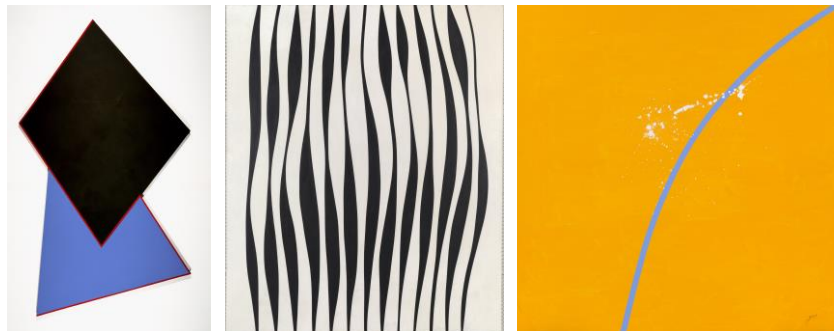


**Press Release**  
New Exhibition  
From October 11, 2018 to January 6, 2019

## Marcel Barbeau. In Movement



Parc des Champs-de-Bataille  
Québec (Québec) G1R 5H3  
418 643-2150  
1 866 220-2150  
mnbaq.org

**Press Contact**

Linda Tremblay  
Media Relations Officer  
418 644-6460, ext. 5532  
linda.tremblay@mnbaq.org

**Québec City, Wednesday, October 10, 2018** ✎ The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (MNBAQ) is proud to devote a major retrospective to Marcel Barbeau (1925-2016), a bold, committed, uncompromising artist and a well-known figure in Québec contemporary art. **From October 11, 2018 to January 6, 2019, *Marcel Barbeau. In Movement*** will offer an outstanding panorama of the artist's output through more than 100 especially rich, diverse works spanning seven decades.

The biggest exhibition ever devoted to the artist will thus encompass his entire career, from the mid-1940s to his most recent work, and elucidate the noteworthy periods of his artistic development to attentively take a new look at this vital but little-known approach.

Centred on five flagship themes, the exhibition will highlight outstanding works, including: *Rosier-feuilles* (1946), *Natashkouan* (1956), *Tomac* (1960), *Rétine optimiste ou Salute* (1964), *Kitchenombi* (1972), *Fenêtre sur l'avenir* (1991-1992) and *Graviers dressés sur l'algue* (1999). Visitors can also admire *La Piémontaise* (1988), a newly restored masterly sculpture.

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*“Like the world we live in and life, my paintings and sculptures are constantly changing. I like to surprise others and surprise myself, since each surprise offers another glimpse of the beauty of the world.”*

— Marcel Barbeau

## *Barbeau, the perpetual explorer*



Barbeau helped initiate numerous avant-garde currents and artistic trends in the country. In the 1940s and 1950s, he made a vital contribution to the development of nascent pictorial abstraction and is internationally renowned for his contribution in the 1960s to optical art.

Spurred by astonishing creative boldness and imbued with an insatiable aesthetic curiosity, Barbeau never confined himself to a single direction or form of expression. Over time, his multidisciplinary attraction expressed itself in such varied artistic disciplines as drawing, painting, collage and sculpture and in pictorial performances produced with actors, musicians and dancers. Moreover, his role in the development of transdisciplinary performance was recognized in the summer of 2013 in Paris with his participation in the *Nouvelles vagues* international event organized by the Palais de Tokyo.

In fact, the artist was a precursor in the decompartmentalization of artistic boundaries. Very early on in his career, Barbeau adopted the stance of a researcher in the development of his approach. He embarked upon a singular artistic path free of any compromise that constantly renewed his output.

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## Exhibition highlights

Among the 100-odd works assembled for the exhibition, visitors can admire several masterpieces by Marcel Barbeau in the exhibition rooms

of the Pierre Lassonde Pavilion. *Rosier-feuilles* (1946) is a major work from the 1940s. It features a composition in which the hierarchy of the elements gradually blurs and the viewer is drawn by the movement of the strokes that traverse the entire surface of the painting.



Mention should also be made of the strength of *Tomac* (1960), one of the most accomplished paintings of the period, which explores the concept of a latent fall, a force that is at once tranquil and tragic, in which the shapes seem poised to fight to preserve their position in space.



The painting *Rétine optimiste ou Salute* (1964) is an emblematic work of optical art. Barbeau produced it in New York, where he lived from 1964 to 1968, stimulated by the hubbub, furious pace and dazzle of the city's neon signs.

