

**Press Release**  
New Exhibition  
From 15 June to 4 September 2017

## The Fabulous Destiny of the Paintings of the Abbés Desjardins

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Parc des Champs-de-Bataille  
Québec (Québec) G1R 5H3

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**Québec City, Wednesday 14 June 2017** ✕ The Musée national des Beaux-Arts du Québec is proud to celebrate the bicentennial of the arrival of nearly 200 paintings produced during the 17th and 18th centuries and confiscated during the French Revolution. It is presenting the Canada's premiere in Québec City of the exhibition entitled *The*

*Fabulous Destiny of the Paintings of the Abbés Desjardins* from **June 15 to September 4, 2017**. Organized in partnership with the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes in France, the exhibition retraces the remarkable epic of the works created by the foremost French painters, some of whom worked for royalty. It is the Abbé Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins who acquired the paintings in Paris and sent them to Québec City in 1817 and in 1820. His brother, Louis-Joseph, chaplain to the Augustinians proceeds to the operation of redistribution of the works in the rapidly growing parishes.

These religious paintings are little known in France. Recent scientific studies have led to new attributions and a better understanding of the context in which the paintings were produced. Two major periods mark the paintings' history: their use in France and their use and impact in the 19th century in Québec. They include works by Claude Vignon, Simon Vouet, Brother Luc, Charles-Michel-Ange Challe, Jean-Baptiste Corneille, Daniel Hallé, Pierre Puget, Michel Dorigny, Louis Boulogne the Younger, Pierre Dulin, Samuel Massé, Jean-Jacques Lagrenée, François-Guillaume Ménageot and Matthias Stomer.

### *The beginning of art history in Québec*

The paintings had an immediate impact on Lower Canada painters, including Jean-Baptiste Roy-Audy, Joseph Légaré, Antoine Plamondon and Théophile Hamel, who trained themselves by restoring French works then copying them at the request of sponsors, thereby offsetting the shortage of painters in the British colony. This period saw the birth of Canadian painting and, in point of fact, the creation of the first art collections in Québec and the establishment of the first private museum.

### *Major masterpieces*

This unique exhibition features nearly 70 monumental works, including 32 from a dozen of Québec churches and chapels. Some 15 lenders, including the chapelle des Ursulines de Québec, located in the heart of Old Québec, at 12, rue Donnacona, have contributed to this outstanding exhibition, which affords visitors an opportunity to view seven other remarkable paintings that are part of the Fonds Desjardins. Among the key works in the exhibition, mention should be made of Simon Vouet's *Saint Francis of Paola Resuscitating a Child* and *The Apparition of the*



*Virgin and Child Jesus to Saint Anthony.* The former is unquestionably a masterpiece from the artist's late career and the latter a magnificent composition from the beginning of his career, which a very recent restoration has revealed after 200 years. Mention should also be made of the magnificent *Christ Preaching* by Philippe de Champaigne, one of the foremost 17th century French painters. Two paintings by Jean-Jacques Lagrenée, a French painter in the second half of the 18th century, are especially remarkable. Among copies of the Desjardins paintings by painters from Lower Canada, Yves Tessier's *The Entombment of Christ* is noteworthy especially for its glorious palette of colours.

Unique testimonials to the relations between France and Québec, vibrant testimonials to the art history of France and Québec, or when art history also relates great history, a selection of paintings will return to France after 200 years and re-cross the Atlantic to the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, which will host the exhibition from October 14, 2017 to January 28, 2018. The paintings of the Abbés Desjardins have indeed achieved a fabulous destiny.

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## Credits

*The Fabulous Destiny of the Paintings of the Abbés Desjardins* is an original production by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) in collaboration with the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes.



