



Contemporary Art in Québec

A GUIDE TO THE
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COLLECTION

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Contemporary Art in Québec

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The Foundations

There is a growing consensus that contemporary art began in the 1960s. In Québec, that decade saw profound artistic, social and political change. The traditional definition of art and the strict distinctions between artistic disciplines were called into question at the same time government and institutional powers underwent reform: it was the Quiet Revolution. From then on, art tended to be characterized by a multiplicity of practices that coexisted in spite of their at times contradictory differences. Abstraction took a radical turn, eliminating all external reference so as to reduce painting and sculpture to the essence, but simultaneously the modernist values it embodied were breaking down. A new generation of artists abandoned conventional forms of expression in favour of “the art being made,”¹ which looked resolutely to the present. A new conception of art and the artist’s role emerged. Experimental, conceptual, multidisciplinary and socially engaged, it shaped the contemporary art landscape as we know it today.

Despite the younger artists’ rejection of modernism, abstraction contributed to the renewal of ideas. The Plasticien painters enjoyed recognition beyond Québec’s borders. In 1965, Claude Tousignant and Guido Molinari participated in *The Responsive Eye*, the benchmark exhibition of art geared to optical perception held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Ridding painting of any form of self-expression, perspectival space and external reference allowed the Plasticiens to focus on the energy of colour, to reduce the pictorial surface to essential optical effects. “What I wish to do,” Claude Tousignant (FIG. 1) wrote in 1959, “is to make painting objective, to bring it back to its source – where only painting remains, emptied of everything extraneous to it – to the point at which painting is nothing but sensation.”² His “targets,” with their bands of colour and rhythmic spaces, exemplify this, as do Guido Molinari’s large hard-edge canvases (p. 26), Marcel Barbeau’s paintings of “electromagnetic waves” (p. 40), Yves Gaucher’s vast monochrome surfaces (p. 32) and Jacques Hurtubise’s vividly coloured works, made with metallic and fluorescent paint, and neon tubes (p. 22).

In the name of the new generation, Serge Lemoyne (p. 62) openly contested the predominance of abstract art, which triumphed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts’ 1965 Spring Exhibition. “We are reacting against all



Fig 1. Claude Tousignant, Poster for the exhibition *Claude Tousignant*, Galerie du Siècle, Montréal, 1966, silkscreen, 60.8 × 45.6 cm. MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2013.355).

1. Coined by an art critic, the expression “l’art qui se fait” (the art being made) has been popular since the 1960s. See in particular M. Fournier, *Les générations d’artistes, suivi d’entretiens avec Robert Roussil et Roland Giguère* (Québec City: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1986).

2. Claude Tousignant, quoted in P. Gagnon (curator), M. Lanctôt (curator) and M. Mayer, *Claude Tousignant*, exhib. cat. (Montréal: Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, 2009), p. 193.



Fig. 2. Serge Lemoine at the Grand National, Montréal, November 1964, in Marcel Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoine* (Québec City: Musée du Québec, 1988), p. 82.

those Automatistes and Plasticiens,” he said. “We want to loosen up the kind of bourgeois painting they have arrived at. Most people over 30 have fallen into their own trap and lost their thirst for adventure.”³ Breaking with “bourgeois” values, Lemoine called for a more direct relationship between art and social space. He projected painting beyond the frame, organizing happenings, environments (FIG. 2) and interventions in public places. But he remained true to the discipline of painting despite his radical stance and paid tribute to the Automatistes and Plasticiens in a series produced in the 1980s. Similarly looking to play a role in social space, the first-generation Plasticien Jean-Paul Mousseau created discotheque interiors, which lay outside the standard boundaries of art. The first Mousse Spacothèque opened in Montréal in 1966. Inspired by the concepts of total theatre and a synthesis of the arts, it was designed to provide a multisensory experience through a combination of slideshow, music and decor that engaged patrons in an entirely new way.



Fig. 3. View of Edmund Alleyn's *Introscaphe I*, presented at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris in 1970. MNBAQ archives.

Art also came to incorporate elements of mass culture, the consumer society and technology. A new way of conceiving of the image emerged in the wake of the Pop Art movement, fuelled by a desire to democratize art. Prizing authenticity and originality, artists like Pierre Ayot (p. 48), the founder of Atelier Graff, developed silkscreen and photographic collage techniques incorporating everyday elements from graphic design and advertising incompatible with the values of “high art.” Screens and the first television sets made their appearance in 1966, in Gilles Boisvert's *Candide*. But these artists' vision was far from optimistic, reflecting instead a critical attitude toward technology and consumerism. Edmund Alleyn (p. 42) created a multisensory cockpit-like sculpture called *Introscaphe I* (1967-1970) (FIG. 3), in which viewers sat enclosed to watch a fast-paced stream of images of violence and over-consumption captured from television. “I said to myself that I had to work on people's perceptions,” Alleyn explained, “to reach people with the means technology uses to reach them. At the time, we were reading McLuhan, Marcuse... It seemed to me that painting didn't afford enough to grab onto. Which led me to use movie-style sequences of images, sound and all sorts of kinetic devices.”⁴

This vibrant period of change came in anticipation of the Montréal World's Fair, Expo 67. The importance placed on art for this major international event was unprecedented. In barely a decade, artists had earned considerable recognition in Québec society. The number of contemporary and technological works at Expo 67 was impressive. Monumental sculptures by Françoise Sullivan (p. 30) and Yves Trudeau and female silhouettes by Toronto artist Michael Snow stood in various places on the site. Serge Lemoine created happenings at the Youth Pavilion. The collective Fusion des arts devised an immense rotating sound installation for the Canada Pavilion, where they presented *Les Mécaniques*, a show in which the audience was invited to play musical instruments concocted from domestic items. Charles Gagnon (p. 20) designed the Christian Pavilion as a multimedia installation – the first to incorporate film, photography and sound – with over 300 photographs, 40 speakers and the experimental 16mm film *The Eighth Day* (FIG. 4). This film is a remarkable collage of archival images denouncing consumerism, the entertainment culture, mass production, the devastation of 20th-century

wars and nuclear weapons. It was in keeping with the anti-war movements that sprang up across North America in the late 1960s.

Decomartmentalization and Pluralism

In demanding changes to artistic standards, artists were fighting for the same values as the counterculture and the social, nationalist, labour and feminist movements. In other words, art and politics shared the same struggle. The 1960s drew to a close in the heady atmosphere of Expo 67, but the following decade began in a climate of disillusionment and tension crystallized by the October Crisis. In terms of art, two key issues emerged. On the one hand, the young artists were leading the way. Newness alone no longer sufficed: the goal was the dynamic nature of art, its capacity to question the present and cast a critical eye on society. On the other hand, the affirmation of national identity was expressed in a quest for contemporary art specific to Québec. Exhibitions and events related to identity proliferated in the early 1970s until, defending the idea of artistic and cultural pluralism, Normand Thériault, curator of *Québec 75 Arts*, raised doubts and provoked debate by declaring in the opening pages of the catalogue, “There is no Québécois art, there are only Québécois artists.”⁵ Presented at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, this exhibition primarily illustrated the decompartmentalization of disciplines and the resulting new practices: conceptual art, minimalist sculpture, installation, performance, photography and video art.

Contemporary art had no boundaries. Artists no longer necessarily aspired to make museum art. They sought to take art outside traditional venues, throwing open their studios and exploring urban and architectural sites. This questioning of institutions was apparent in a number of ways, for example in conceptual practices focused on process and documenting rather than on creating an aesthetic object or a finished work, and in ephemeral works – performance and installation. Artists felt the need to establish their own exhibition venues, and critics and theorists felt the need to found periodicals to report on this new language of art. In the late 1970s, the young generation turned to the global scene and organized the first international contemporary art events in Québec.

From Artwork to Concept

In 1968, Charles Gagnon created *The Sound of Space*, riding a bicycle back and forth in his studio in front of one of his large-format canvases, *November Steps* (1967-1968), which served as a screen for his action; he filmed the event



Fig. 4. Charles Gagnon, *The Eighth Day*, 1967, 16mm b/w film transferred to digital medium, sound, 14 min, made for the Christian Pavilion at Expo 67, Montréal.

3. Serge Lemoine, quoted in M. Saint-Pierre, *Serge Lemoine*, exhib. cat. (Québec City: Musée du Québec, 1988), p. 30.

4. Edmund Alleyn, quoted in M.-C. De Koninck and P. Landry, *Délics art et société: le Québec des années 1960 et 1970*, exhib. cat. (Québec City: Musée de la civilisation; Montréal: Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal/Fides, 1999), p. 225.

5. N. Thériault, “Manifeste pour une exposition,” in *Québec 75 Arts*, exhib. cat. (Montréal: Institut d'art contemporain de Montréal, 1975), p. 10.



Fig. 5. Suzy Lake, *A One Hour (Zero) Conversation with Allan B.*, 1973, cover of the catalogue of the exhibition *Camerart* (detail) (Montréal: Galerie Optica, 1974).



Fig. 6. Henry Saxe, *X-Tree Link, Variation no. 2*, 1969, reworked in 1975, steel and vinyl, 200 × 365 × 200 cm. MNBAQ, gift of Mark and Esperanza Schwartz (1992.139).

with a 16mm camera. In the early 1970s, Françoise Sullivan walked from place to place, charting her route with photographs. Such actions shifted the meaning of art toward the process. The films and photographs documenting them gained artistic status, and the artist's body became a material in its own right.

Two exhibitions put conceptual art of this kind in the spotlight in the early 1970s. *45° 30' N-73° 36' W* and *Montréal: plus ou moins?* featured works that, in a radical departure from artistic conventions, took “material” form in photography, language and process as well as diagrams, plans, documents and serial systems. A number of the Québec artists exploring this new tendency had a keen interest in the notion of territory, of geographical and urban configuration, as seen in Bill Vazan's (p. 54) *Route 37*, Tom Dean's *Telephone Square* and Melvin Charney's (p. 70) *Rue Saint-Laurent*. Photography was also central to these approaches. Suzy Lake's *A One Hour (Zero) Conversation with Allan B.* (1973) (FIG. 5), which appeared on the cover of the catalogue for the 1974-1975 exhibition *Camerart*, illustrates the use of protocols, grids and serial repetition characteristic of conceptual and minimalist art. By caking her face with white make-up and looking directly into the camera lens, Lake added autobiographical references and feminist concerns to the realm of conceptual art. Serge Tousignant (p. 28), with the series *Coins d'atelier* (1971-1973), and Lynne Cohen (p. 92), who repeatedly took pictures of private and public interiors suggestive of cold discomfort, are among the artists who redefined photography. Sound, too, became a full-fledged material in those years. In 1976, at Galerie Média, Raymond Gervais presented one of his first sound installations, *12 + 1 =*, with 13 phonographs playing different sound samples simultaneously.

From Artwork to Site

In parallel with these conceptual approaches and following on from the formal explorations of the 1960s, sculpture was moving toward a sparer language and at the same time taking into account both its intended site and the viewer's experience and perception. The medium also incorporated industrial production methods and materials, like steel and concrete. Henry Saxe (FIG. 6) was one of the first artists to juxtapose different elements in a given space, thus broadening the scope of sculpture by making it site-specific. This approach, which paved the way for installations, was adopted by several other artists during the 1970s and 1980s, among them Roland Poulin (p. 52), David Naylor, Claude Mongrain, Gilles Mihalcean, Michel Goulet (p. 60) and François Morelli (p. 80).

It was in this spirit that the outdoor exhibition *Corridart* came to occupy urban space and take a stand in regard to cities and museums. The event was to present works of art at locations all along Montréal's Sherbrooke Street during the 1976 Olympic Games. The artist and architect Melvin Charney, who curated and organized the event, described it as a “street museum,” a “linear museum”⁶ stretching across the city from east to west. But municipal authorities secretly ordered all the works demolished during the night before the exhibition's official inauguration. Instead of consigning *Corridart* to oblivion, however, this act of censorship made it the most controversial

art event in the history of Québec. It is also emblematic of site-specific installations, of which *Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* (FIG. 7) is widely considered one of the earliest examples. Using plywood and salvaged framing lumber on temporary scaffolding, Charney reconstructed facades typical of 19th-century stone houses. This ephemeral “monument,” which made visible the disappearance of heritage architecture, was meant as a memorial to houses demolished by recent urban development.

