québec*?) offering to shoot publicity stills for would-be movie stars and extras. This stack of images constitutes his Warholian 'screen tests', for the famous and would be-famous. Most of the photographs in the suitcase are atmospheric shots of people drinking in bars or seemingly intimate close-ups of people staring into his camera. He also staged photographs with these aspiring actors, crafting lurid covers for *Official Police Detective* and *Detective World* in 1979.

Kerr was an amateur with aspirations, living in a time and space that encouraged his lifestyle and dreams. He was undisciplined and ill-equipped. We worked together on a selection of images which he printed in my darkroom, leaving it an unholy mess and walking out on some of his best negatives. They may be the only ones extant, for there are none in the suitcase. He hung this exhibition in a bar. I do not know if it was reviewed. Sometime later, we quarreled. I was fed up with his attitude – he was not working at his photography, he was not *serious*. Our relationship ended. In the mid-eighties he left Montreal for Hong Kong. If the

suitcase went with him, he later brought it back and left it with a friend in Pointe-St-Charles. When this woman sold her house, she telephoned and offered the suitcase to me. Her reasoning was as follows: since I was still active in the field of photography, I might know what to do with it. – **Donigan Cumming, 2015**

Excerpt from the text of the exhibition A LIFE IN PHOTOGRAPHY: KERR'S SUITCASE// UNE VIE EN PHOTOGRAPHIE : LA VALISE DE KERR, Montreal, November 2015.