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*The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is a state corporation funded by the*  
*Gouvernement du Québec.*

**Québec** 

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***The Fabulous Destiny of the Paintings of the Abbés Desjardins***  
**Pierre Lassonde Pavilion, MNBAQ**  
**From 15 June to 4 September 2017**

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Page 1 – Claude François, known as frère Luc (Amiens (France), 1615 – Paris (France), 1685). *Christ Dictates the Rule to Saint François of Assisi*, c. 1679. Oil on canvas, 249,2 x 161,2 cm. Saint-Antoine-de-Tilly, Fabrique Saint-Antoine-de-Padoue. Conservation treatment by the Centre de conservation du Québec. Photo: CCQ, Michel Élie

Page 2 – Philippe de Champaigne (Brussels, 1602-Paris, 1674) and studio. *The Preaching Christ*. 17th century. Oil on canvas, 220 x 150 cm approx. Québec, Ursulines de Québec (1997-1015). Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie // Jean-Jacques Lagrenée, *The Entombment*, 1770. Oil on canvas. 155,2 x 205 cm. MNBAQ, purchased. Conservation treatment by the Canadien Conservation Institute of the Department of Canadien Heritage (1970.115) Credit photo: © Government of Canada, Canadien Conservation Institute, ICC 76160-0003

Page 3 – Unknown artiste. *The Dream of Saint Joseph*, Mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Oil on canvas 254 x 189,6 cm. MNBAQ, Purchased. Conservation treatment by the Canadien Conservation Institute of the Department of Canadien Heritage (1970.121) Credit photo: © Government of Canada, Canadien Conservation Institute, ICC 2005498-0002

Page 7 – Louis Dulongpré (Saint-Denis [France], 1759 – Saint-Hyacinthe, 1843). *Louis Joseph Desjardins*, c. 1802. Oil on canvas, 65,9 x 51,7 cm. Québec, Augustines de l'Hôtel-Dieu de Québec (2010.1979)

Photo: CCQ, Guy Couture // Studio of Jean-Baptiste Paulin Guérin (Marseille (France), 1783 – Paris (France), 1855). *Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins*, c. 1828. Oil on canvas, 73 x 58 cm. Québec, Ursulines de Québec (1997.1123). Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie

Page 8 – Unknown artist, painter of the entourage of Simon Vouet (Paris (France), 1590 - Paris (France), 1649), *The Holy Family in Nazareth*, c. 1640. Oil on canvas, 224 x 145 cm. Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu, Fabrique Saint-Denis. Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie // Unknown artist, painter of the entourage of François Verdier. *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, c. 1690-1700. Oil on canvas, 180 x 165 cm. Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu, église Saint-Denis. Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie

Page 9 – Michel Dorigny (Saint-Quentin (France), 1617 - Paris (France), 1665). *The Annunciation*. 1656-1658. Oil on canvas, 271 x 245 cm (with the framing). Québec, Fabrique Saint-Michel-de-Sillery. Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie // Joseph Légaré (Québec, 1795 - Québec, 1855), after Giacinto Calandrucci (Palerme (Italie), 1646 - Palerme (Italie),

1707), *The Rapture of Saint Paul*, 1822. Oil on canvas, 220 x 150 cm. Trois-Rivières, Évêché. Conservation treatment by the Centre de conservation du Québec. Photo: CCQ, Michel Élie

Page 11 – Louis II de Boulogne (Paris, 1654 – id., 1733). *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, 1688. Oil on canvas, 274 x 213 cm. Moncton, Musée acadien de l'université de Moncton, NB (69-6-41) Photo: Moncton, Musée acadien de l'université de Moncton, Adam Karpowicz

Page 12 – Yves Tessier (Québec, 1800 – Montréal, 1847), after an unknown French artist of the second half of the 18th century. *The Entombment of Christ*, 1825. Oil on canvas, 296 x 193 cm. Saint-Marc-sur-Richelieu, Fabrique Saint-Marc. Photo: CCQ, Michel Élie

## Complements: the exhibition themes

### *Once Upon a Time... Philippe-Jean-Louis et Louis-Joseph Desjardins*



Philippe-Jean-Louis (1753-1833) and Louis-Joseph (1766-1848) Desjardins were born in Messas, France. They both studied theology at the Seminary of Orléans, and then in Paris and Bayeux. The former was ordained in 1777 and the second in 1790. During the Revolution, the two brothers, faithful to their values, fled France to England. The elder arrived in Québec City in 1793—followed by his younger sibling the following year—and held various positions, including vicar general, Séminaire professor, and chaplain of the Augustines de l’Hôtel-Dieu and of the Ursulines. The youngest was initially a missionary in Baie-des-Chaleurs before becoming vicar, then pastor, of Notre-Dame de Québec, the chaplain of the Augustines and the Superior of the Ursulines.