As Johanne Lamoureux has written, installations are designed in accordance with the site and its parameters, whether “physical, institutional, geographical or political.”⁷ Artists took over abandoned buildings, warehouses, public places and industrial and urban wastelands. These spaces contrasted with the “white cube” of the museum and afforded artists greater freedom, while changing the way artworks were exhibited and experienced. Installations also gave rise to “artists' museums,” a concept that challenged the institutional conditions of art. With her first creations, Irene F. Whittome (p. 82) questioned the exhibition and collection functions of the museum, as well as its role in the conservation of objects. She began by transforming her studio into a museum with “The White Museum” series (1975). Then, after taking over the museum by intruding into its architecture and apparatus with *Ho T'ï* (at the Muséum d'histoire naturelle in La Rochelle, France) in 1988, she intervened in other spaces with “The Museum of Traces” (1989). The installations of Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe (p. 76) were also considered “alternative museums.”⁸ During the 1980s, these artists carried out projects in several deserted venues in Montréal (*Le Musée des sciences*, 1984, in a former post office in Little Burgundy; *La Donna Delinquenta*, 1987, in the old Corona Theatre, in the St. Henri district) and New York (*The Wilds and the Deep*, 1990, in the Battery Maritime Building, a partially decommissioned ferry terminal). These site-specific works brought the public to neglected urban areas and buildings while raising political, social, economic and artistic questions related to the history of museums.

Installations quickly gained favour in Québec and still dominate the art scene today. The 1985 exhibition *Aurora borealis* revealed the crucial importance of this art form by bringing together 30 artists from across Canada, most of whom presented site-specific works. Although initially referring to an ephemeral work conceived for a particular place, the term “installation” had outgrown this definition and now designated more generally unclassifiable hybrid and transdisciplinary forms that made room for new materials such as sound, photography and video. And, as René Payant observed, with installation art, “in the final analysis, the issue is really the status of the viewer.”⁹



Fig. 7. Dismantling the exhibition *Corridart*: demolition of the work *Les Maisons de la rue Sherbrooke* by Melvin Charney, July 1976. Concordia University Libraries Special Collections, Fonds Corridart (P119-02-560).

6. M. Charney, *Corridart dans la rue Sherbrooke*, exhibition brochure (Montréal: Programme Arts et Culture du Comité organisateur des Jeux Olympiques de 1976, 1976).

8. R. Hétu, “L'œuvre de deux Montréalaises dans une gare maritime fait des vagues,” *La Presse*, June 9, 1990, Arts visuels section, p. D4.

9. J. Lamoureux, *L'Art insituable de l'in situ et autres sites* (Montréal: Centre de Diffusion 3D, 2001), back cover.



Fig. 8. Les Fermières obsédées, *La Valse des ventriloques*, performance presented at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec on April 11, 2009.

From Artwork to Action

On the evening of the opening of *Montréal: plus ou moins?* in 1972, six women from Groupe mauve wearing wedding gowns climbed the stairs of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and took off their veils to clean the columns flanking the entrance. Throughout the exhibition's run, they returned once or twice a week to wash the floors. This museum cleaning was clearly intended to denounce discrimination against women. Forty years later, performance was still decrying biased standards, codes and models. Since the early 2000s, the collective Les Fermières obsédées (FIG. 8) has used subversive theatrical performance to raucously expose female clichés and deliver a scathing critique of “the society of the spectacle.” Women have thus marked the history of performance art, a form of expression that offers them the opportunity to reappropriate their bodies, identity and image.

Performance defies definition. As Richard Martel noted, “There are as many kinds of performance as there are performers.”¹⁰ A performance is an impermanent action that can encompass Automatiste gestures and avant-garde practices like the happenings of the 1960s, the body art of the 1970s and the more theatrical forms that appeared in the 1990s. In Québec, performance art, which originated with Françoise Sullivan's *Dance in the Snow* (1948), thrived in the 1970s. In 1978, Rober Racine (p. 56) executed French composer Erik Satie's shortest – and longest – composition, consisting of a single page to be repeated 840 times. The first complete performance had been organized in New York in 1963 by John Cage, with a tag team of ten pianists who relayed each other for over a little more than 18 hours. Racine, however, played the piece by himself in an uninterrupted performance that lasted more than 14 hours. Two years later, he took on the architecture of Gustave Flaubert's novel *Salammbô*, which he deconstructed word by word in a vast installation and performance during which he read aloud his transcription of the entire novel and then leaped from the top of a staircase. This repetition- and endurance-based dimension pervades his entire practice. Racine then spent 15 years, from 1980 to 1995, cutting up and annotating the 2,130 pages of the *Petit Robert* dictionary to create the imposing 1,600 *Mirror-Pages* project.

Breakdown and Undecidability

The 1980s brought a reaction and spawned vigorous debate over post-modernism. Conceptual and experimental approaches were followed by a strong resurgence of painting and figuration. The breakdown of traditional disciplines and languages continued, but an undecidability prevented any one discourse from dominating. Elements that until then had seemed incompatible, if not irreconcilable, became combinable: some artists began mixing abstract and figurative components in the same work or commingling fragments of the past with contemporary concerns. Notable examples of such works include *De Dürer à Malevitch* by Pierre Granche (1982), *Mes confessions* by Pierre Dorion (1985), *Peintures/Paintings* by Pierre Dorion and Claude Simard (1983) and the exhibition *Peinture morte* by Joseph Branco (1984). The hybrid, deconstructionist form of painting practised by

these artists was expressed in eclectic figurative worlds blending genres and eras as well as in pictorial experiments exploring the potential of abstraction permeated by a new materiality. Pursued throughout the 1990s, this research is still going on, as Guy Pellerin, François Lacasse (p. 106), Stéphane La Rue (p. 100), Francine Savard, Anthony Burnham, Janet Werner and others continue to renew the language of painting by revisiting its formal vocabulary.

Contrary to what one might expect, these approaches are motivated by critical thinking, even though they are no longer in rupture with the past. This reflection is fundamental in that it challenges the rhetoric of truth, the authority of history and the notions of objectivity and universality.

Bodily Instability

The body has a profound, intimate and at times distressing relationship with contemporary art. Women artists and recent scientific and technological developments have significantly influenced the body's representation and place in art. In just a few decades, an idealized image yielded to an active, subversive presence that shows an unstable, changing body. Signs of this had emerged by the late 1960s. When abstraction ruled and the body had all but disappeared from representational space, a series of prints by Betty Goodwin (p. 44) revealed the body's imprint on worn-out clothes and, a few years later, on immense tarpaulins hung on the wall like paintings; she also explored the human form in exceptionally large drawings of swimmers (FIG. 9) that explicitly express this instability and tension.

Self-representation and autobiographical fiction are important facets of this way of considering the body. Raymonde April (p. 96) photographed the intimacy of her everyday life over a period of nearly 30 years, amassing extensive visual archives from which she drew some 500 images for her installation *Embracing Everything* (2000). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Geneviève Cadieux (p. 74) centred her work around the human body in photographic installations and portraits that evidence pain, wounds, bruises and scars. She sought a landscape on the skin's surface and exposed a singular nakedness that differs markedly from the most commonly accepted representations. Jana Sterbak (p. 68) has prompted reflection on the vulnerability of the individual and the human condition in exploring facets of the body at odds with technology: dispossession of the self and the reduction of living beings to the status of commodity, anonymity and subjection to machines. This profound instability is disturbing to some people's ways of thinking. A controversy erupted in Canada when *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (FIG. 10) was exhibited at the National Gallery of Canada in 1991. Made entirely of raw meat, this work left no one indifferent. As Sterbak said, *Vanitas* “can be interpreted in many different ways, from the respect that we do not accord to animals we raise for our food needs, to our own aging and death, the



Fig. 9. Betty Goodwin, *Moving Towards Fire*, 1985, oil pastel and acrylic (site-specific), 120.5 x 700 cm, reproduced in *Aurora Borealis* (Montréal: CIAC, 1985), p. 32.

9. R. Payant, “The Shock of the Present,” trans. D. McGrath, in J. Bradley and L. Johnstone, eds., *SightLines, Reading Contemporary Canadian Art* (Montréal: Éditions Artexes, 1994), p. 244.

10. R. Martel, *Art-action* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2005), p. 105.



Fig. 10. Jana Sterbak, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (detail), 1987, raw flank steak on a model and colour photograph, 113 cm, dress size 38. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, purchase (AM 1996-524).

rituals of possession and absorption, etc. *Vanitas* could also be about the way time changes our perception of works. On the day of the opening, when the dress is exhibited the flesh is raw. Then the meat dries and starts to look like leather.”¹¹

Restaging History

Appropriation, quotation, reuse, recycling, remake, reconstruction and re-enactment are terms used to describe the procedures by which artists revisit history and the work of other artists. References to the past can take highly diverse paths. Claudie Gagnon’s farcically playful *tableaux vivants* (p. 90) mix art history and popular culture without regard for the hierarchy of genres, canonical figures or historical periods. Adad Hannah enacts performative reconstructions of existing works to draw attention to the position of the viewer vis-à-vis art. In the series “Paintings about Art,” Michael Merrill represents other artists’ creations in different contexts and situations: studios, warehouses, art galleries, private collections and museum exhibitions. Sophie Bélaire Clément reinterprets works and exhibitions, highlighting not only their formal and conceptual particularities but also their strategies of presentation and narration.

The determination to put an end to the dominant discourses paved the way to reshaping historical narratives and restaging their modes of representation by revealing the power plays and processes of legitimization and domination they conceal. The works of Trevor Gould (p. 84) provide particularly telling examples of the critical and political rereading of history taking place not only in art but also in postcolonial studies, which have spread to the social sciences as a whole. Gould questions imperialism by adopting the perspective of an explorer, revisiting the discovery and exploitation of Africa, and drawing attention to the authority of scientific discourse in natural history museums, zoos, botanical gardens, encyclopedias and World’s Fairs. He appropriates their methods of representing knowledge to deconstruct their powers of legitimization and discrimination.

Current Positions

Creation in the Digital Age

These developments in art have called into question photography’s objectivity and relationship to reality. In the digital age, the term “post-photography” has come to refer to photography freed from reality. Photographers are no longer dependent on actual shots, the use of a camera or the production of images. Nicolas Baier (Fig. 11) employs the new creative tools provided by digital technologies: computer, scanner, image-retouching software, laser printer. He retouches and manipulates images to reveal a measure of the invisible in them and to question the meaning of the world by showing another way of perceiving and understanding reality. The computer is not merely a tool, it is a world unto itself, with its own subcultures, memory, thought patterns and lifestyles. Jon Rafman has taken due note of contemporary societies’ digital shift and launched into the exploration of this new Web

culture. The fields he investigates are rooted in computers, video games, networks, databases and virtual worlds.

Video has evolved in a way similar to photography. At first documentary, in the 1980s it spread to exhibition sites, where it was displayed on monitors and projection screens. Video production grew owing to the accessibility of the tools needed for filming and editing, and the ability to draw on film techniques. In the late 1990s, video art, which had sought to keep its distance from cinematic conventions, found itself in a grey area in between film and contemporary art. Some artists, like Olivia Boudreau, Patrick Bernatchez (p. 114) and Pascal Grandmaison (p. 116), make works that retain the qualities of the cinematic image but extend the exploration of its narrative and temporal mechanisms to great lengths. Slow pacing, long waits, repetition and the deconstruction of linearity generate a complex experience of the image in movement. These manipulations recall the growing presence of technology in our lives since the advent of computers, surveillance systems, robotics and telematic networks. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (p. 78) uses military equipment and devices designed to intensify the surveillance of people and places to point out this technological illogicality by appropriating it for artistic and humanistic purposes.

Collaboration and Participation

Between 1991 and 1999, Mathieu Beauséjour stamped the words “Survival Virus de survie” (Fig. 12) on all the Canadian banknotes that passed through his hands and noted their serial numbers before putting them back in circulation. By this act, he infiltrated the economic system, seeking to short-circuit it from within. In a similar yet different spirit, Raphaëlle de Groot (p. 126) turned to the public to obtain a wide array of materials and objects, which she inventoried, classified, incorporated into performances and exhibited in installations. Massimo Guerrera, with his “platform” *Darboral* (Fig. 13), begun in 2000, invited people to take part in rituals and activities such as sharing food, creative workshops, body-casting and meditation.

In all the multiplicity and diversity of these practices, a common element is discernible: they lie at the intersection of art and human relations, of the individual and society, of public and private, redefining the role of the viewer in a way never before imagined. In 1999, Nadia Myre (p. 110) undertook to bead the 56 pages of the first five chapters of Canada’s *Indian Act*. This huge three-year project was accomplished with the participation of over 200 persons across Canada, to whom the artist taught glass-bead weaving, thus perpetuating an ancestral craft beyond First Nations communities. With *Indian Act*, Myre transformed a craft that had been handed down from mother to daughter into a collective endeavour of unprecedented scale. Such a political process of reappropriation and erasure was an act of decolonization through which the artist addressed the deeply human questions of identity, memory, hope and reconciliation.



Fig. 11. Nicolas Baier, *Levitation* (detail), 2001, digital prints on galvanized steel, 1/3, 243 × 305 cm (right element, shown here), 122 × 122 cm (left element). MNBAQ, purchase with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (2001.165).



Fig. 12. Mathieu Beauséjour, *Survival Virus de survie* (detail), 1991-1999, stamp and inkpad, stamped banknotes, video and ring binder containing photocopies, pencil and ink inscriptions and collages on paper, 182 × 137 × 91.5 cm (overall). MNBAQ, purchase with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (2003.238).



