

Press Release
New Exhibition
October 29, 2015 to May 23, 2016

A Private Passion

Modern Art in Québec from the Pierre Lassonde Collection

Parc des Champs-de-Bataille
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Québec City, Thursday October 29, 2015 ✕ If there is anyone who cultivates the art of collecting, it is Pierre Lassonde, a patron of the arts and philanthropist who has been collecting art for quite some time now. His collection was founded some forty years ago around two centres of interest, Impressionist landscapes and post-war abstraction, and is one of the largest private collections devoted exclusively to modern Québec art. From 29 October, nearly one hundred works from this exceptional collection will leave the private sphere and be shared with the public during an exclusive presentation at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec until 23 May 2016. A Private Passion: Modern Art in Québec from the Pierre Lassonde Collection will offer a unique look at more than a century of artistic creation, from Cornelius Krieghoff to Jean Paul Riopelle by way of Helen McNicoll and Jean Paul Lemieux. “Collecting is my entire life’s passion. Being able to share it with the general public of Québec is an immense honour,” Pierre Lassonde remarks.

The exhibition is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to discover works rarely shown in public, but also to enter into contact with the collector himself.

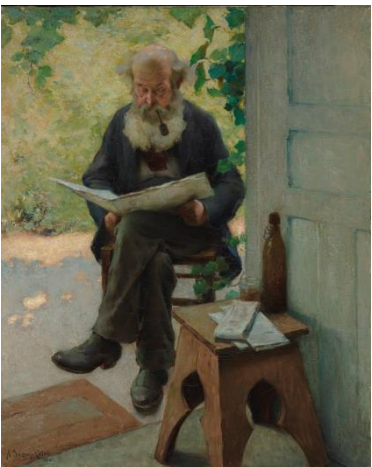


What are his influences and ideas? When and how was his passion for art born? How does he choose the works he acquires? Is he interested in specific artists, in one movement rather than another, in a precise period or culture? Living with a collection on a day-to-day basis is a completely different experience than that of the public in a museum. This exhibition is thus a unique opportunity to plunge into the collector's work through a new approach to exhibition design. With the Musée's galleries taking the form of the rooms in Pierre Lassonde's home, a contemplative experience awaits the visitor. Walking through his home, visitors can let themselves be guided by their intuition and view the works in their own way, placing their own sensibility at the heart of their aesthetic experience.

The singular passion of a great collector of Québec art, shown here through a great many works, may in turn stimulate new private passions.

Pierre Lassonde Donates Seven Works to the MNBAQ

The present exhibition is also an opportunity to highlight the exceptional donation of several major works from the Pierre Lassonde collection. Thus joining the Musée's collection of Québec art in the near future are the works *Contentment or The Old Pensioner* (1900), *Alleghany Hills in Winter, Near Arthabaska* (1923) and *Old Sugar Shack* (undated) by Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté; *The Rock, Gibraltar* (around 1913-15) by James Wilson Morrice; *The Red Sleigh* (1924 or 25) by Clarence Gagnon; *Winter Thaw* (around 1930) by Maurice Cullen; and *The Masks* (1973) by Jean Paul Lemieux.



Before becoming a part of the Musée's collection, each donated painting is subjected to a rigorous evaluation process. First, the work is presented to the internal acquisition committee, on which all the Musée's curators sit, which recommends or not that it be acquired according to the importance of the work and the artist, the history and critical reception of the work, its fit with the mandate of the collection, and the other works by the same artist already found there. The Musée's restorer examines the physical state of the work thoroughly to identify any problem that may have an impact on its preservation and presentation.

If the acquisition is recommended, the work is then appraised by independent specialists, who fix its fair market value. Finally, it is submitted to an external acquisition committee, which makes a final recommendation to the Musée's board of directors as to whether or not to acquire the work.

Exhibition, from One Space to Another

I feel pampered to get up each morning surrounded in my bedroom by beautiful paintings such as those of Helen McNicoll, an artist without peer. Unfailing peace and serenity exude from her work. It is hard to be in a bad mood upon rising when you see paintings such as these!