Philippe returned to France in 1802. His interest in the Diocese of Québec and his experience made it clear to him that painters able to meet local demand were few and far between. On returning home, he also realized that the family business was in dire financial straits. It dawned on him that there was simple solution: combine both interests by selling paintings in Lower Canada and using the profits to help his family.

Between 1803 and 1810, he acquired paintings in circumstances that remain largely unknown. The first shipment was in 1816. Four rolls and a case totaling 120 paintings left the port of Brest bound for New York City. On site, the imports had to be cleared and transportation to Québec City arranged. In the winter of 1817, the works of art made the voyage to Québec City in a sleigh. Once there, the works were delivered to Louis-Joseph in the outer chapel of the Augustines, which was transformed into

a workshop where several young artists remounted the pieces and restored them before the art was sold to various parishes and communities. The same scenario was repeated in 1820, but this time with some sixty paintings.

## *The 17th-Century Desjardins Paintings*

Most of the Desjardins paintings are 17th-century French works and, with a few exceptions, work from Italian and Northern schools.

The composition of this ensemble speaks volumes about the taste of the French at the time of the Revolution. It reflects the conservation choices made in separating the works that would be placed in the newly created museums from those destined to be sold and saved by amateurs like Philippe Desjardins. As a result, the generation of painters of the 1640s, appreciated for their classicism by the curators who formed the nucleus of French national collections, such as Jacques Stella, Laurent de La Hyre, Eustache Le Sueur, Philippe de Champaigne, Sébastien Bourdon and obviously, their model, Nicolas Poussin, is either totally absent or is represented by work incorrectly attributed even before it arrived in Québec City. Only a few paintings by Philippe de Champaigne and his studio are the exception to the rule.



The strength of the Desjardins paintings lies in the art from the opposite ends of the century. *Christ in the Garden of Olives*, a rare canvas by Quentin Varin, introduces a remarkable ensemble from the 1630s, with two paintings by Simon Vouet and several works by his pupils and followers such as Michel Dorigny and Jean Senelle. For the second half of the century, basically the years 1680-1690, there are some interesting anonymous paintings such as *Angels* and *Shepherds Adoring the Child Jesus*, but especially the great paintings by Daniel Hallé, Brother Luc, Jean-Baptiste Corneille and Louis de Boullogne, including *The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, one of the masterpieces of the exhibition.

## *Master Simon Vouet and His Entourage*



Around 1630, a new generation of artists who had trained in Italy came back to France. The most notable return was that of Simon Vouet, in 1627. After a brilliant career primarily in Rome, the painter was recalled to Paris by Louis XIII. At that time, Philippe de Champaigne and Claude Vignon—whose works are exhibited in this gallery—were beginning their careers and the biggest workshop in the city was that of Georges Lallemant, which was soon surpassed by Vouet's. Alongside private assignments, in which Vouet excelled, the artist received commissions for religious art throughout his career.

The Desjardins paintings feature a particularly important set of works by Vouet and his entourage. This is undeniably one of the strong points of the ensemble and of this exhibition. The master himself is represented by two canvases. *Saint Francis of Paola Resuscitating a Child* is one of the last commissions by Vouet before his death, while *The Apparition of the Virgin and Child Jesus to Saint Anthony*, revealed here after its de-restoration, is situated at the very beginning of the painter's Parisian career, just after he returned from Italy.

Around these two altarpieces are paintings in which Vouet's influence and the propagation of his artistic manner are palpable.

## *The 18th-Century Desjardins Paintings*



The Desjardins paintings consist of fewer 18th-century works—mainly French—than 17th-century ones. However, chronologically, they cover the entire century. It comprises a body of work done for the churches of Paris by the most important artists of the time. At first there were originals or copies by all the big names (Collin de Vermont, Restout, Cazes, Massé or Vanloo), but several have disappeared since. The absence of a Boucher or a Fragonard is not surprising, since religious commissions occupied only a very minor place in their respective work.