The painting *Kitchenombi* (1972) stems from the artist's first pictorial performance at the Théâtre de Caen in France in 1972 at a poetry recital organized by director Gabriel Gascon, in association with percussionist Vincent Dionne, during which a series of five monumental paintings was produced before the audience.



Lastly, the large sculpture *Fenêtre sur l'avenir* (1991-1992) seems to showcase the narration of the shapes in the artist's paintings (*Les Grappes lucides* and *Sentinelle des ondes*), which evoke the numerous viewpoints that the sculptural volume offers. The correlation between Barbeau's two-dimensional and three-dimensional works is at its height in this series.

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## Marcel Barbeau, in a nutshell

Marcel Barbeau was born in Montréal on February 18, 1925. Between 1942 and 1947, he studied at the École du Meuble, a linchpin of Montréal's artistic avant-garde at the time, where he trained in cabinetmaking and design. Paul-Émile Borduas, whose influence is acknowledged on the development of his initial practice, was one of his teachers. His classmates included Jean-Paul Riopelle and Maurice Perron. With them, he frequented Borduas' workshop, which welcomed young people from different cultural backgrounds sensitive to the avant-garde who wished



to unshackle themselves from the conservatism of artistic institutions, a core group that shortly thereafter formed Les Automatist.

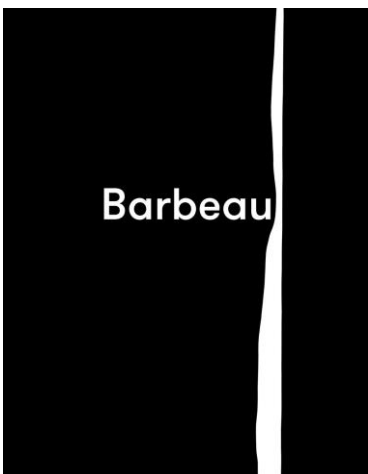
Different periods shaped his output. The first, so-called “automatiste” period, from 1946 to 1956, highlighted the free expression of the subconscious and spontaneous gestures. Around 1946, his all-over paintings, displaying vigorous lines, spurts and drips of paint, were unique in Québec’s artistic landscape. Big paintings and black-and-white drawings were the hallmarks of his work in 1959 and 1960. The negation of the boundaries of the frame then gave way to the duality between form and content in his compositions. In the early 1960s, the artist initiated an optical experience and took an interest in kinetic painting. This new research, which evokes contemporary music, is centred on the illusion of movement. His works reflect the op art movement, a striking trend in New York and in Europe, of which he is one of the pioneers in Canada. The 1970s witnessed the artist’s pictorial performances produced in collaboration with musicians and dancers, his return to sculpture and the adoption of a vaguely impressionistic tachiste aesthetic in the 1980s and, more recently, recourse to geometric, dynamic abstraction.

Marcel Barbeau’s works have been frequently exhibited and are widely collected in Canada, the United States and Europe. Prestigious awards, including the Governor General’s Award and the Prix Paul-Émile Borduas, both received in 2013, have highlighted his outstanding career and acknowledged contribution to the contemporary visual arts. The artist sustained his artistic practice until his death on January 2, 2016

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## A rich, diverse, bold catalogue

A publication accompanies this huge retrospective. The 242-page book, richly illustrated with nearly 250 photos, includes an essay by Eve-Lyne Beaudry, Curator of Contemporary Art at the MNBAQ and Curator of the Exhibition; a portfolio of all of the works exhibited; *Souvenirs épars d’un poète visuel*, a testimonial from art historian and sociologist Ninon Gauthier, PhD, the artist’s widow; and *Danser la peinture*, an essay by artist, writer, pianist and composer Rober Racine. An illustrated chronology elaborated in collaboration with Marc-Antoine K. Phaneuf and Denis Castonguay rounds out the catalogue, whose graphic design was assigned to Marc-André Roy.