Fig. 13. View of Massimo Guerrera’s sculptural installation *Darboral*, presented at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec in 2002-2003.

11. C. Francblin, “Jana Sterbak: Of Moths, Dogs and High Water,” *Art Press*, no. 329 (December 2006), p. 45.



Fig. 14. Michel de Broin, *Blue Monochrome*, 2003, garbage dumpster, epoxy paint, metal ladder, pump, filter, water, light and heating system, 218 × 225 × 158 cm. MNBAQ, purchase for the Prêt d'oeuvres d'art collection, 2005; transfer to the permanent collection. Restored by the Centre de conservation du Québec (2005.2749).

These collaborative undertakings have transformed the role and status of the artwork by focusing on human experience and actual social contexts. They operate according to a principle of cooperation, where exchange, conversation and participation become the work's materials. In Québec, these "relational" practices have emerged mainly outside venues specifically dedicated to exhibiting – galleries and museums – and even outside the art system, in public spaces, with communities and social and activist groups. The relational and participatory dimension of such works poses a huge challenge to museums that wish to acquire them.

The Relationship with the World of Objects

It would be impossible to draw up a comprehensive inventory of the objects and materials that go into the art being made today. Everyday items are found alongside both luxurious and inexpensive goods, every sort of merchandise and promotional item, clothing, containers, cardboard boxes, taxidermy animals, food and junk. The materials are no less varied: salvaged wood, Plexiglas, Styrofoam, plaster, metal, plush, modelling clay, mirrors, glue, nylon, rope, wire, wool, pigments, hair, water. Although these are all part of our daily world, they are not usually found in museums. Their presence is the sign of a bewildering sculptural renewal that some see as the "material turning point" of contemporary art. Artists associated with this trend include David Altmejd (p. 118), BGL (p. 86), Valérie Blass (p. 112), Michel de Broin (FIG. 14), Claudie Gagnon, Jean-Pierre Gauthier, Raphaëlle de Groot, Diane Landry (p. 122) and Serge Murphy. There are artists who recycle, reassign and transform, sometimes finding an opportunity to critique consumer society by detaching an object from its economic function in order to give it artistic and symbolic value. Some artists set out to expose the stereotyped nature of objects (luxury goods, for example), while others simply seek to bring art and life closer together. Artists' interest in the materiality of everyday things is anything but trivial, and contemporary art could well bear the mark of an extreme sensitivity to the world around us, both animate and inanimate.

Noon Time Yellow

1960

Oil on canvas, 137 × 117 cm

MNBAQ, purchase, Concours artistiques de la province de Québec – 1st prize, painting (1961.171)

Throughout his prolific career, Jean McEwen concentrated on the qualities of the paint itself – its transparency, density, materiality, fluidity and luminosity, which reveals countless subtleties. His monochromatic compositions, among the first of their kind in Canada, made him a leading exponent of painterly abstraction in the country. Though at first he was positioned between the two major artists' groups of the period – the Automatistes and the Plasticiens – the individuality of his approach soon came to the fore in his openness to American formalism, in particular colour field painting.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, who sought to convey the objective reality of coloured material using the hard-edge technique, McEwen aspired to express its materiality in a rich and varied spatial structure that conveys a sense of the painter's physical presence. This no doubt explains why, in 1955, he began applying the pigment with his fingers, a method that offers the eye a tactile sensation. In *Noon Time Yellow* (1960), which won first prize for painting in the Concours artistiques de la province de Québec in 1961, McEwen superimposed tonalities ranging from a warm brown, almost a dark chocolate, to a shimmering gold. His method of covering every layer of colour with another led to a sense of depth and allowed the artist to create a vibrant space, a pictorial field whose energy was not obtained by the calculated juxtaposition of bands of colour as practised by the Plasticiens. The impression of depth is accentuated by the addition of varnish to some layers. Applied to the layered pigment, varnish captures the light and presents a different texture that also contributes to bringing the surface of the painting to life.

Jean McEwen

Montréal, 1923 – Montréal, 1999

In *Blue Rider* (Fig. 15), for example, the tension of the perimeter and cross-brace of the stretcher is echoed on the surface of the canvas, but without compromising the sensual qualities of the paint. The translucent sky blue expanses seem to have been deposited on the horizontal bands that suggest the stretcher. Between these two blue veils, a glowing red vertical advances from the background. With this composition, McEwen underscores the relationship between the junction and the overlay of coloured planes, forcefully tackling the issues of colour as a structuring phenomenon.



Fig. 15.
Jean McEwen
Blue Rider, 1963
Oil on canvas, 89 × 116 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (1970.270)



Kanaka

1962

Oil on canvas, 201.5 × 171 cm MNBAQ, purchase (1971.74)

Marcelle Ferron influenced the history of Québec art through the scope of her varied production and her contribution to the renewal of the language of painting. A leading light of Lyrical Abstraction, she was among the first artists in Québec to take an interest in integrating art with architecture. In 1944, after two years' study at the École des beaux-arts in Québec City, she pursued her training on her own, finding a mentor in Paul-Émile Borduas. Receptive to the boldness of his approach and the atmosphere of freedom surrounding him, she eventually joined the Automatiste group and in 1948 signed the manifesto *Refus global*. Her curiosity and desire for change took her to Paris, where she lived from 1953 to 1966.

Ferron's time in France provided fertile soil for the development of her style. Inspired by stimulating encounters and avid for new pictorial explorations, she gradually abandoned the Automatiste approach she had adopted through contact with the group and began to emphasize gesture and material. In 1959, she moved closer to Lyrical Abstraction, which focuses on the sensitive and emotional qualities of the material. *Kanaka*, painted in 1962, is a good example of her production at the time. Against a resoundingly bright background, the work presents an explosion of coloured material that sprang from the artist's candid, energetic gesture. Broad strokes of the spatula spread a generous accumulation of paint that combines chromatic harmony and tonal contrasts, ensuring a dynamic composition that is nonetheless structured.

Marcelle Ferron

Louiseville, 1924 – Montréal, 2001

Ferron's painting is distinguished by the unity and richness of its colouring, a feature not unrelated to the fact that she prepared her own colours. Light also occupies an important place in the artist's oeuvre: it is the very essence of her approach, and she endeavoured to convey it through not only evanescence but also spatial effects. This fascination led her to turn her hand to making stained glass under the French master Michel Blum, a skill she put to use after returning to Québec, executing immense glass pieces. The best known is undoubtedly the one in the Champ-de-Mars station of the Montréal metro (FIG. 16). Here, the artist exploits the transparency of the glass, combined with a copious interplay of colour, to take full advantage of light's intangible qualities. As the hours advance, daylight enlivens the swirl of motifs to offer public transport users a ceaselessly renewed visual experience.



Fig. 16.
Marcelle Ferron
Stained-glass window (detail) at the
Champ-de-Mars metro station,
Montréal, 1968
Glass and vinyl, 9 m (max. h.) × 60 m (total l.)
Société de transport de Montréal collection,
gift of the Government of Québec



The Gap

1962-1963

Oil on canvas, 173 × 198.5 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (2006.02)

A painter, photographer and filmmaker, Charles Gagnon left his mark on the Canadian art scene of the second half of the 20th century. From the beginning of his career, he was open to a broad range of disciplines and artists, an eclecticism that put him on the periphery of the main art currents. In 1954, he discovered Abstract Expressionism in New York, where he lived from 1955 to 1960 while studying at New York University and the New York School of Design. The city's flourishing experimental avant-garde fascinated him and contributed to the development of his approach: he saw the films of Maya Deren and Alfred Leslie, the photos of Robert Frank and the Combine paintings of Robert Rauschenberg; he attended the birth of the happening, concerts by John Cage and dance performances by Merce Cunningham. In the late 1950s, photography served as a generative element for his paintings. In the early 1960s, he produces box constructions in which he assembled everyday objects (FIG. 17) – a medium he returned to in the 1970s. In addition to distinguishing him from the formalism that then prevailed in Québec, his painting attests to the uniqueness of his influences and his sensitivity to the reality around him.

Upon returning from the United States, Gagnon was reluctant to associate himself with the predominant Montréal painting trends promoted by the Automatistes and the Plasticiens, which made his approach one of the most original in Québec. After incorporating collage, letters and numbers into his paintings, he took a new direction featuring large square and rectangular chromatic fields that seem to be nested in one another. Their arrangement fragments the composition, creating window-like openings that reveal chromatic spaces. The particular interest of this series, entitled “Gap Paintings,” lies in

Charles Gagnon

Montréal, 1934 – Montréal, 2003

the spatial ambiguity caused by an astute interplay of formal opposites – between the straight line and splashes of paint or gestural strokes, between the flatness of the coloured surfaces and the sense of depth created by their superimposition. Neither strictly Automatiste nor purely Plasticien, *The Gap* (1962-1963) combines both aesthetics, yet without precluding a landscape dimension, as suggested by green areas and vistas into the pictorial space.



Fig. 17.
Charles Gagnon
Box No. 1, 1961
Wooden chair leg, tar, newsprint
and aluminum can in a wooden drawer,
48.8 × 27.2 × 9.2 cm
MNBAQ, gift of Michiko Yajima Gagnon
(2005.2571)



Isabelle

1965

Acrylic on canvas,
121.8 × 152.3 cm

MNBAQ, purchase, Concours
artistiques du Québec – 1st prize,
painting (1965.134)

Jacques Hurtubise was among the abstractionists who contributed to reconfiguring the painterly language in Québec in the 1960s. After graduating from the École des beaux-arts de Montréal, he received a Max Beckmann Scholarship that allowed him to study in New York for nine months in 1961. There he became familiar with Abstract Expressionism, then in its heyday in the United States. His vigorous canvases from that period combine personal experience and the aesthetic power of colour fields, which he discovered through contact with American artists. Though influenced by the Automatistes as well as by Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, Hurtubise forged a personal style characterized by his original treatment of colour.

After returning from New York, he met and spent time with Guido Molinari and Claude Tousignant, which led him to rethink his approach in the light of *Plasticien* theory. He opted for “rationalized gestural painting,” a style dually informed by *Automatisme* and formalism. *Isabelle* represents this pivotal point in his work and earned him first prize for painting in the 1965 *Concours artistiques du Québec*. Two broad red splashes traverse the canvas horizontally, shattering the formal balance of the blue and black planes that divide the surface vertically. Though the splashes appear to be the result of an automatic gesture, they were in fact made with a very precise hand: Hurtubise masked the areas with tape, drew the shapes, cut them out to form a stencil, and then applied the acrylic. In other words, he borrowed the *Plasticiens*’ meticulous hard-edge technique to cause fake accidents. His mastery of the blot and the spontaneity simulated by calculated gesture produced startling optical effects, which, while not *Op Art*, poke fun at the Abstract Expressionist and *Plasticien* purists.