– Pierre Lassonde

Gallery 5

Bedroom

The everyday experience of living in contact with works of art depends on where they are located in the house. This location is often motivated by a search for a specific ambience. The way they are grouped together is tied to questions of the senses and affect, but also to space limitations and the kind of furniture in the room. In the dining room you have just left, for example, the still lifes by Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, Jauran, Jean Dallaire and Stanley Cosgrove were placed together thematically, while the soft light and iridescent colours of Adrien Hébert's and Helen McNicoll's outdoor scenes give this bedroom a peaceful atmosphere.



Often it is through somewhat daring juxtapositions that we can see a kind of aesthetic wink taking place between artists from one generation to the next.

– Pierre Lassonde

Gallery 5

Alcove

One of the liberties of a collector is to be able to place in proximity paintings arising out of artistic projects which have rarely been considered in light of the other. We have been inspired by this approach here by presenting Clarence Gagnon's *The Clearing in the Woods* (between 1908 and 1913) alongside Jean-Paul Riopelle's *Undergrowth II*, two of the first artists to enter Pierre Lassonde's collection. Although each artist's treatment in these two compositions is radically different, they demonstrate the same desire to explore the features of Québec nature, such as the winter's light, wilderness areas, topography, vegetation and even the particular physical experience of our vast land and the imaginary realm tied to living on it.



In the work of Riopelle, Gagnon, Suzor-Coté and Cullen, the Québec landscape reveals its grandeur in images which most often depict it as mysterious and unconquerable. This subjective, sensory experience is surely what the collector is trying to feel and to make us feel by creating a grouping of their works such as this. This exhibition spaces seeks to encourage a similar experience.

My wife and I wanted to establish a collection of paintings which are emblematic of periods when truly significant artistic changes were taking place. Obviously, the Impressionists brought about a great change in the late nineteenth century in Europe before becoming an international movement, one well represented in Québec. The other major evolution that interested us was during the post-war period, from 1945 to 1955, with Abstract Expressionism, Lyrical Abstraction and the Plasticiens.

– Pierre Lassonde

Gallery 5

Hallway

While we recognize from the outset how Jean McEwen works the surface and the paint, conceived as in the work of many of his contemporaries as the central topic of his paintings, the situation was much different for artists working in the early twentieth century. And yet one of the earliest liberties taken by the Impressionists concerned, precisely, the materiality of the painting. Abandoning the finish of academic compositions,

painters such as Suzor-Coté revealed the density of the paint and how it was applied. In subsequent years this phenomenon would come to be seen as foundational for so-called “modern” painting.



Despite the national conception of the landscape shared by Suzor-Coté and Marc-Aurèle Fortin and the abstract quality of the paintings by McEwen and Riopelle, placing together work which has no historical connection makes it possible to bring out certain features which they nevertheless share, such as the way our experience of the painting takes precedence over the mimetic depiction of reality.

Each painting is acquired because it speaks to me. For me to hang a painting on a wall, I have to love it. I always enjoy saying that, of all the paintings I have acquired in forty years, I have got rid of only one. First it must speak to me, but there is also the desire to establish an interesting group of works.

– Pierre Lassonde

Gallery 6 *Vestibule*

Whether it is employed to express the materiality of the light, as with the Impressionists, or to create a connection, through painting, with the dynamics of nature or even with the physical experience of our contact with it, the landscape provides numerous ways to experiment with new aesthetic approaches. This is what explains its continued presence in the contemporary painting vocabulary found in Jean Paul Lemieux, Paul-Émile Borduas, Jean-Paul Mousseau and Jean McEwen. The imaginary realm called up by the painter to think about the space of the painting itself is often tied to the notion of landscape. The essential point is less to reproduce a landscape than to provide a visual experience by devising a specific approach to applying the paint to the canvas, a quest shared by every artist represented in the Pierre Lassonde collection.

An artist friend said to me: “Pierre, the economy and money are the heart and blood of a people, but art is its soul.” It’s true; art is the soul of a people. When I look at all the paintings I have surrounded myself with, I have the sensation of seeing in

them part of the soul of Québec. I feel in them the evolution of a people, the evolution of its culture. We see in them the transformation of art itself, but also that of our customs, clothing, etc. Art speaks of art, but it also speaks about society.

– Pierre Lassonde

Gallery 6

Living room



Landscape painting, whether it is motivated by a desire to document an activity, as in the work of Cornelius Krieghoff, or takes on metaphorical or even metaphysical dimensions, as in the work of Jean Paul Lemieux, is the dominant genre in the Pierre Lassonde collection. Amply employed by Québec painters, this genre has been the site of formal innovations which today are seen as foundational for modern Québec art.