The second half of the century, which marks a renewal of history painting and a gradual return to the antique model, is illustrated through Challe's paintings for the Louvre Oratory, Lagrenée's two masterpieces from the Abbey of Montmartre and the large painting by Menageot. This work by well-known painters is complemented by paintings by less famous artists

such as Godefroy and Preudhomme (Ursulines de Québec chapel). As a result, the paintings from the 18th-century provide a far more exhaustive portrait of their era than their 17th-century counterparts. It must be borne in mind that the paintings of the Enlightenment were still very recent at the time when the Revolution broke out and did not always enjoy the same prestige as the works of the Grand Siècle.

### *The Desjardins Paintings, Joseph Légaré and Art Museums in Québec*

Starting in the early 1820s, self-taught Québec painter Joseph Légaré purchased several canvases from among the Desjardins paintings, some of which were the inspiration for his numerous copies. His collection would pave the way for the creation of the first two art museums in Québec in the 19th century.



As early as 1829, Légaré exhibited his collection in the meeting room of the Literary and Historical Society of Québec. In 1833, he moved it to his three-storey residence on Sainte-Angèle Street. In association with lawyer Thomas Amiot, he inaugurated the Québec Gallery of Paintings in 1838. However, Légaré's ventures did not seem to spark much interest, and the gallery folded in 1840. Undaunted, in 1852 the painter opened the Quebec Gallery in his new home at the corner of Sainte-Ursule and McMahon Streets. Légaré died in 1855, but his widow kept the museum open until her death in 1874. Monseigneur Thomas-Étienne Hamel, Superior of the Séminaire de Québec and Rector of Laval University, bought the collection.

This acquisition laid the foundation for the Pinacothèque at Laval University as North America entered a period of museum-mania. Even before the inauguration of the first building of the Art Association of Montreal (the future Montréal Museum of Fine Arts) in 1879, the City of Québec had an art museum, thanks to Joseph Légaré's determination. The Desjardins paintings imported some 60 years earlier formed the core of the museum's collection.



## *The Augustines and Ursulines de Québec Paintings*

As we have seen, the Abbés Desjardins had special ties with the Augustines de l’Hôtel-Dieu and the Ursulines de Québec, ties that went well beyond the paintings themselves. From the outset, the former were an integral part of the adventure by lending their buildings for the reception, uncrating and remounting of the paintings and by extending their hospitality to the painters involved and customers from everywhere in Québec. François-Guillaume Ménageot’s *The Virgin Placing Saint Teresa under the Protection of Saint Joseph*, usually found on the left lateral altarpiece of the exterior chapel of the Augustines, attests to this significant episode in the life of the paintings.

Several generations of Ursulines have venerated *Christ Exposing his Sacred Heart to Margaret Mary Alacoque*, by Pierre-Jacques Cazes, usually strategically placed in the exterior chapel, a place of worship which is the permanent home of the greatest number of Desjardins paintings. Seven paintings are displayed there, including Brother André’s *The Meal at the House of Simon*, the biggest of all the Desjardins paintings, at 3.66 metres high by 6.10 metres wide

## *Copying and Distribution of the Desjardins Paintings*

The Desjardins paintings played a crucial role in the growth of painting in Lower Canada by stimulating the budding careers of artists who, after having done copies of certain works, diversified their output. Since at the time there were no fine arts academies or schools in Lower Canada, these painters were able to learn the basics by borrowing to various degrees from the French academic tradition made available through this pool of 17th- and 18th-century paintings.

The inventory of the copies—a little over 120 done in the 19th century—shows that one quarter of the Desjardins paintings were used as templates by Québec artists. The most of the copies were in the chapel of the Séminaire de Québec, at the Cathedral-Basilica of Notre-Dame-de-Québec and in Joseph Légaré’s collection. The copies found their way to nearly 70 parishes or collectors, the result being considerable visibility for these paintings in our churches.