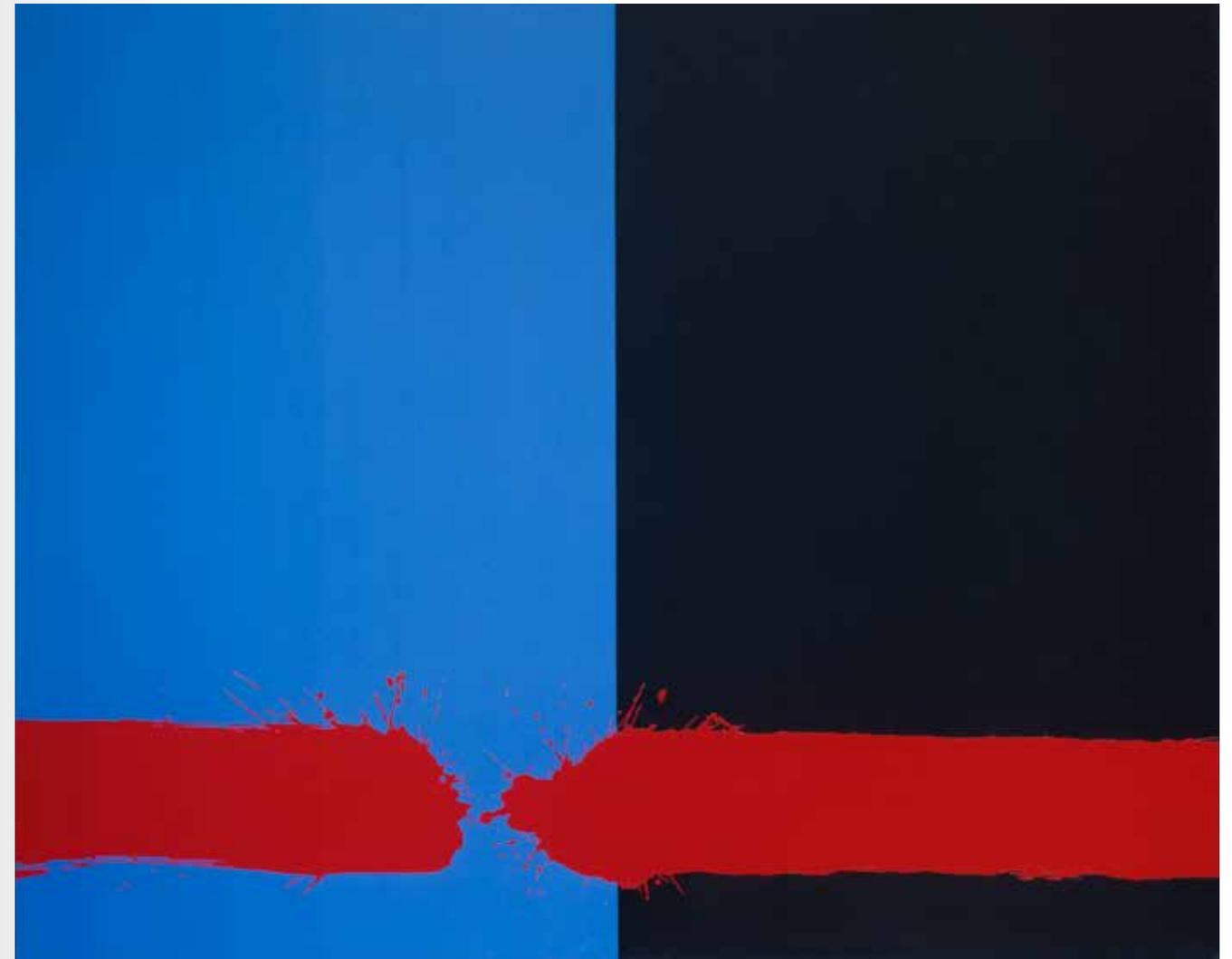
Jacques Hurtubise

Montréal, 1939 – Margaree Harbour,
Nova Scotia, 2014

Hurtubise explored the plastic possibilities of illusion throughout his career, as in the use of ambiguous symmetry, begun in the 1980s, and the artifice of replicated blots forming images worthy of a Rorschach test. The 1990s saw him explore the same optical phenomenon through the themes of mask and bestiary. In the following decade he took this research a step further, applying it to figurative compositions such as *Cartographic Memories* (Fig. 18). In 2004, the roadmap motif began appearing as the background of his paintings, echoing his many trips along North American highways. Smudged with sinuous blotches, the tangle of roads vividly expresses the vast, uneven terrain of artistic practice and of life itself.



Fig. 18.
Jacques Hurtubise
Cartographic Memories, 2007
Acrylic on canvas, 173 × 380.5 cm
MNBAQ, gift of Sylvie Cataford-Blais
and Simon Blais (2014.295)



Group of Black Circles

1967

Acrylic on canvas,
172.8 × 172.8 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (1972.84)

A painter, sculptor and designer, Denis Juneau was associated with the second generation of Plasticiens, along with Jean Goguen, Guido Molinari and Claude Tousignant. By promoting bare-bones geometric abstraction, this group was decisive in the renewal of painting in Québec in the 1950s. Juneau's work, which spans more than five decades, is distinctive for a rigorous approach that gives priority to the exploration of rhythmic colour structures and their optical potential. Juneau is known for paintings that create optical effects through a sequential interplay of geometric motifs whose strong chromatic contrasts make the retina vibrate.

Circles – bisected, doubled, carefully interrelated within brightly coloured spaces – dominate Juneau's Plasticien experiments from 1966 to 1978, contributing to the formulation of the eminently structured approach that characterizes his so-called Op Art period. The artist subjected this archetypal figure to a series of rhythmic combinations based on the principles of order and rupture, the avoidance of all symmetry being essential to activating his works' visual kinetics. In *Group of Black Circles* (1967), he varied the orientation of the circles so that no two white segments face each other directly. This irregular alternation and the contrast of white and black against a solid blue background generate a surface tension, an unstable harmony seemingly on the point of collapse. The gravitational force that gives the impression of bringing these particles to life sets off vibrations that draw the eye toward the highest point.

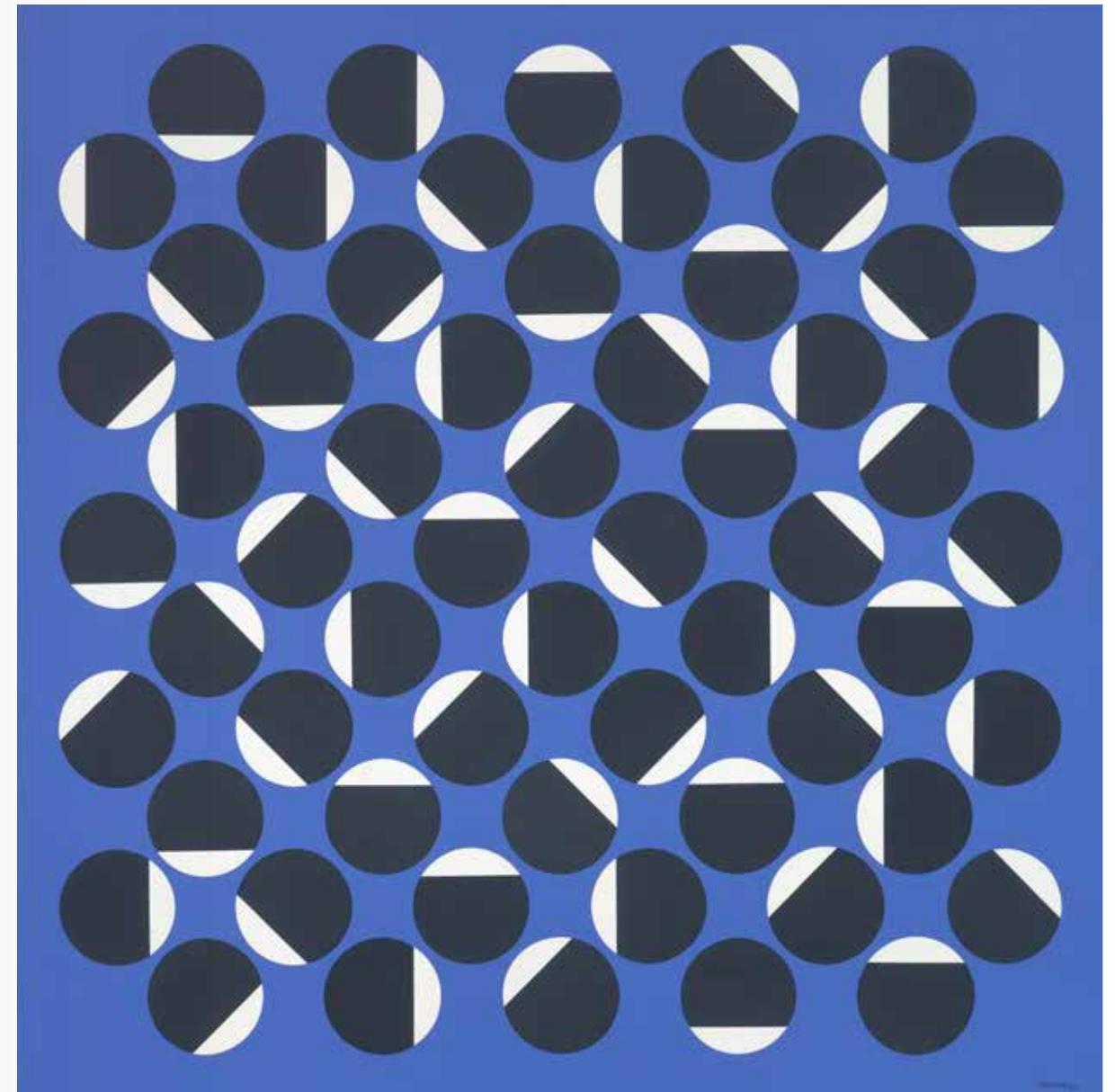
Denis Juneau

Montréal, 1925 – Montréal, 2014

Visual participation on the part of the viewer is extended in a remarkable fashion in *Spectrorames* (Fig. 19), an interactive work that, though perhaps marginal in the artist's production, is nonetheless masterful. This installation – made up of 40 vertical paintings distributed over eight backdrops of a single pure colour – invites the public to play an active role in its kinetics by moving the components around to create new configurations as they see fit. Like Cozic and Ulysse Comtois, Juneau sought to redefine the viewer's relationship with the art object, embracing the participatory art trend that was emerging at the time.



Fig. 19.
Denis Juneau
Spectrorames, 1970 (detail)
Acrylic on canvas,
244 × 30.8 cm (each of 40 vertical panels);
365 × 365 cm (each of 8 backdrops)
MNBAQ, purchase (1972.86)



Untitled

1967

Acrylic on canvas,
203.3 × 365.3 cm

MNBAQ, gift of Guy Molinari
(2014.145)

An emblematic figure of geometric abstraction in Canada, the artist, teacher and theorist Guido Molinari produced a rigorous body of work spanning more than five decades. In his early twenties, after taking evening classes with the painters Marian Scott and Gordon Webber at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' School of Art and Design, he focused on colour theory and the principles of composition. To promote "investigative art," he founded L'Actuelle, a gallery devoted to non-figurative work, in 1955 and the following year helped establish the Association des artistes non-figuratifs de Montréal. Along with Claude Tousignant, Jean Goguen and Denis Juneau, he belonged to the second generation of Plasticiens, whose works emphasize surface flatness and exploit the structural properties of colour.

Molinari laid the groundwork for his practice with the serial paintings of the 1960s, where he created a new, dynamic space requiring the viewer's active perception, clearly apparent in the 1967 *Untitled*. This work reflects his research on the concept of serial art, which he explored with vertical bands of diverse colours juxtaposed across the entire support. Minimal yet monumental, this painting is based on the dynamism of chromatic interrelations. Devoid of any perspective effect, the resolutely two-dimensional spatial structure is configured so that the colour contrasts animate the surface. The serial repetition and permutation of the formal elements and the absence of any referent are pictorial principles that favour the expression of a plastic event.

Guido Molinari

Montréal, 1933 – Montréal, 2004

Molinari's entire oeuvre is a response to a quest for pictorial space based on the painting's structure and the different modes of perception that it commands. Throughout his career, and in various forms, he probed the experience of art as event. After approaching it through serial strategies, he transposed his investigation to checkerboard patterns, then to triangular shapes and finally to monochrome space. This patient journey culminated with the production of the painterly environment *Blue Wind* (FIG. 20), a masterful installation whose seven immense abutting canvases sweep the viewer with gusts of chromatic force.

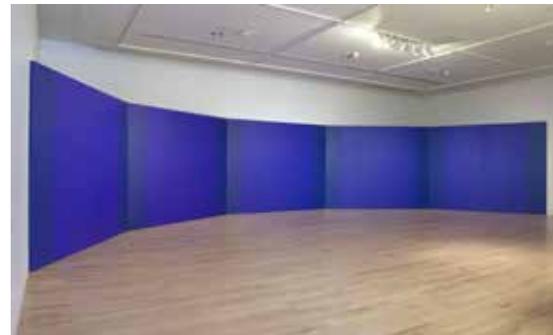
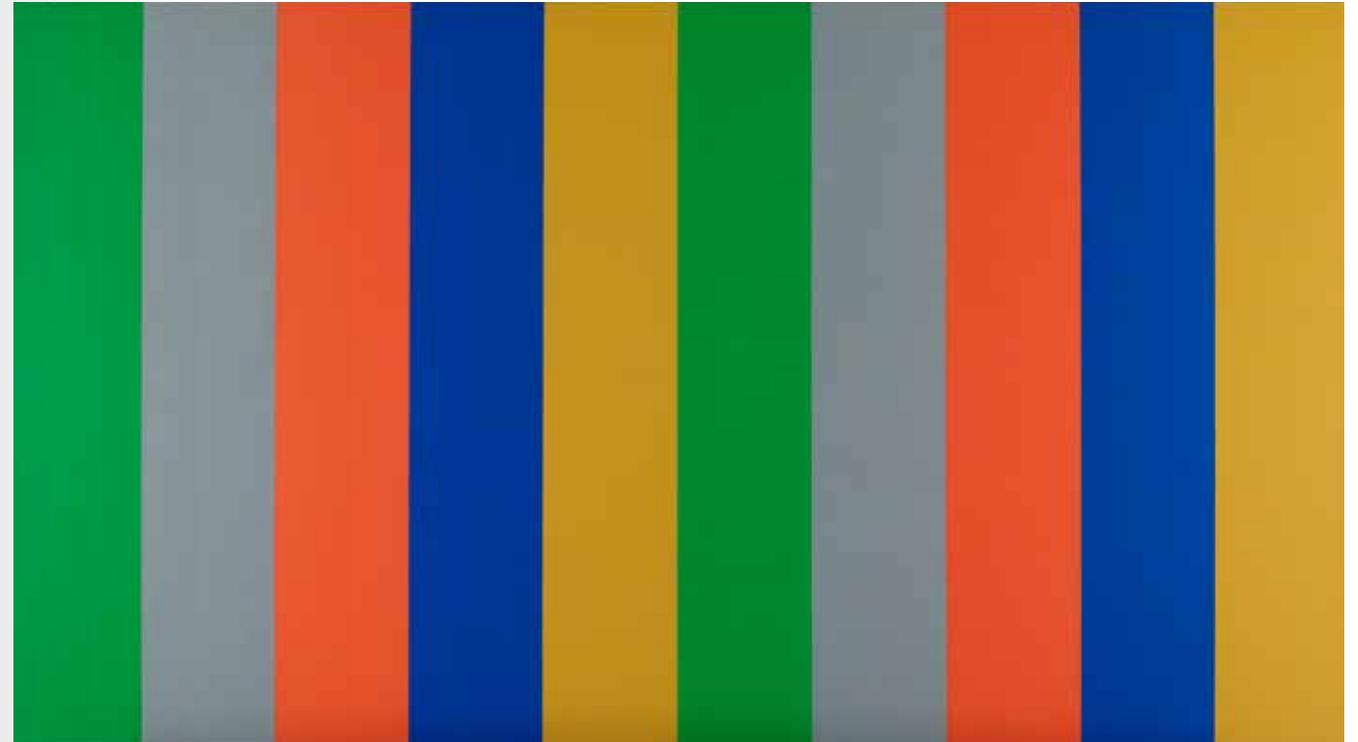


