



**A Samuels photo: Uncompromising**

## *Portraits make 'bold' exhibit*

**By LOUISE ABBOTT  
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As a vehicle for portraiture, the camera can be boldly, coldly uncompromising.

"The process itself has a kind of exactitude," explained American photographer Diane Arbus, "a kind of scrutiny that we're not normally subject to. I mean that we don't subject each other to. We're nicer to each other than the intervention of the camera is going to make us . . . In a way this scrutiny has to do with not evading facts, not evading what it really looks like."

It is this kind of directness that young Montreal photographer Chuck Samuels has tried to exploit in a series of black-and-white portraits currently being exhibited in the large gallery at Dazibao. Whether photographing men, women, or children, Samuels is systematic, indeed ritualistic, in his approach. He uses a square-format camera to achieve heightened detail and a plain background to produce a clean graphic design reminiscent of Richard Avedon's.

The photographer rarely talks as he works, moving in close to his subjects (arguably too close in some instances) and asks them to hold still as he exposes his film in natural light with slow shutter speeds. He thus reduces the subjects' potential for putting on a performance for the camera and stamps his own imprint firmly on them.

As a group, the resulting images are quite startling. The faces, almost all unsmiling, peer out at you from the gallery walls. Rather than identifying with them, however, you remain detached and find yourself relentlessly exploring the peculiarities of their physiognomy. It is a disconcerting experience; ultimately you can't help but feel that you're regarding some of the subjects not as warm, living beings but as inert specimens.

The Samuels exhibition continues in the large gallery at Dazibao, 1671 St. Hubert, until November 29. On view in the small gallery are color photographs taken in South America by Francois Truchon, who currently teaches at UQAM.