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## Chronology of Events

**1630:** Simon Vouet paints *The Apparition of the Virgin and the Child Jesus to Saint Anthony* for the chapel of Château de Chilly, in Paris

**1648:** Simon Vouet paints *Saint Francis of Paola Resuscitating a Child* for the church of Minimes, Place Royale, in Paris

**1717** Pierre Dulin paints *Saint Jerome Hearing the Trumpet of the Last Judgment* for the church of the Ladies of St. Thomas, in Paris

**1753:** Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins is born in Messas, France

**1759:** The British capture Québec City

**1763:** Treaty of Paris, under which New France is handed over to the British

**1766:** Louis-Joseph Desjardins is born in Messas, France

**1770:** Jean-Jacques Lagrenée paints *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* for the Montmartre Abbey, in Paris

**1774:** Quebec Act, which recognizes the religious freedom of Roman Catholics

**1777:** Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins is ordained a priest in France

**1789:** French Revolution and the nationalization of church property

**1790:** In France, religious communities are suppressed and Louis-Joseph Desjardins is ordained a priest

**1792:** Paris churches are stripped of their works of art; the Abbés Desjardins flee France for England

**1793:** France's churches are shut down; inauguration of Paris' Musée central, the precursor of the Louvre; Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins arrives in Québec City



1794: Louis-Joseph Desjardins arrives in Québec City

1800: Lower Canada's population doubles in 20 years

1801: In France, signature of the Concordat

1802: Peace of Amiens; Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins returns to France

1803: Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins acquires a first lot of paintings

1810: Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins acquires a second lot of paintings and is then put under house arrest in Piedmont, Italy

1814: Jean-Louis Desjardins is released and returns to Paris

1816: A lot of 120 paintings leaves the port of Brest for New York City

1817: The paintings are transported from New York City to Québec City during the winter; the exterior chapel of the Augustines de l'Hôtel-Dieu is turned into a temporary workshop

1818: Jean-Baptiste Roy-Audy paints *The Pentecost* (after Champaigne) for the church of Varennes

1820: A new lot of 60 paintings leaves France for Québec

1821: Louis-Hubert Triaud paints the *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew*, inspired by a work by Jean Restout, for the church of Saint-André, in Kamouraska

1822: Joseph Légaré paints *The Rapture of Saint Paul* (after Calandrucci) for the church of Trois-Rivières

1825: Yves Tessier paints *The Resurrection* and *The Entombment of Christ* (after an anonymous artist) for the church of Saint-Marc-sur-Richelieu

1829: Joseph Légaré exposes his collection of paintings at the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec

1830: Riots in Paris



**1831:** Destruction of the residence of the archbishop, where Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins lives

**1833:** Philippe-Jean-Louis Desjardins dies in Paris; in Québec City, Joseph Légaré moves his collection into his residence on Sainte-Angèle Street

**1838:** Joseph Légaré opens the Québec Gallery of Paintings

**1848:** Louis-Joseph Desjardins dies in Québec City

**1851:** Antoine Plamondon paints *Christ Expiring on the Cross* (after Monnet) for the church of Sillery

**1852:** Joseph Légaré inaugurates the Quebec Gallery at his new Québec City residence

**1874:** The Séminaire de Québec acquires Joseph Légaré's collection; creation of the Pinacoteca at Laval University

**1888:** Fire at the Séminaire de Québec chapel

**1922:** Fire at the Cathedral-Basilica of Notre-Dame-de-Québec

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## General Information

OPENING  
HOURS OF THE  
MUSEUM COMPLEX

**1st June to 4 September 2017**  
Monday to Sunday,  
10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Wednesday till 9:00 p.m.

**15 June to 1st September, the**  
Pierre Lassonde Pavilion is open  
on Wednesday, Thursday and  
Friday till 9:00 p.m.

ADMISSION

Adults: **20 \$**  
Seniors (65 and Over): **18 \$**  
Ages 18 to 30: **11 \$**  
Ages 13 to 17: **6 \$**  
Families (2 adults and 3 children  
13 to 17): **44 \$**  
Families (1 adult and 3 children  
13 to 17): **22 \$**  
Children 12 and under: **free**  
Members: **free**  
Wednesdays from, 5:00 to 9:00  
p.m.: **half-price**  
Reduced rates for groups

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