The walls of Pierre Lassonde’s living room, on which several winter landscapes by some of the most important artists in his collection hang, also display several non-figurative works. Borduas, for example, reinterprets the experience of the land in winter by treating the internal structure of his paintings like zones in movement, alive with forces similar to that of an ecosystem.

Often it is through somewhat daring juxtapositions that we can see a kind of aesthetic wink taking place between artists from one generation to the next.

– Pierre Lassonde

Gallery 6

Hallway

In the early 1940s, Paul-Émile Borduas and several of his students at Montréal’s École du meuble began explorations of pictorial space and of the paint itself, for their own sake, in order to free painting from the role of representing reality to which it had too long been assigned. They also argued for the primacy of subjectivity in apprehending reality and, by extension, each person’s necessarily unique perception of the world and of art. Their pictorial experimentation took various forms, drawing on the artistic movements developing at the same time in North America and

Europe in the post-war period, such as gestural painting, Lyrical Abstraction, Tachisme, Automatism and Abstract Expressionism.

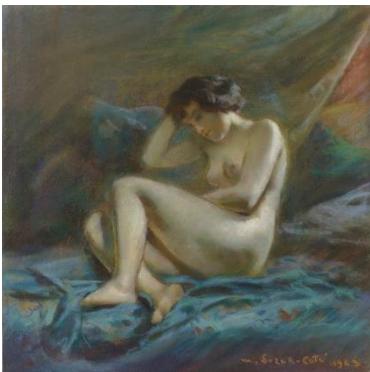
The artists who were signatories to the *Refus global (Total Refusal)* manifesto are seen as having made a fundamental contribution to the history of Québec art, both in the power of the voices it brought to light and in its resonances, still perceptible today, in the Québec arts milieu. It was precisely the importance of this contribution which led Pierre Lassonde to collect work from the 1940s and 50s.

I believe that this passion for art was transmitted from mother to son. My mother was a great collector of Canadian art, especially from Québec. I think this had an important effect, because my two brothers and my sister are also collectors. In my case, it's simply a little extreme!

– Pierre Lassonde

Gallery 6

Alcove



The collecting process is not simply one of a series of purchases, although the financial aspect is a question that is difficult to ignore. The art market is perhaps the economic sphere most subject to major fluctuations. An artist's "stock" on the market can rise and fall by turns according to sometimes complex causes. The rarity of a certain kind of work, an artist's popularity, the collecting of his or her work by several collectors simultaneously, interest in this same artist on the part of institutions, the most recent discoveries about the artist, their being featured in a recent exhibition or publication and the state of conservation of their work are all factors in their fluctuating value on the market. This situation requires the collector to stay up to date or to seek advice from a professional in tune with the market and its peculiarities. For the collection to grow, the collector's knowledge and even the way he or she views artworks on a daily basis must be constantly kept up to date. While some collectors remain loyal to their original passion, with others their centre of interest is renewed over time. In this sense, it is fascinating to observe the evolution of a collection, because it reveals not only the fluctuating availability of works on the market but also changes in the collector's tastes and his or her willingness of give a new direction to the ensemble they have created.



Pierre Lassonde, en bref

Canadian businessman and recognized expert in the mining sector, Pierre Lassonde is also a great philanthropist and patron of the arts who has supported numerous educational and cultural institutions, including the Université de Montréal and the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. A passionate art lover from a very early age, he has established one of the largest collections of modern Québec art, in addition to contributing to the collection of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec through his exceptional donations. His philanthropic activities have earned him numerous distinctions, including the titles officer of the Ordre national du Québec and member of the Order of Canada and the Ordre des mécènes de la Ville de Québec.