Distributed by Dimedia, *Marcel Barbeau. In Movement* is a bilingual work (in French and English) available at the MNBAQ bookstore-boutique and in bookstores for \$49.95  
ISBN : 978-2-551-26325-7



*We wish to thank the law firm Séguin Racine for its generous contribution to the production of this catalogue.*

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## **Formes instants, a previously unreleased musical experience**

On December 11, 1958, Marcel Barbeau attended a new music concert at the Université de Montréal, where he discovered Stockhausen's music and experienced an aesthetic thunderbolt. The new sounds transformed his output and spurred him to embark on new artistic explorations. To reflect Barbeau's passion for contemporary music, the MNBAQ invites visitors to discover the exhibition through the *Formes instants* musical experience. Through 30 very brief musical gestures embroidered with coloured silences that emerge and create unexpected harmony between the works and the sounds, visitors can explore the artist's universe through a truly astonishing musical touch. Curator Yannick Plamondon selected the musical excerpts that make up this soundscape through an appeal launched among Québec contemporary composers.



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## **Credits**

The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec has organized the exhibition *Marcel Barbeau. In Movement* presented from October 11, 2018 to January 6, 2019 and generously supported by the Canada Council.

***Project Director***  
**Christine Conciatori**  
Director of Exhibitions and  
Mediation, MNBAQ

***Curator***  
**Eve-Lyne Beaudry,**  
Curator of Contemporary Art  
(1950 à 2000), MNBAQ

**Set and Graphic Design**  
Marie-Renée Bourget-Harvey

**Mediation Coordinator**  
Marie-Hélène Audet, MNBAQ

**Operations Management**  
Yasmée Faucher, MNBAQ

**Digital Mediation**  
Anne-Josée Lacombe, MNBAQ

**Projet Manager**  
Mylène Renaud

-30-

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

**Québec** 

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**Marcel Barbeau. In Movement**  
**Pierre Lassonde Pavilion of the MNBAQ**  
**From October 11, 2018 to January 6, 2019**

INFORMATION: 418 643-2150 or 1 866 220-2150 / mnbaq.org

Page 1 - From the bottom up and from left to right: Marcel Barbeau, *Bec de brise*, 1959. Oil on canvas, 148.3 × 298.4 cm. Musée de Lachine. Gift of Chantal Laberge (RD-1988-L15-37) © Estate of Marcel Barbeau Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie // Marcel Barbeau, *Prum, Prum, Foula*, 1969. Acrylic on canvas, 417 × 244 cm. Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. Gift of Gérard Lortie (D 70 5 P1) © Estate of Marcel Barbeau Photo: Denis Farley // Marcel Barbeau, *Rétine prétentieuse*, 1965. Acrylic on canvas, 241.5 × 203 cm. Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Concordia University, Montréal. Gift of Marie-Marthe Huot Elie (985.002) © Estate of Marcel Barbeau Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie // Marcel Barbeau, *Chanson de salamandre*, 2013. Acrylic on canvas, 137 × 137 cm. Ninon Gauthier Collection, courtesy of the Trépanier Baer Gallery, Calgary © Estate of Marcel Barbeau Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie

Page 2 - Hella Hammid, photographer, Marcel Barbeau at the International Op Art Seminar, Fairleigh-Dickinson University, Madison, NJ, summer 1965 © Estate of Hella Hammid

Page 3 - Marcel Barbeau, *Rosier-feuilles*, 1946. Oil on wood panel, 49 × 75.5 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Private collection (AGO.125480) © Estate of Marcel Barbeau Photo: Ian Lefebvre © 2018 Art Gallery of Ontario // Marcel Barbeau, *Rétine optimiste ou Salute*, 1964. Acrylic on canvas, 242 × 203.5 cm. Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, purchase. Conservation treatment by the Centre de conservation du Québec © Estate of Marcel Barbeau (1969.209) Photo: MNBAQ, Jean-Guy Kérouac // Marcel Barbeau, *Kitchenombi, n° 4*, 1972. Acrylic on canvas, 260.7 × 389.3 cm. Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Québec. Achat (1973.574) © Succession Marcel Barbeau Photo: MNBAQ, Idra Labrie

Page 4 - Ninon Gauthier, photographer. Performance of *May First*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, May 1977. Marcel Barbeau Foundation Archives © Estate of Marcel Barbeau

Page 7 - Maurice Perron, photographer, The Hay Barn, summer 1947. Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Fonds Maurice Perron (1999.147) © Courtesy of Line-Sylvie Perron

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## Marcel Barbeau (1925-2016), chronologie

### 1925-1941

Marcel Christian Barbeau is born in Montréal on February 18, 1925.



### 1942-1944

Barbeau enrolls at the École du Meuble in Montréal. Studying under Borduas, he discovers his own passion and talent for art.