Fig. 20.
Guido Molinari
Blue Wind 1 to 5, 1995
Acrylic on canvas, 273 × 346 cm
(each component)
MNBAQ, anonymous gift (2002.122);
gift of the artist (2004.419 and 2004.420);
purchase (2005.2542 and 2005.2543)



Green Pincers

1967

Enamelled steel and polished stainless steel, 42 × 193 × 81.5 cm MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2006.421)

Serge Tousignant's career took off at full speed. When barely 17, he enrolled at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal to study graphic arts. Straight from graduation, he experimented with lithography and etching in Albert Dumouchel's studio. In 1965, he was chosen from candidates nominated by art schools across Canada to receive a Leverhulme Scholarship, which enabled him to pursue further studies at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London. A founding member of Véhicule, a dynamic artist-run hub of conceptual art, he played a key role in the development of contemporary art in Montréal in the 1960s and 1970s.

P. 169, *P. 276* and *P. 277* (FIG. 21-23), created in 1964, share some similarities with Pop Art, which was then flourishing in Québec avant-garde circles, but they also reflect a conceptual stance surprisingly ahead of its time. Done in ink and acrylic on pages of a phonebook – an everyday object – they are part of a suite of 28 drawings whose titles refer to the torn-out pages. The crossed-out letters and numbers and the geometric shapes express a correlation from one to the next, with the whole following a sequential logic – a method of organization later abundantly used by proponents of conceptual art.

Tousignant's approach also helped shape the new sculptural paradigms that emerged in the 1960s: the use of non-traditional materials, elimination of the pedestal, incorporation of internal space, reversal of the artist's role in the creative act. In 1967, he began producing three-dimensional works that play on illusion and engage viewers in active participation that affects their perception of the object. In *Green Pincers*, a strip of green-enamelled steel folded into an "M" shape rests on a plate of polished

Serge Tousignant

Montréal, 1942

steel acting as a mirror. The point of contact with the reflecting surface brings the real object and the reflected object together as one, in the form of green pincers. Combining the real and the virtual, this sculpture illustrates an exploratory method that was audacious at the time. The process is disarmingly simple but requires that the viewer move about in order to perceive the optical artifice. Like the American Minimalists, Tousignant opted for industrial machining, rejecting the irregularities of the handmade in favour of a uniform surface treatment. In the history of contemporary sculpture, this choice marks the shift from crafting to manufacturing, opening up artistic exploration to technological considerations.

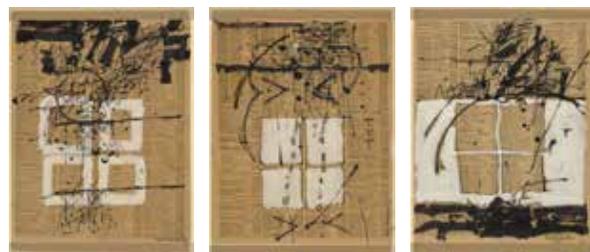
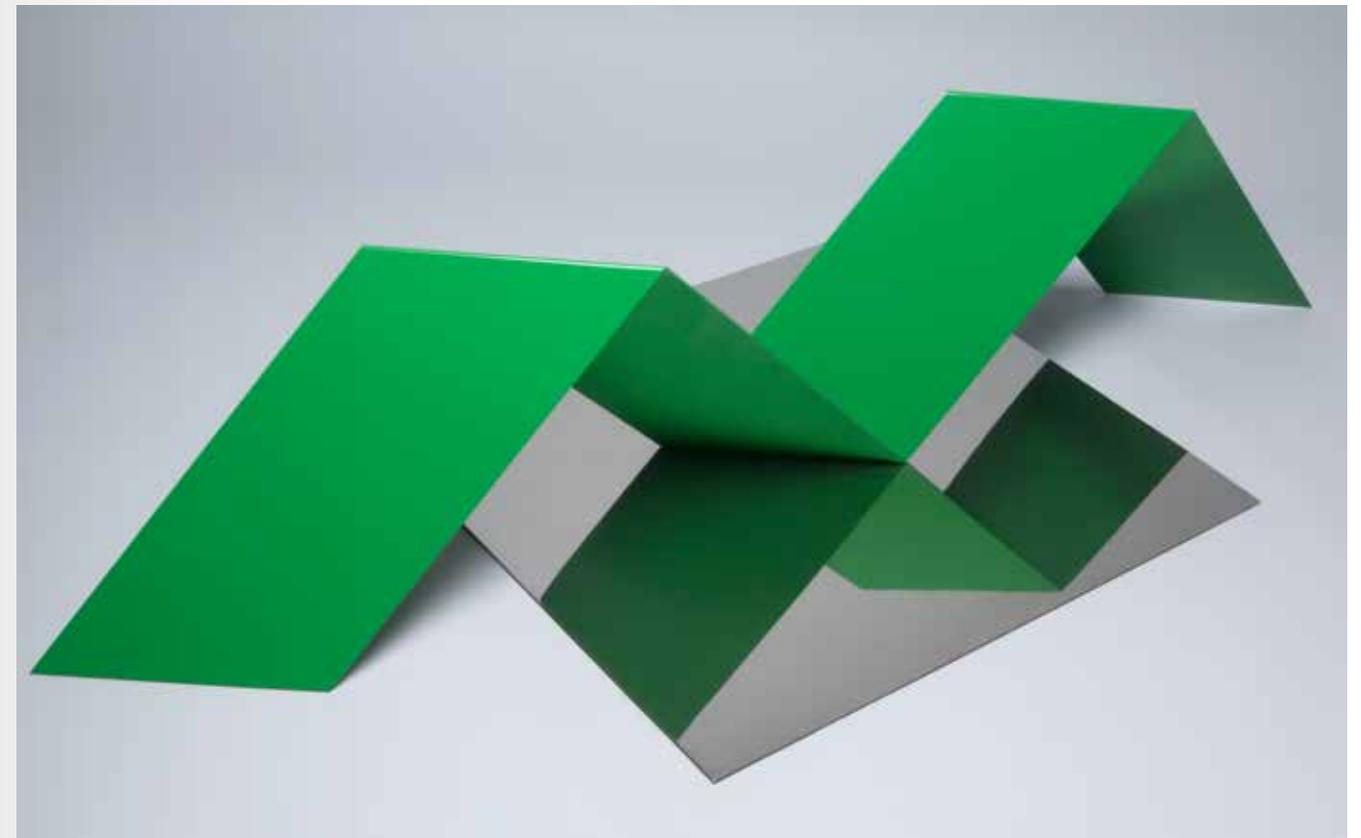


Fig. 21-23.
Serge Tousignant
P. 169, *P. 276* and *P. 277*, 1964
Ink and acrylic on phonebook paper
mounted on wood, 28 × 22.5 cm (each)
MNBAQ, gift of Madeleine Forcier
(2014.250 to 2014.252)



Of One

1968-1969

Plexiglas, 72.5 × 278 × 74 cm

MNBAQ, gift of the artist
(2002.165)

At age ten, Françoise Sullivan was taking drawing, painting, dance and piano lessons – a versatility later reflected in her art. She first gained recognition in the Québec avant-garde of the 1940s as a dancer and choreographer. In 1945 and 1946, she went to New York to study modern dance at the Franziska Boas School of Dance and with other teachers, including Hanya Holm, Martha Graham and Louis Horst. There, Sullivan discovered the expressive and rhythmic potential of the body and the autonomy of gesture. Subsequently, she transposed the Automatiste principles of introspection, the unconscious and intuition into her choreography. Her essay “Dance and Hope,” published in 1948 in the manifesto *Refus global* (Total Refusal), which she signed, is a founding text of modern dance in Québec.

In the 1960s, Sullivan attracted attention for her remarkable contribution to sculpture. After exploring the rhythm and fluidity of forms through metal welding, which she learned from Armand Vaillancourt, she set about freeing the object from the traditional mass-to-volume relationship by using Plexiglas, a new material eagerly adopted by sculptors of the emerging generation. Movement unfurling in space and the idea of the perpetual flux that governs the universe – notions related to her concept of dance – are embodied in *Of One*, a long spiral placed directly on the floor. Made in a factory with assistance from technicians, this sculpture, which bears no trace of its fabrication, draws on the principles of minimalism. Despite its imposing size, it blends into its surroundings because it is transparent and open to the light. Sullivan considers the spiral the simplest expression of the infinite unreeling suggested by the passage of time and the cycle of life.

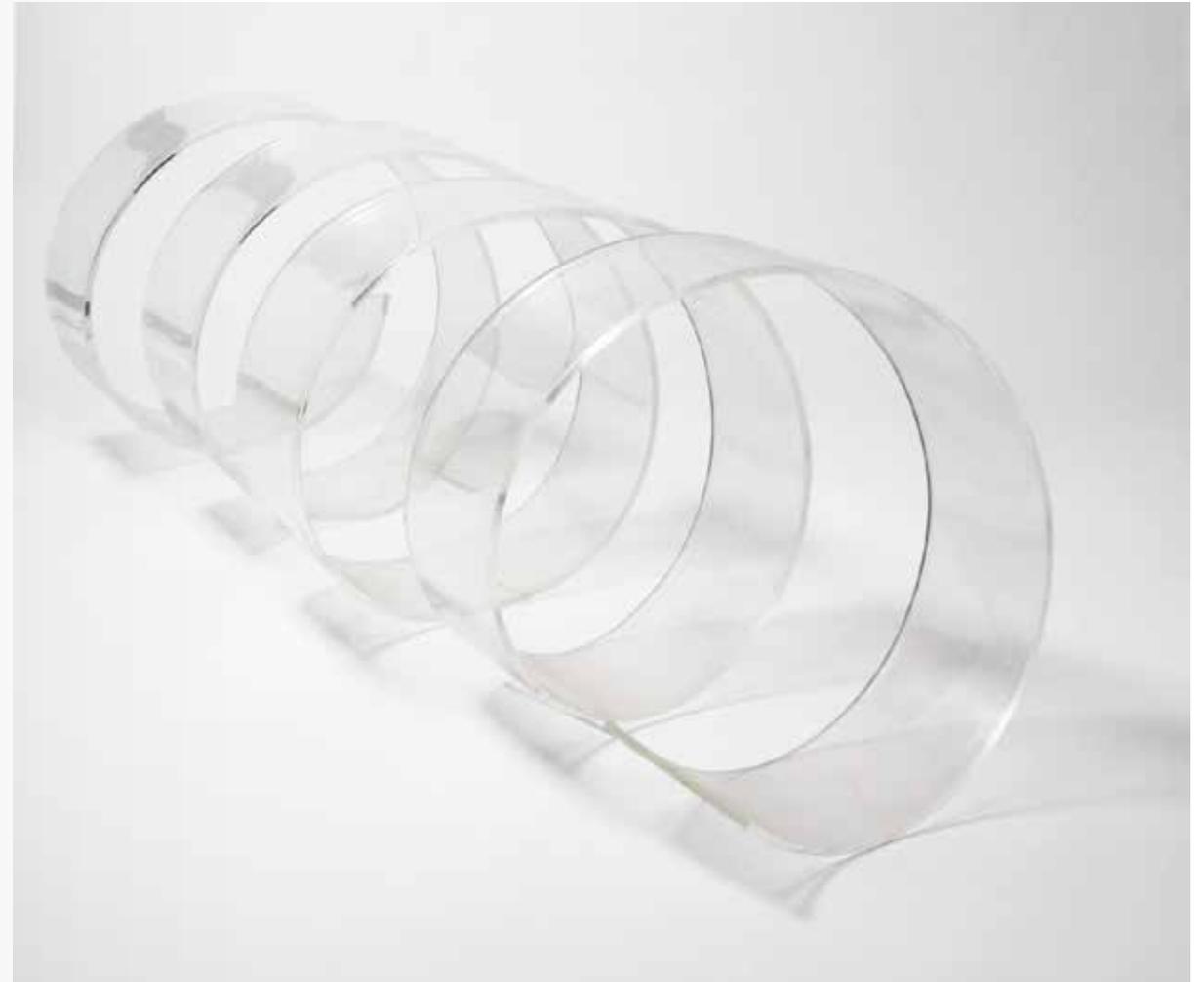
Françoise Sullivan

Montréal, 1925

After venturing into performance and conceptual art in the 1970s, Sullivan returned to painting in the following decade. Her “Tondos” and “Cretan Cycle” are of particular note. In the mid-1990s, she again took up chromatic plasticity and spontaneous gesture. Applied in series on the canvas, linear and rounded brushstrokes reaffirm the artist’s interest in dance, conveying the almost choreographic gesture that produced them. The deep blue picture space of the large diptych *Night* (FIG. 24) grows out of the rhythmic cadence of the swirling brush, modulated shades and superimposed material, which make all the visual power of colour burst forth from the painted surface.