Page 1 - Paul-Émile Borduas, *Untitled (No. 22)*, 1959. Oil on canvas, 59.9 x 72.4 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection // Clarence Gagnon, *The Red Sleigh*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 51.4 x 66 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection

Page 2 - Ozias Leduc, *Landscape at Twilight*, c. 1910. Oil on panel board, 26.4 x 23.8 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection // Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, *Contentment or The Old Pensioner*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 80.9 x 65 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection

Page 3 - Jauran (Rodolphe de Repentigny), *Abstract Composition*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 27.9 x 32.4 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection

Page 4 - Clarence Gagnon, *The Clearing in the Woods*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 55.2 x 74.9 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection

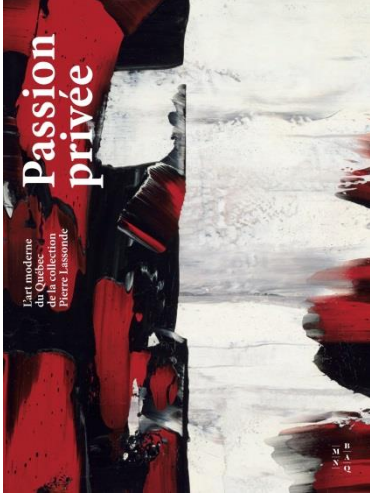
Page 5 - Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, *Landscape at Clearwater*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 48.9 x 64.1 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection

Page 6 - Cornelius Krieghoff, *A Winter Hunting Camp*, 1858. Oil on canvas, 48.5 x 65.5 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection

Page 7 - Henrietta Mabel May, *Violet and Rose*, c. 1920. Oil on canvas, 69.4 x 56.8 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection // Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, *Reclining Nude*, 1923. Pastel on paper, 36,8 x 36,8 cm. Pierre Lassonde Collection

The Catalogue

The publication *Passion privée: L'art moderne du Québec de la collection Pierre Lassonde*, edited by Anne-Marie Bouchard, curator of modern art (1900-1949) at the MNBAQ, presents for the first time in Canada the exceptional collection of modern art held by the businessman and philanthropist Pierre Lassonde. This collection offers a comprehensive survey of Québec art from 1858 to 1973 through nearly one hundred works by thirty-five artists. The major movements in the history of Québec art are well represented in the collection, which contains numerous major works by emblematic artists of modernity in Québec.



The catalogue provides a synthesis of the most recent research into Québec art of the period and marks out a singular history of art created out of the singular perspective of a sensitive and passionate collector, from Impressionism to abstract art by way of symbolism, the women members of the Beaver Hall Group, Automatism and other currents and movements. This 256-page volume includes no fewer than 154 illustrations, an interview with Pierre Lassonde, thirty-five biographical notes on the artists and ninety-six notes on the works in the exhibition. Eight authors, including four MNBAQ curators and four guest art historians, contribute texts on the works and artists from the perspective of their respective specializations: Eve-Lyne Beaudry, Mario Béland, Anne-Marie Bouchard, Daniel Drouin, Bernard Lamarche, Sarah Mainguy, Anne-Élisabeth Vallée and René Viau. Viau.

This reference volume, designed by Lg2boutique and published by the MNBAQ, is distributed by Les Publications du Québec. It is available for purchase at the Boutique du Musée and in numerous bookstores throughout Québec at the price of \$49.

Credits

The exhibition *A Private Passion: Modern Art in Québec from the Pierre Lassonde Collection* is organized by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is a government corporation which receives funding from Québec's Ministère de la Culture et des Communications.

Projet Director

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Curator of Modern Art 1900-
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Exhibition Design

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Designer

Graphic

La bande à Paul

The furniture and lighting have been lent through the generosity of Structube.

STRUCTUBE

A Private Passion. Modern Art in Québec from the Pierre Lassonde Collection
October 29, 2015 to May 23, 2016
Galleries 5 et 6, Gérard-Morisset Pavilion

INFORMATIONS :

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General Information

OPENING HOURS OF THE MUSÉE

September 8, 2015 to May, 2016

Tuesday to Sunday, from 10:00
to 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday until 9:00 p.m.

Closed Mondays (except
December 28, 2015, February 29
and March 28, 2016)

Closed December 25

ADMISSION

Adults : **18 \$**

Seniors (65 and Over) : **16 \$**

Ages 18 to 30 ans : **10 \$**

Ages 13 to 17 ans : **5 \$**

Children 12 and under: **Free**

Families : **40 \$** (2 adults and 3
children 13 to 17)

Members : **Free**

Wednesdays from,
5:00 to 9:00 p.m.: **Half-price**
Reduced rates for groups

SERVICES AVAILABLE

Parking, boutique, café,
restaurant, free Wi-Fi and
Cloakroom

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