### 1945

Barbeau frequents Borduas's studio, where he receives his cultural education. There he also meets other young students of Borduas, most of whom will later sign the *Refus global* manifesto.

He becomes a junior member of the Contemporary Arts Society, the most influential modern art group in Québec at that time.

He share "the alley studio," with Riopelle until the following spring.

### 1946

He obtains a diploma in furniture design from the École du Meuble.

Barbeau and the poet Rémi-Paul Forgues share a studio on University Street in Montréal, until the spring of 1948. He paints there some forty gestural works.

### 1947

Barbeau organizes a studio reception to show his recent works to his friends. Borduas completely dismisses Barbeau's paintings, saying that they are all surface and lack any sense of depth. Barbeau will refashion his works, eventually destroy them and then stop painting for a while.

### 1948

Marcel Barbeau marries Suzanne Meloche, a young poet from Ottawa whom he met through Claude Gauvreau. He takes up painting again, having abandoned it the previous year.

He signs the *Refus global* manifesto. One of his sculptures is reproduced in it.

**1949**

Suzanne Meloche gives birth to a daughter, Manon.

**1950**

Inspired by the anarchist ideal of libertarianism and cooperation, Barbeau goes to live on a farm in the Montérégie region with his wife and their daughter, along with Jean-Paul Mousseau, his wife, Dyne, their daughter Katryn, and Paul Legault and his companion. The commune dissolves at the end of the summer.

**1951**

Suzanne Meloche gives birth to a son, François.

Barbeau visits New York in search of an art gallery to represent him and to meet the Abstract Expressionists.

**1952**

Suzanne Meloche leaves Marcel Barbeau.

**1953**

Barbeau looks at crystals under an electron microscope. His observations will influence his works.

Barbeau settles in Québec City, where he works for almost two years as an assistant to the renowned portrait photographer Gaby. Commercial photography will pay him a living wage until his departure for Paris in 1962.

**1956**

He becomes a member of the Non-Figurative Artists' Association of Montreal.

**1957**

Very active period of experimentation and streamlining through new approaches.

He leaves Montréal for the West Coast. His voyage takes him to San Francisco, Seattle, the Okanagan Valley and finally Vancouver, where he will stay for a year.



**1958**

He discovers the works of Bachelard and Bergson, whose theories of perception will have a strong impact on his future work.

Back in Montréal, he attends a concert and lecture by Karlheinz Stockhausen, who will have a major influence on his drawing.

**1960**

The Galerie Denyse Delrue, who was then defending the leading exponents of contemporary Québec art, take Barbeau under her wing, until 1969.

**1962**

Barbeau travels to France, where he is introduced to Iris Clert, the owner of one of the most avant-garde Parisian galleries. She will represent him until 1966.

He permanently gives up oils for acrylics.

**1963**

At the Musée des Arts décoratifs de Paris, he discovers the work of Victor Vasarely, a leader of the contemporary Op Art movement. He sees affinities between it and his own research, which confirm that he is on the right path.

**1964**

The artist settles in New York. He meets Bruno Palmer-Poroner, director of the East Hampton Gallery, which will represent him until its closure in 1970.

**1965**

Barbeau soon becomes associated with the New York Op Art movement and will take part in many of their exhibitions throughout the United States between 1965 and 1967.

**1967**

Barbeau is introduced to the Toronto art dealer Carmen Lamanna, whose gallery will become one of the most prestigious in the country among those specializing in the avant-garde. Lamanna will represent him until 1973.

**1968**

Barbeau meets Ninon Gauthier, whom will become his lifelong companion. The couple settles in Montréal.

**1970**

Barbeau spends a year in Carlsbad in southern California and uses photography as a way of exploring his ideas about sculpture.

A first survey of its production is presented at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Manitoba.

**1971**

After having spent the winter in Palm Springs, crossed the United States and stopped in Montréal for a few weeks, he flies off to Paris.

**1972**

As part of the *Kitchenombi* show staged by Gabriel Gascon, Marcel Barbeau does an initial painting performance to music provided by percussionist Vincent Dionne.

**1973**

He receives the Lynch-Staunton Award from the Canada Council for the Arts.

**1974**

He travels to Morocco and Greece. Back in Québec, Barbeau purchases an abandoned schoolhouse at Saint-Irénée and converts it into a studio. He will work there every summer from then until 1982.