Fig. 24.
Françoise Sullivan
Night, 2002
Acrylic on canvas, 236.5 × 396 cm
MNBAQ, purchase (2003.06)



R-M-III N/69

1969

Acrylic on canvas,
304.5 × 203.5 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (1981.07)

Yves Gaucher, a towering figure in contemporary Québec art, is recognized for his research in abstract painting and his contribution to the printmaking revival. He first came to notice as a printmaker, and by the early 1960s the experimental character and technical boldness of his work had earned him an international reputation. It is also as a printmaker that he made his first geometric explorations, whose formal rigour is seen in “In Homage to Webern.” Inspired by the music of Anton Webern, this 1963 series laid the foundation for a visual rhythm that Gaucher continued analyzing in the paintings of the series “Grey on Grey,” which he worked on from 1967 to 1969.

On these vast expanses of grey, the artist drew thin horizontal lines of various lengths and in various tonalities. The barely perceptible shades are essential to reading the roughly 60 compositions of this group. Though grey is often considered neutral, for Gaucher it encompassed all the colours and emotions in the world. Despite an apparent kinship with minimalism, the “Grey on Grey” paintings do not stem from minimalist objectivity but from an analogy with musical composition and a pictorial investigation that looked to serial music and the twelve-tone system as cultivated by Webern. Just as the ear seeks out melodic phrases in atonal music, the eye moves around the surface of Gaucher’s paintings, guided by the signs that punctuate it.

Yves Gaucher

Montréal, 1934 – Montréal, 2000

While Gaucher’s prints express their materiality with hollows and relief, the paintings he began making in the mid-1960s highlight the flatness of their surface, for he refrained from creating any illusion of depth. Using masking tape and applying paint with a roller to obtain geometric shapes with hard-edged outlines enabled him to focus on his main object – chromatic experience. His aim was a subjective immersion in the colour field, a contemplative posture that, though strongly felt in the series “Grey on Grey,” characterizes his entire production.

In all the canvases with wide horizontal bands painted between 1971 and 1976, Gaucher played with the intensity and weight of the colours to balance the compositional tensions. *Red, Brown, Blue, Yellow, Green, Ochre, 2nd Version* (Fig. 25) achieves a remarkable chromatic harmony despite the surprising arrangement of primary colours and earth tones, which at first may not have seemed compatible.



Fig. 25.
Yves Gaucher
*Red, Brown, Blue, Yellow, Green,
Ochre, 2nd Version, 1974*
Acrylic on canvas, 244 × 366 cm
MNBAQ, gift of Germaine Gaucher
(2013.01)



Green Caterpillar

1970

Nylon, batting and fleece,
244 × 190 × 92 cm

MNBAQ, purchase with support
from the Canada Council for
the Arts Acquisition Assistance
Program (2001.62)

In the 1960s, Québec underwent profound political and social changes. The Quiet Revolution also saw great upheaval in the visual arts. While some artists continued to follow in the wake of Automatism or the Plasticien movement, others rallied around Pop, minimal, conceptual, environmental, kinetic and participatory art. This array of tendencies reflected the winds of change sweeping society and the ferment of an era marked by a determination to democratize the arts.

Cozic's work was not only part of this artistic profusion, it was one of the main driving forces. No doubt the province's first artist duo, Yvon Cozic and Monic Brassard became the standard bearers for the newly emergent participatory practices. The approach they developed went far beyond visual perception to engage the public in the physical experience of their works. Impelled by the democratic ideal of access to art for all, their production questioned the very nature of the art object, from creation to the manner of presentation. It took various forms and was based largely on play with the aim of dispelling the scholarly aura that some still attributed to art. The passive viewer became an active performer (FIG. 26).

Working on projects with visually impaired people in the 1960s made Cozic aware of the tyranny of sight in the reception of art and caused them to rethink the art object in a new tactile relationship. This led to using vinyl, plastic and other industrial materials for their "sculpture-objects," along with unusual components like plush and feathers. The heavy sturdiness of traditional sculpture was abandoned in favour of organic, malleable, unpredictable forms apt to stimulate the senses of both sight and touch.

Cozic

Yvon Cozic and Monic Brassard

Saint-Servan, France, 1942; Nicolet, 1944

Green Caterpillar, a serpentine tube of green fleece twisted into the mesh of a yellow net fixed to the wall, floor or ceiling, illustrates this avant-garde approach to art. Soft and pliable, the long coloured cylinder changes shape with each handling by a participant, whose action becomes part of the creative process. The net, an ironic nod to Mondrian's grid, is like a blank canvas waiting for the caterpillar-line to be configured in new and different ways. Fully existing only insofar as it is manipulated, this work questions the idea of sacralizing art objects and firmly challenges museum conventions.



Fig. 26.
Cozic
Surface That Hugs You (detail), 1972
Fleece, batting, non-woven
interfacing, ribbon and stool,
245 × 150 × 50 cm
Collection of the artist



Equatria No. 21

1970

Painted steel, 158 × 222 × 75 cm MNBAQ, purchase (1980.67)

A native of Flemish-speaking Belgium, Pierre Heyvaert received art training at the *École technique de Bruxelles* and the *École des arts industriels et décoratifs d'Ixelles* before settling in Montréal in 1957. His Canadian-based career got off to a meteoric start. In just ten years he exhibited in some 50 group shows in Canada, the United States and Europe, participated in numerous symposiums and produced public art – eloquent evidence of his contribution to liberating sculpture in Québec in the 1960s. His inspiring creations reflected the discipline's latest trends, which promoted the use of new materials and ways of working.

Heyvaert's early sculptures were organic forms worked in wood with the traditional direct carving technique. But he soon turned to innovative methods and materials such as steel, aluminum and Plexiglas that allowed him to construct and assemble forms instead of carving them from a block of material. The first piece he made in this way was *Acier* (Steel), a monumental sculpture produced for the Québec Pavilion at Expo 67 and installed in the surrounding pool (FIG. 27). Designed around multiple geometric plates welded together, the sculpture is supported by three submerged concrete pillars, giving the impression that, despite its mass, it is floating on the water's surface. Rounded forms are nowhere to be seen in this composition, whose refined structure of straight lines and planes prefigures the artist's future production, which is exemplified by *Equatria No. 21* (1970).

For the "Equatria" series, where the triangle is subjected to myriad formal variations, Heyvaert adopted a compositional principle that determined his creative process. The assemblages of folded sheets of steel resemble giant pieces of origami, with the weight of metal seemingly replaced by the lightness of paper. In *Equatria No. 21*, the artist uses the openings created by joining the triangular planes to involve the surrounding space in the perception of the work. This establishes a dynamic relationship between the sculpture's negative and positive

Pierre Heyvaert

Lebbeke, Belgium, 1934 – Montréal, 1974

spaces: depending on the angle and direction of the light, the modulation of the shadows on the surfaces alters the nuances of the three-dimensional monochrome yellow. The exploration of geometric forms manifest throughout the series reflects a determination to simplify the sculptural vocabulary and accentuate the aspects of tension and spatial dynamics. Heyvaert's life was cut tragically short, but over the course of his artistic evolution he paved the way for minimalist sculpture practices in Québec.



Fig. 27.
Pierre Heyvaert
Acier, 1967
Steel and concrete, 385 × 700 × 350 cm
Ville de Montréal collection



Blues

1971

Acrylic on canvas, 183 × 183 cm

MNBAQ, gift of Simon Blais
(2009.45)

The expression of light and of its corollary, shade, is central to the work of Rita Letendre, an artist of Abenaki descent who was born in Québec but has lived much of her life in Toronto. In 1950, while attending the École des beaux-arts de Montréal, she visited the Automatistes' protest show *L'Exposition des Rebelles* and was so struck by the sense of freedom in the paintings that she abandoned academic training and joined the group. Rejecting all forms of figuration, she embraced the adventure of abstract art. At first she practised gestural abstraction, producing densely coloured compositions shaped by a relatively controlled formal lyricism. Then, in the 1960s, her work gradually evolved to a more geometric abstraction, approaching the structural dynamics of the Plasticiens. Spontaneous gesture gave way to the sharp contours obtained with the hard-edge technique. Her colour palette narrowed, and her forms grew refined in works that resemble large colour fields shot through by light-drenched arrows.

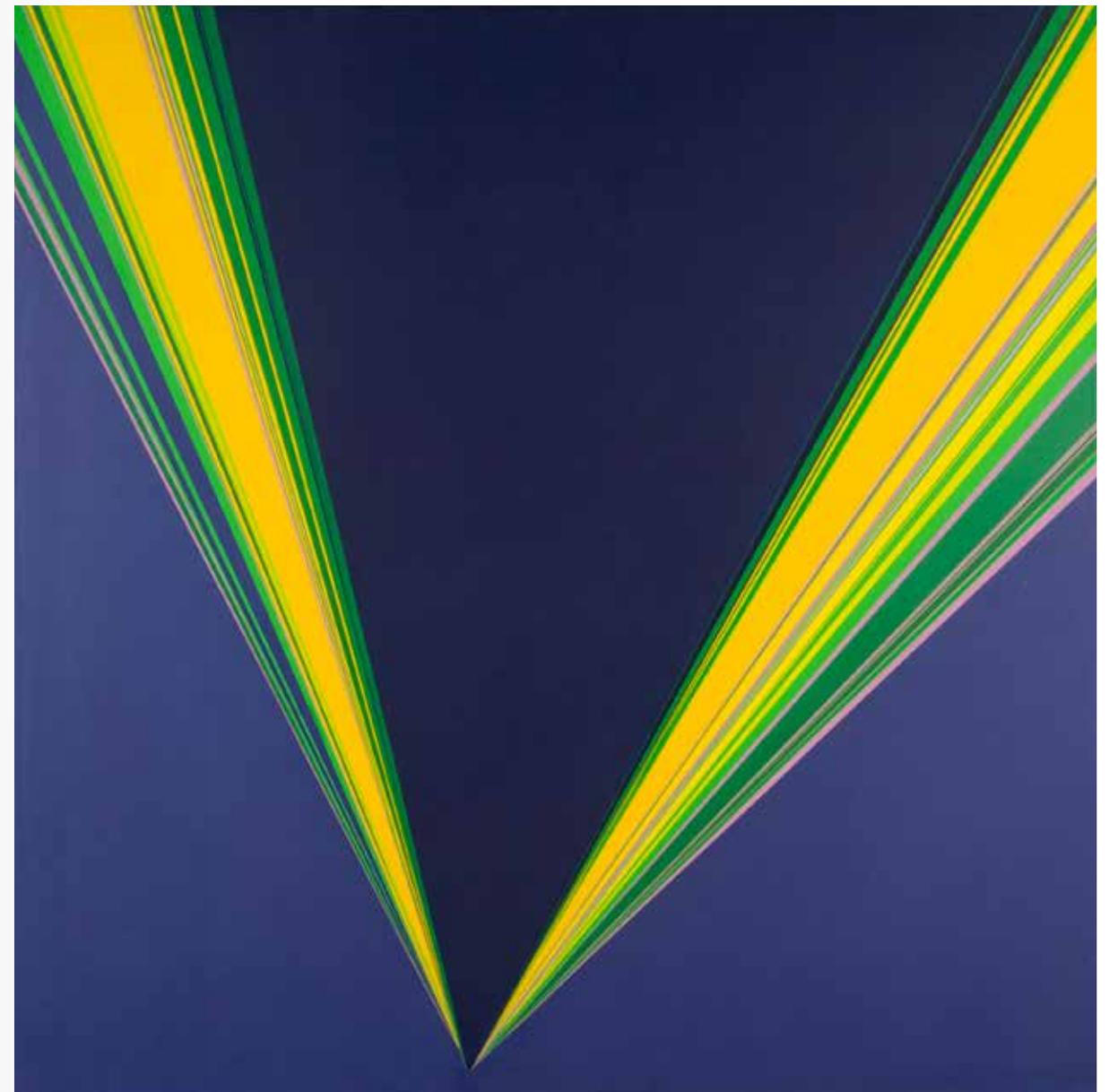
Rita Letendre

Drummondville, 1928

All of these signature elements appear in the 1971 painting *Blues*. Two colourful beams shout out their intensity, cleaving the dark surface of the canvas with green, yellow and violet rays. The large luminous streaks about to converge at the bottom of the composition suspend the force of the impact, creating a vibrant chromatic tension. This is one of Letendre's last works painted entirely with a roller, a process she soon replaced with airbrushing. Similar to the spray gun used in body shops, the airbrush allowed her to paint without coming into direct contact with the support and to produce atmospheric expanses in modulated hues. The vast panoramic canvas *Oradek* (FIG. 28) illustrates this effect. While the light here does not evoke an arrow in flight, the almost volatile pigments suggest depth of field and bathe the horizon in new energy.



