

Press Release
 New Exhibition
 Opens 20 February 2014

Jean-Paul Riopelle

Metamorphoses



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Québec City, Wednesday 19 February 2014 □ As part of the redeployment of its collections in the new museum complex, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is pleased to devote a gallery to Jean-Paul Riopelle with the exhibition *Jean-Paul Riopelle: Metamorphoses*. The Charles Baillairgé pavilion is now the go-to place for the four major artists in the history of Québec art included in the exhibition *Four Figures of Modern Art in Québec*: Jean Paul Lemieux, Alfred Pellan, Fernand Leduc and Jean-Paul Riopelle. The MNBAQ has devoted a gallery to Jean-Paul Riopelle in the Gérard Morisset pavilion since 2000. Relocating it to another pavilion provides an opportunity to take a new look at his work, which is a constant topic of research among art historians.

Riopelle's art is tied up with the European and American avant-gardes of the twentieth century, whose members he associated with early in his career. It is also connected to questions around abstraction and figuration, with which Riopelle worked by turns according to his creative impulses. One constant, however, was his pursuit of vitality and diversity, whether he was applying paint in mosaics or returning to the figure in the 1960s. To many, he was our Picasso.

The body of work Riopelle created continues to fascinate and is the subject of research which, even recently, has brought out little-known aspects of his many-sided practice through study of his sculptures, prints and drawings. This constant rediscovery of his work's ramifications reaffirms the range of his art and makes it possible to substitute other figures for André Breton's legendary description of him as a "superior trapper" when he was welcomed into the Surrealist movement in the 1940s. Riopelle is a conveyor of sensibilities.

Everything points to Riopelle having covered more creative ground than that suggested by his well-known 1950s works – the majestic mosaics made with a spatula. He thus becomes an artist who dabbles in everything, one whose inventiveness has not yet been fully revealed. The 35 works gathered together for this exhibition – paintings, bronzes, lithographs, collages – also demonstrate Riopelle's extreme versatility and his unmatched thirst for creating.

The Four Figures of Modern Art in Québec exhibitions have received funding from the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications.

Some of the Must-See Works in the Exhibition

The Master Works on Paper

In this section of the exhibition, the works on paper have been grouped together and placed in relative obscurity because of the sensitivity of the paper to light.

Riopelle laid the stylistic foundations of his work in engraving with a series of large drawings in 1964. In the impressive composition *Blanc, noir, vert et rouge strié de noir* (White, Black, Green, Red with Streaks) Riopelle employs lyrical gestures to transform the plane of the sheet of paper by establishing a space suspended between the white of the paper and the black netting in the foreground. This imposing drawing, by virtue of the passion emanating from it, the sensibility it demonstrates and the structural equilibrium animating it, occupies a leading place in the Musée's collection, alongside such major paintings by Riopelle as *Le Perroquet vert* (The Green Parrot, 1949), *Espagne* (Spain, 1951), *Poussière de soleil* (Sun Spray, 1954) and *Pangnirtung* (1977).

Riopelle s Riopelle took up engraving in 1966. He said of this discipline that he would "defy technique and risk failure" and that he would push

back its boundaries “through incompetence.” He thus followed alternative paths and carried out a variety of experiments. This oversized *Untitled*, conceived in 1967 to occupy a vault in the rotunda of the present-day Gérard Morisset pavilion, contains prints of some of his important works made that year: lithographs from the *Album Riopelle* and from the series *Jute, Feuilles (Leaves)*, *Affiche avant la lettre (Poster avant la lettre)* and *Sphinx*, some of which are on exhibit in this gallery. *Le Bestiaire (The Bestiary)*, the immense, nearly five-metre collage that towers in the rotunda of the Charles Baillairgé pavilion, demonstrates the extent to which Riopelle was not content to rest on his laurels. This work will be on view for a limited time, until 14 April 2014.

Fascinating Sculptures

Riopelle’s leaps from one discipline to another were remarkable. In the early 1960s, he produced some thirty sculptures; earlier, in 1947-48, he had made a few pieces in raw clay. Working at the Meudon foundry in France, he developed an entire catalogue of animal figures and architectural structures whose singular treatment displays the traces of their making on their surface. Comparing the two disciplines, Riopelle said of painting that it required tools, “while with modelling you have it at the tip of your fingers without instruments.”

