

ISABELLE LANDRY

By Zoe Koke

Isabelle Landry is interested in demystifying our understandings of different cultural communities that aren't visible to us. When I asked her why she doesn't photograph her own family, friends and community, she explained that she isn't compelled to photograph the people she already knows and understands. Photography for Landry has become a way to connect with her subjects and develop relationships with people she wouldn't otherwise meet. And although this notion is controversial, Isabelle's stunning portraits and images of domestic spaces are beautifully composed and express a delicate level of intimacy between her and her subjects. The series I discussed with her is of a Hasidic family she became acquainted with through a long and complex process of contacting a Jewish Studies student at Concordia, and then regularly meeting with his friend Israel, who currently lives in Outremont. She was pleased when only after a few meetings, he unexpectedly welcomed her to photograph his wife and family upon one of her first visits to his home. The first step in the process, she explained, was to convince his wife to let her into their home because of what the community would think about the project. The photographs have emerged parallel to the growing trust established between Isabelle and the family, and are comprised of still life, portraits and interior views of the rooms in their home. The photograph featured is of a doorway where religious symbols merge with the domestic nature of the space. Isabelle describes her work as less about exposing the history of the culture, yet she acknowledges that it does naturally reveal itself. This photograph shows the intersection between a dining room and hallway, acting as a subtle gateway into the viewer's understanding of the life of this family. This photograph and the others act as tokens of an outsider's experience in the family's space, and the spectrum of ease to awkwardness associated with being in the space. Although voyeuristic by nature, the photographs exude a graceful stillness and Landry's obvious technical confidence.