Fig. 28.
Rita Letendre
Oradek, 1976
Acrylic on canvas, 214 × 549 cm
MNBAQ, anonymous gift (2004.380)



Kitchenombi No. 4

1972

Acrylic on canvas, 300 x 400 cm MNBAQ, purchase (1973.574)

From 1942 to 1947, Marcel Barbeau studied design and cabinetmaking at the École du meuble, the flagship of the Montréal avant-garde at the time. Among his teachers there, Paul-Émile Borduas had a considerable influence on his development. He also met Jean-Paul Riopelle and Maurice Perron, who introduced him to the Automatiste movement. Barbeau spent time with them in Borduas's studio, coming in contact with creators from a variety of fields with whom he signed the manifesto *Refus global* in 1948.

Barbeau's career falls into different periods. First, he espoused spontaneous gesture and free expression of the unconscious. Then, about 1947, he produced paintings whose all-over composition, loaded with vigorous strokes, drips and splashes, was unprecedented in Québec. In 1960, his interest turned to kinetic art and optical experiments, and he became a Canadian pioneer of Op Art, a style based on retinal perception and the illusion of movement. *Optimistic Retina* (FIG. 29), painted in 1964, arrests the eye with juxtaposed vertical bands of pure colour traversed lengthwise by undulating lines.

Though his practice generally focused on painting and drawing, Barbeau often worked in sculpture as well as printmaking, collage, photography and performance. He employed these mediums in collaborative multi-disciplinary projects involving poetry, dance and music. In the 1970s, he incorporated the gestural quality of his paintings into choreographic and pictorial performances carried out to experimental music. His first such performance took place in France, at the Théâtre de Caen, in 1972, during a poetry recitation entitled "Un soir avec les poètes canadiens," organized by actor-director Gabriel Gascon in association with composer-percussionist Vincent

Marcel Barbeau

Montréal, 1925 – Montréal, 2016

Dionne. "Kitchenombi," a series of five large paintings executed in public, is the result of a "pictorial dance" in which Barbeau, inspired by the poems and Dionne's *musique concrète*, bounded back and forth to mark the canvas with coloured signs that crystallize an event-based synthesis of various arts.



Fig. 29.
Marcel Barbeau
Optimistic Retina, or Salute, 1964
Acrylic on canvas, 242 x 203.5 cm
MNBAQ, purchase (1969.209)



Brome Lake

from "La Suite québécoise," 1973-1974

Acrylic on canvas and Plexiglas panels, 211 x 366 cm (canvas);
173 x 310 cm (angled panels)
MNBAQ, purchase (2007.18)

Edmund Alleyn was a shrewd observer of aesthetic and social issues, and his work is recognized for the profound critical reflection it conveys. Beginning in the 1960s, under a variety of influences, he helped advance the decompartmentalization of artistic practices and the recognition of contemporary Québec art overseas. Between 1955 and 1970, Alleyn made two long stays in Paris, where he discovered a host of trends that lay outside the concerns of his painter colleagues in Québec. This fuelled the extraordinary profusion of his art. At first drawn to Lyrical Abstraction, he soon expressed his sociopolitical questioning in figurative Pop Art-inflected paintings inspired by Native American mythology and in images that evoke the human alienation caused by technology.

This critical approach culminated in one of the first multimedia works by a Québec artist: *Introscaphe I* (FIG. 30), a multisensory cockpit-like sculpture presented at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris for a month in 1970. Viewers were invited to sit inside the egg-shaped machine and watch a four-and-a-half-minute film that consisted of shocking still and moving images, mainly of current events. Scenes of the Vietnam War and racial tensions in the United States were intermixed with references to a consumer society apparently unconcerned with these oppressive aberrations.

When Alleyn returned to Québec, he hardly recognized his own society. During the summers of 1971-1972, he reconnected with the culture by taking hundreds of photographs of the anonymous masses visiting the site where Expo 67 had been held. Some of the portraits

Edmund Alleyn

Québec City, 1931 – Montréal, 2004

from this group inspired him to create "La Suite québécoise," a series of installations that incorporate life-size figures painted on Plexiglas. Treated in a hyperrealist style, these clusters of characters set in front of large canvases depicting idyllic sunsets belong to clear-cut social categories: children, teenagers, couples, parents, senior citizens. Their placement outside the painting underscores the distance between the world of art and that of "ordinary people." Bursting the conventions of painting, Alleyn draws viewers into the work by having them share the same environment as the main figures of the scene they are looking at.



Fig. 30.
Edmund Alleyn
Introscaphe I, 1968-1970
Wood, fibreglass, paint, electrical and
electronic circuits, projection system
and other materials, 155 x 365 x 105 cm
MNBAQ, conditional gift of Jennifer Alleyn
(2008.78)



Tarpaulin No. 1

1974

Gesso on tarpaulin, rope,
245 × 203 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (2006.36)

Betty Goodwin has a place among the major forces in contemporary Canadian art. Her unique practice questioned modernist precepts, favouring instead an iconography centred around the human figure and human affects. The themes of life's fragility, absence, grief, memory and forgetfulness pervade all her work, which includes prints, sculptures, drawings, paintings and installations. The body – depicted or symbolized in the clothing seen in her prints, on the fine paper of her drawings and in the objects she appropriates and recasts (hair, tarps, stones) – is a leit-motif giving material form to her existential reflections.

Tarpaulin No. 1, the earliest example of Goodwin's transition from printmaking to investing the object with symbolic meaning, eloquently evokes the relationship to the body and to intimacy so characteristic of her approach. In creating her famous nine-work cycle between 1974 and 1976, the artist salvaged used truck tarpaulins, which she spread out, stretched, folded and covered with gesso (a plaster-like coating), oil and pastel. Throughout the process, she took care to respect the traces of wear and repairs on the objects' surface, considering them to represent the memory of prior use. As in printmaking, where each line is the impression of a cut, these pieces of canvas bear the vestiges of their existence in their scrapes, tears and faded patches. Carefully folded and hung on a long metal rod, still with metal eyelets from which ropes hang loose, *Tarpaulin No. 1* makes its presence felt as a wounded body, with its marks and nicks. The tarp, which once covered the back of a truck, has been deflected from its primary function and now resembles a human figure whose scarred epidermis betrays a personal history and the passing of time.

Betty Goodwin

Montréal, 1923 – Montréal, 2008

From the early 1980s on, Goodwin no longer contented herself with suggesting the fragile, vulnerable body: she showed it clearly in all its suffering, in large drawings whose thin support mimics the delicacy of skin. In *Figure Lying on a Bench* (FIG. 31), created in 1988, the artist contrasts the thinness of the drawn sheet with a rusty bar of brushed metal, thus accentuating the tragic character of the scene represented. In this way, she reveals her interest in metal and especially its patina, which she viewed as a metaphor for life's experience, like the traces left on the tarps, books and other objects that punctuate her production.



Fig. 31.
Betty Goodwin
Figure Lying on a Bench (1988)
Oil, oil pastel, graphite and metal
on polyester film mounted on canvas,
210.5 × 143 cm
MNBAQ, gift of Paul Mailhot
(2014.239)



3-79-102

1978

Acrylic on canvas, 259 cm
(diam., each component)

MNBAQ, purchase with funds
from an anonymous donor
(2000.56)

A leading proponent of geometric abstraction in Québec, Claude Tousignant has followed a path of artistic rigor for more than 60 years. In the early 1950s, after studying at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' School of Art and Design and briefly attending the Ranson and Cloison d'or academies in Paris, he began a practice that was soon associated with the emergence of a second wave of Plasticien painters, among them Guido Molinari. His approach stood out for pictorial investigation aimed at an art of pure sensation and based on fairly narrow, though very precise, parameters. His strategies for achieving this goal included the choice of support format, articulation of the compositional elements, consideration of the exhibition space and frequent use of industrial materials.

The paintings of Barnett Newman, seen on a trip to New York in 1962, profoundly affected the development of Tousignant's art. The intrinsic expressive qualities of colour became the prime concern in his search to free painting from all reference to reality. Determined to eliminate any allusion to landscape or portraiture, he abandoned the rectangular format in favour of circular or oval shapes. His early explorations in this direction consisted of round paintings of concentric circles whose contrasting colours create a pulsing rhythm that makes viewers feel simultaneously drawn in and pushed away. The uniformity of the lines, obtained with the use of masking tape, helps to efface any trace of the artist's hand, thus favouring the visual experience of the chromatic permutations. The successive bands of colour in the three series "Chromatic Transformers," "Gongs" and "Chromatic Accelerators" (Fig. 32) generate this kind of tension.

Claude Tousignant

Montréal, 1932

Further probing of colour's dynamic properties led Tousignant to work with repeated shapes in diptychs and triptychs so as to dispel the effect of perspective common in single pieces and enhance the object-nature of his painting. In the circular diptychs produced between 1978 and 1980, he reduced the colour contrasts to a minimum, replacing bright hues with more mineral shades, as in 3-79-102. Painted in a range of warm greys, with each element restricted to two concentric circles, this work was a step toward colour harmony. The chromatic play between slight nuances of the same hue takes place so subtly that form and colour seem to merge before the viewer's eyes. Closer than ever to the goal of pure sensation, the artist had embarked upon the path to the monochrome approach that he would explore in the following decades.

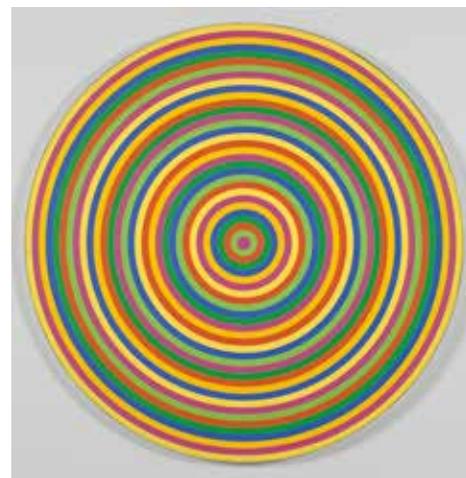


Fig. 32.
Claude Tousignant
Chromatic Accelerator 64, 1967
Acrylic on canvas, 162.3 cm (diam.)
MNBAQ, purchase, Concours artistiques
du Québec (1968.18)



Sher-Wood 748, Louisville 520, Ultralite 709

1979

Photo-silkscreen (2/9, 9/9 and 2/9), hockey sticks, aluminum and Plexiglas, 276 × 435 × 30 cm (overall)

At a time when pictorial formalism ruled, in Québec as elsewhere, a new generation of creators was making figuration the vehicle of a visual renaissance. Intrigued by the diverse modes of expression flourishing with Pop Art in the United States and Nouveau Réalisme in Europe, some Québec artists turned to the everyday as a fruitful source of objects and materials for their work. As a democratic, popular and reproducible medium, printmaking – along with happenings, environment art and photography – became a discipline of choice for newcomers contesting the supremacy of “high art.” Pierre Ayot, who in 1966 founded Atelier libre 848 (renamed Graff in 1970), was a leading light in this context, both for his unique way of rethinking the print practice and for his contribution to a milieu eager to explore its techniques.

As a teacher at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal and later at Université du Québec à Montréal, Ayot made a lasting impact by promoting experimentation, an attitude he cultivated throughout his own career. His early prints defined the bases of his approach: borrowing iconography from mass culture and popular imagery, he provoked reflection on the boundaries of art and fostered a new relationship between viewer and work. His art was characterized by trompe l’oeil effects, the use of real objects, humour and playfulness. In exploring the potential of printmaking, he liked to push its limits, sometimes giving the printed material a sculptural dimension, as in *O’Keefe Beer Cases* (FIG. 33), other times incorporating it into multimedia installations such as *Demolition Permit No. 1502*, which imitates a collapsed section of ceiling. In a different vein, *Sher-Wood 748, Louisville 520,*

Pierre Ayot

Montréal, 1943 – Berthierville, 1995

Ultralite 709 is like an extension of reality: the three silkscreen prints depict handles of hockey sticks whose image is extended by actual sticks propped against the wall, with no demarcation visible at first glance. An interchange sets in between the real object and its image in an act of mutual deconstruction – spatial for the sculpture, mimetic for the print. Beyond a tip of the hat to Québec’s national sport, this work makes art leap from its frame and challenges our perception of reality and the objects that form it.



