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## I AM STILL WHAT I MEANT TO BE

*Alana Riley's wistful diptychs*

BY MEREDITH ERICKSON

When she was growing up, Alana Riley wanted to be an astronaut. But don't try to tell the Montreal photographer and artist "you are what you do." This past spring, she took pictures of ordinary people in Rimouski, a small city in eastern Quebec on the south shore of the St. Lawrence. Two pictures, actually: one in their actual workplace and another in an imagined scene from their childhood dream job. The result is a powerful visual inquiry into identity and self-perception.

Riley believes we define ourselves too much by what we do. "At a certain

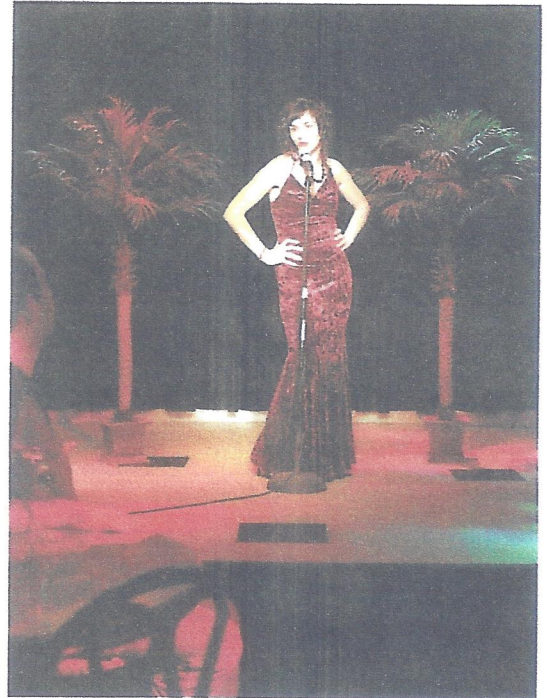
age we stop considering our options. But we can still be anything we want to be."

The project came to life, Riley says, when she grew tired of photographing friends and acquaintances in Montreal and looked farther afield. She started taking pictures of residents of Rimouski—and that's when things took off. Shooting was an organic process: talking with a local mechanic while he was fixing her flat tire, he mentioned his dream of being a truck driver. Three days later, she photographed him standing proudly on an eighteen-wheeler.

Indeed, part of the allure of these photos is in the willingness of the participants to get into the spirit of their own fantasies. Perhaps not surprisingly, given Quebec's intense religious heritage, several photos show theological impulses that still lie in people's hearts. Riley's exhibit, *I Am Still What I Meant to Be*, showed this past summer as part of the group show called *Déjà Vu* at the Musée Régional de Rimouski. While Riley doesn't plan to be experiencing zero gravity any time soon, the artist continues to photograph strangers for new projects.



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