Among the bronzes on display here, *Femme hibou (Owl Woman)*, *Le Chien (The Dog)*, *Le Poisson (The Fish)* and *Le Poteau (The Pole)* are all part of an ensemble that makes up the famous sculpture-fountain *La Joute*, created in 1969-70, cast in 1974 and today installed in Place Jean-Paul Riopelle in the heart of the Quartier International in Montréal. Other elements of the work include *L’Ours (The Bear)*, on display at the entrance to the gallery, and *La Tour (The Tower)*, which can be seen in the outdoor sculpture garden in front of the Musée’s central pavilion. In 1964, Riopelle described his paintings as “oil sculptures.” Indeed his work in sculpture enabled his paintings to open up to figures arranged in space rather than depict tangled surfaces, as can be seen in the triptych *Les Masques (Masks)* in particular. There then took hold in Riopelle’s work a resonance between his sculptures, paintings and prints.

Chronology

1923

Jean-Paul Riopelle is born on 7 October on De Lorimier St. in Montréal.



1943-1946

Riopelle studies at the École du Meuble under Paul-Émile Borduas. He participates in the first exhibition of the Automatist group in Montréal in 1946.

1947

Riopelle meets André Breton in Paris. He signs the Surrealist manifesto *Rupture inaugurale*.

1948-1949

In August 1948 the manifesto *Refus global (Total Refusal)*, written by Borduas, is published in Montréal; Riopelle is one of the 16 signatories. Late that same year he moves to France. His first solo exhibition is held in Paris in 1949.

1954

Riopelle exhibits his work for the first time at the Pierre Matisse gallery in New York. His work is also shown at the Venice Biennale along with that of Paul-Émile Borduas and Bertram Charles Binning.

1962

Riopelle represents Canada at the Venice Biennale, where he wins the UNESCO Award. Following this event, the National Gallery of Canada mounts the exhibition *Jean-Paul Riopelle: Peinture et sculpture (Jean-Paul Riopelle: Painting and Sculpture)*, which travels to various Canadian cities and to Washington D.C.

1967

The Musée du Québec organizes a retrospective of his work: *Peintures et sculptures de Riopelle (Painting and Sculpture by Riopelle)*. On this occasion, the artist donates the large assemblage *Untitled* to the Musée.

1974

Riopelle has a studio built in the Laurentians. He now divides his time between France and Québec.

1980-1982

The Department of External Affairs of Canada presents the large retrospective exhibition *Jean-Paul Riopelle: Peinture 1946-1977 (Jean-Paul*

Riopelle: Painting 1946-1977) in collaboration with the Musée du Québec and the Musée national d'art moderne (Centre national d'art et de culture Georges-Pompidou, Paris). The exhibition travels within France and Québec and to Mexico and Venezuela.

1981

The government of Québec bestows the prestigious Paul-Émile Borduas award on Riopelle.

1991

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts organizes the exhibition *Riopelle* to mark the opening of the Jean-Noël Desmarais pavilion.

1992-1996

In his studio on Île aux Oies, Riopelle creates *L'Hommage à Rosa Luxemburg (Tribute to Rosa Luxemburg)*, which is presented in 1993 at the Michel Tétréault Art International gallery in Montréal. This imposing triptych is exhibited in France, with the assistance of the Musée du Québec, at the La Roche-Guyon chateau just outside of Paris in the summer of 1995. The work is presented at the Musée du Québec in 1996, an event that attracts no fewer than 33,000 visitors in the space of five weeks.

2000

The Musée du Québec opens a permanent gallery in May devoted to Jean-Paul Riopelle and his work.

2002

Jean-Paul Riopelle dies on Isle-aux-Grues on 12 March.

Credits

The exhibition *Jean-Paul Riopelle: Metamorphoses* is an original production of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

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General Information

OPENING HOURS OF THE MUSÉE

Until 31 May 2014

Tuesday to Sunday,
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Wednesdays until 9:00 p.m.
Closed Mondays

1 June to

1 September 2014

Daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Wednesdays until 9:00 p.m.

ADMISSION

Adults: **\$18**
Seniors (65 years and over): **\$16**
18 to 30 years: **\$10**
13 to 17 years: **\$1**
12 years and under: **free**
Members: **free**
Wednesdays from 5:00 p.m.
to 9:00 p.m.: **half price**
Reduced rates for groups

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Jean-Paul Riopelle, *Poussière de soleil (Sun Spray)*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 245.2 x 345.3 cm. MNBAQ coll., purchase by the Fondation du MNBAQ with a special contribution from the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications du Québec. Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie © Estate of Jean-Paul Riopelle/SODRAC (2014)

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Basil Zarov, *Jean-Paul Riopelle*, 11 October 1978. Silver gelatin print, 25.4 x 20.3 cm. Institutional archives of the MNBAQ © Library and Archives Canada