**1975**

Marcel Barbeau marries Ninon Gauthier.

He attends a number of dance and contemporary music performances, and takes introductory contemporary dance courses to prepare for his next performances.

**1977**

Barbeau settles in Sherbrooke. He is elected vice-president of the board of directors of the Conseil des artistes peintres du Québec and president of the Fédération des arts visuels du Québec, positions that he will hold until the spring of 1979.

Barbeau presents the multidisciplinary performance *May First* on the terrace of the Art Gallery of Ontario with dancers Paul-André Fortier, Andrea Ciel Smith and Carol Anderson, and the percussionists Chris Faulkner and Joseph Kivubiro

### 1978

Bishop's University, in Lennoxville, hires Barbeau as artist in residence. For three summers, he serves as a mentor during *Québec Été Danse*, a dance program on the university campus, where he gives seminars and performs along with the young dancers and choreographers.

### 1979

Barbeau returns to live in Montréal.

### 1983

Barbeau is hospitalized for depression for several months, as well as several more times until 1987. This is a less productive period for the artist.

### 1986

Barbeau embarks on new explorations using cut-outs from back issues of the *New York Times*, that will lead to the series entitled *Anaconstructions*, began in 1991 and developed until 2010.

### 1988

The artist settles in Piedmont, in the Laurentians, north of Montréal. He will spend his summers there until 1992, making large sculptures.

### 1993

Barbeau becomes a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.

The Barbeau family goes back to Paris for a protracted stay. In the years that follow, they will travel frequently between Québec and France, officially settling there in 1996.

### 1994

He represents Québec at the Jeux de la Francophonie in Paris, where he receives the gold medal in painting.

**1995**

He receives the title of Officer of the Order of Canada as a tribute to his entire body of work.

**1996**

The Barbeaus settle in Bagnolet, a commune in the eastern suburbs of Paris, where the artist has been provided with a permanent live-in studio by the French Ministry of Culture. They will live there until 2008.

**1998**

Fiftieth anniversary of *Refus global*, Barbeau takes part in a wide variety of celebrations in Canada, France and England.

**1999**

Barbeau organizes an interdisciplinary performance around paintings, in the area around the Bassin de la Villette, Paris.

The artist, in conjunction with the dancer and choreographer Jocelyne Montpetit, organizes an interdisciplinary event around the sculpture *Liberté, liberté chérie*. This performance with that dancer is the first of a series of six.

**2000**

Manon Barbeau's film *Barbeau, libre comme l'art* premieres.

**2001**

Barbeau is awarded a painting prize at the International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Florence, Italy.

**2003**

Barbeau is the featured artist at a fundraiser for the 24th edition of the Montréal Jazz Festival.

**2008**

The artist finds a studio at the Château Saint-Ambroise alongside the Lachine Canal. This will become his new permanent studio, and his last.

**2009**

Marcel Barbeau and Ninon Gauthier complete their move to Montréal.

**2011**

Barbeau win a competition that involves the integration of artworks with architecture at the École des métiers de la construction.

**2012**

One of his work (*Nadja*, 1946) is presented in the exhibition *L'art en guerre : France, 1938-1947 - De Picasso à Dubuffet* at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris.

**2013**

Marcel Barbeau receives the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, the Louis-Philippe-Hébert Prize from the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, as well as the Paul-Émile-Borduas Prize, in recognition of his entire body of work.

He participates at the event *Nouvelles vagues, Palais de Tokyo hors les murs*, Paris.

**2015**

The artist is awarded the medal of Officer of the Ordre du Québec.

**2016**

Marcel Barbeau dies on January 2 at the age of 90.

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## General Information

OPENING  
HOURS OF THE  
MUSEUM COMPLEX

**Septembre 4, 2018 to May 31, 2019**

Tuesday to Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Wednesday till 9 p.m.

Closed Mondays (except January 1, March 5, April 2, and May 21)

Closed December 25

*Important: Updating of the Gérard Morisset Pavilion for the third phase of the reorganization of the collections.  
Reopening in November 15, 2018.*

### 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): **\$24**

Children 12 and under: **free**

Members: **free**

Wednesdays from, 5 p.m. to  
9 p.m.: **half-price**

Reduced rates for groups

### SERVICES AVAILABLE

Parking, Librairie-Boutique,  
café, restaurant, free Wi-Fi and  
Cloakroom

### CONTACT US

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