Fig. 33.
Pierre Ayot
O’Keefe Beer Cases, 1979
Photo-silkscreen on fabric, kapok stuffing,
19 × 52 × 34 cm (each of 12 cases)
MNBAQ, anonymous gift (1993.225)



Nordic Suite

1979

Woodcuts (13/20), and printing blocks, 270 x 240 x 260 cm (overall)

MNBAQ, gift of Christian Gélinas and Michel Amyot (1991.36)

A prominent figure in Canadian printmaking, René Derouin has divided his time between Québec and Mexico since the 1950s. Unlike many of his contemporaries then looking to Europe for inspiration, Derouin sought out different models and was instead fascinated by the north-south axis of the Americas, with their immense indigenous territories and heritage of pre-Columbian civilizations. Encountering Mexico's archaeological sites and the monumental murals of Orozco, Diego Rivera and Siqueiros made a great impression on him and shaped the essence of his production.

Permeated with reflections on identity, Derouin's art combines the cultural and territorial memories of North and South, taking up the questions of migration and mixed ethnicity at various times in history. The result is a unique hybrid approach expressed through printmaking, drawing, sculpture and installation. The most ambitious of his installations so far has been *Migrations* (FIG. 34), conceived for the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City and exhibited there in 1992. It consisted of 150 printing blocks assembled on the floor to form an immense territory, 50 metres in length, populated by 20,000 terracotta figurines handmade by the artist. The spectacular scene recalled the dense crowds that gather on Mexico's huge public squares and the great migrations of peoples that have occurred throughout history.

A trip to Québec's Far North in the 1970s led Derouin to turn his attention to the concept of northerness. In search of his roots, he further pursued the concept of Americanness, which inspired unusual installations involving prints. Created after a stay at James Bay in 1979, *Nordic Suite* – an enormous modular print composed of

René Derouin

Montréal, 1936

six sheets plus their printing blocks resting on the floor – shows the life forces of nature that are ingrained in wood. This work refers to the geological movement and glacial erosion inscribed for millennia in the memory of the land. It initiated a series that highlighted the interrelationship of imprint and relief by displaying them together, which contributed to a radical renewal of the language of printmaking in Québec. The gigantic format, reminiscent of the Mexican muralists, and the overhead viewpoint, which eliminates the traditional horizon line, were also instrumental in revitalizing the genre.



Fig. 34.
René Derouin's installation *Migration*, on display at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec in 1992.



Without

1979

Reinforced concrete,
28.7 × 162 × 144 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (1997.19)

Roland Poulin has influenced the contemporary sculptural scene in Québec through an approach of rare formal sensitivity that takes the immaterial as a given. The intangible elements of time, space and light confer a metaphysical dimension on Poulin's production, which might at first appear minimalist in the extreme. Initially interested in drawing and then in painting while studying at the École des beaux-arts de Montréal from 1964 to 1969, the artist eventually turned toward sculpture, finding that the material and the object provided a fertile terrain to explore.

Poulin's career falls into two main periods. In the late 1970s, his work was permeated with American Minimalism, which he discovered on a trip to Germany in 1972. His sculptures, low and resting on the floor, took simple, even elementary forms and were made of inexpensive industrial materials like glass, plywood, wire mesh and reinforced concrete. This heavy material was his choice for an important series, whose titles – *Lieu*, *Contenu*, *En forme de vide*, *Sans* (Place, Contents, In the Shape of a Void, Without) – focus attention on the works' formal essence and anchoring in space. Consisting of two interlocking rectangles placed directly on the floor, *Without* (1979) creates a spiral effect that leads the viewer to circulate around it. This universal shape evokes a perpetual motion at variance with the stability of concrete. The artist takes advantage of other contrasts inherent in the object, such as a constant interplay between the solid structure and the void it contains and is surrounded by. The lighting is crucial when the work is exhibited: the shadow it projects

Roland Poulin

St. Thomas, Ontario, 1940

was calculated to express the absence of light as well as its presence as a virtual form. *Without* plays on the tensions between the tangible and intangible, which the artist seeks to resolve.

In the 1980s, a shift occurred: although the artist's formal vocabulary remained largely unaltered, a metaphorical language appeared. Fascinated by the themes of death and sacredness after reading *Hymns to the Night* by the mystic poet Novalis and visiting Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, Poulin began infusing the material, shadows and light with metaphysical connotations. Laid out on the floor, the dark-painted wood sculptures with simple forms recall tombstones or coffins, sometimes suggesting actual interment. The existential dimension of Poulin's works shows through in expressive titles like *La Nuit, de toutes parts* (Night, on All Sides), *Lamento* and *La Part de l'ombre* (The Shadow Side) (FIG. 35).



Fig. 35.
Roland Poulin
The Shadow Side, 1985-1986
Painted cedar and pine plywood,
86.5 × 760 × 750 cm (overall)
MNBAQ, purchase (1987.08)



Pressure/Presence

1979, printed 2006

Digital inkjet print (from an azo dye print) on vinyl, 363 × 305 cm

MNBAQ, promised gift of the artist (DPD.2012.448)

A leading figure of land art and a pioneer of conceptual art in Canada, Bill Vazan has travelled the world to intervene on various sites, glean visual or material fragments and carry out lengthily planned actions. His artistic approach took shape in the early 1960s and is accompanied by an existential reflection on humans' relationship with their natural, urban, social and cultural environments. Dealing with time, space and other universal subjects, his rigorously disciplined practice is informed by history, geography, anthropology, religion and contemporary scientific theory.

In the 1960s, Vazan's work was characterized by major projects such as *Canada in Parentheses* (1969), created in collaboration with the Vancouver artist Ian Wallace, and *Canada Line* (Fig. 36), carried out in 1969-1970, which involved linking eight galleries and museums across the country with a virtual line. These relational experiences, marginal at the time, marked the conceptual art then emerging in Canada. In the second half of the 1970s, he began producing monumental pieces, among them *Pressure/Presence*, an earthwork nearly 400 metres in diameter inscribed on the Plains of Abraham, near the Musée. Conceived in 1978, this project materialized late in the summer of 1979: assisted by members of the artist-run centre La Chambre blanche and more than a dozen volunteers, Vazan used whitewash to draw an immense spiral representing the epicentre of an earthquake and its concentric aftershocks. The open-air composition evoked both the earthquakes that, for eons, have rocked the St. Lawrence Valley from Québec City to Baie-Saint-Paul and, symbolically, the historic upheavals that followed the Battle of the Plains of Abraham and the repercussions still felt today.

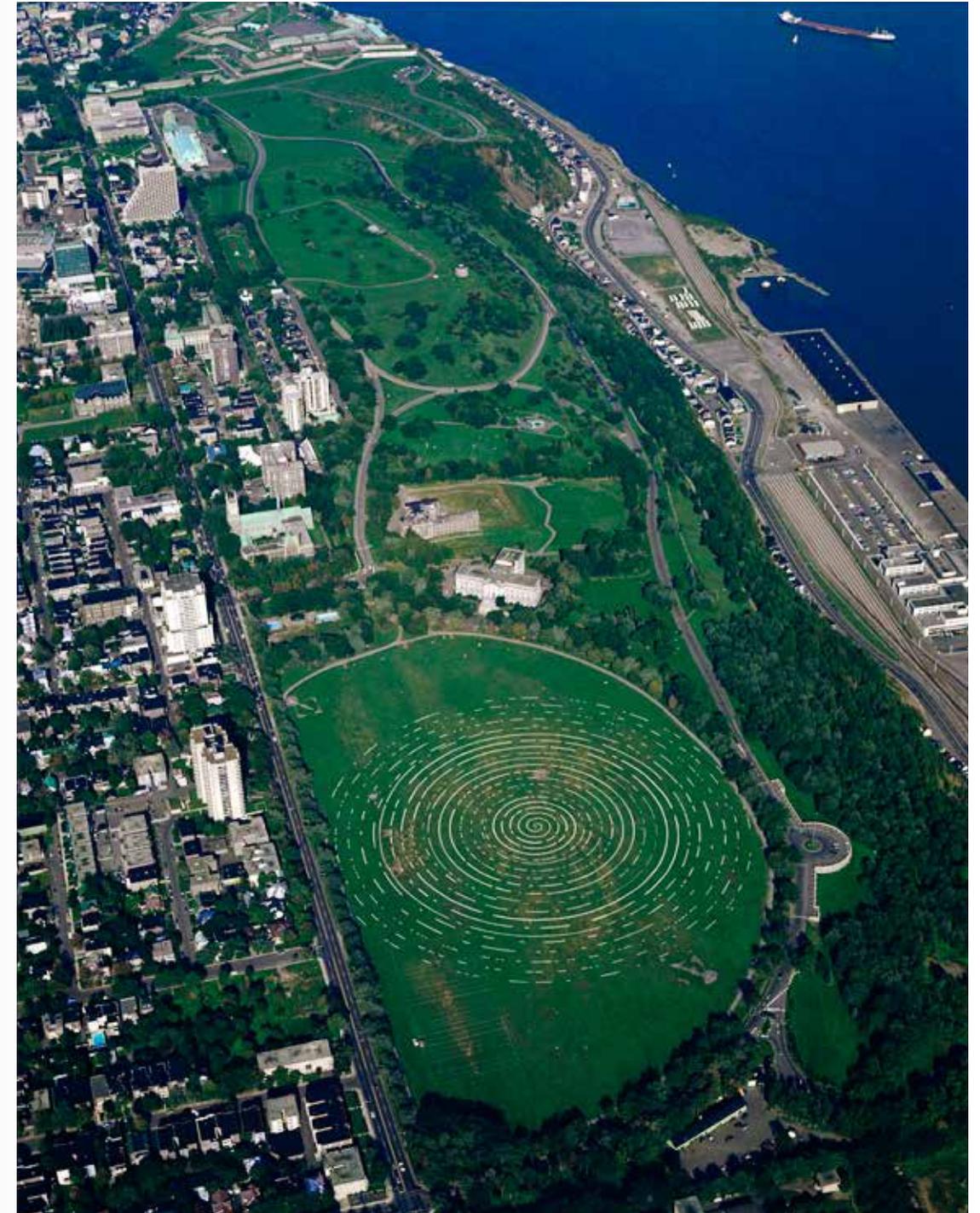
Bill Vazan

Toronto, 1933

Vazan has produced nearly 150 land art projects. His interventions are inscribed in special places, some rich in historical resonance, others shaped by nature or transformed by human presence. The evocation of Québec's geological history and colonial past and the redefinition of the artwork through an ephemeral presentation outside conventional exhibition venues make *Pressure/Presence* one of the most imposing works of its kind ever created in Canada.



Fig. 36.
Bill Vazan
Canada Line, Documentation Work 2,
(detail), 1969-1970
Topographic maps and map of
Canada with ink and graphite, gelatin
silver prints, letters and documents,
variable dimensions
MNBAQ, gift of the artist. Restored by
the Centre de conservation du Québec
(2012.446)



1,600 Mirror-Pages

(detail)

1980-1995

Ink, graphite and gilding on paper
mounted on polyester mirror,
245 × 120.7 × 5.3 cm
(each of the 20 elements)

MNBAQ, purchase
(2002.09 to 2002.23);
gift of the artist
(2002.146 to 2002.150)

Musician, writer, visual artist and performance artist Rober Racine shows remarkable originality in both his approach, at once rigorous and sensitive, and his production, where poetry and logic coexist. Since the 1970s, he has been instrumental in establishing new aesthetic paradigms in Québec, initiating a rupture in the language of forms and a dematerialization of the art object.

Known for the excessiveness of his projects, which are sometimes as demanding physically as they are mentally, Racine has grounded his work in performance from the outset. In 1978, he performed Erik Satie's *Vexations* (Fig. 37), a piece consisting of 152 notes repeated 840 times, which required him to sit at the piano for more than 14 hours.

In addition, Racine has demonstrated a persistent and passionate curiosity about the dictionary, devoting the core of his efforts to it for 15 years. The colossal undertaking *1,600 Mirror-Pages* (1980-1995) is made up of 20 components, each comprising 80 pages from a French dictionary that the artist annotated and decorated. The dictionary he used was the same *Petit Robert* from which he had previously cut out all 55,000 entry words to produce *Le Terrain du dictionnaire A/Z* (The Dictionary Terrain A/Z) in 1980.

The same year, eager to delve deeper, the artist embarked upon a meticulous illumination of the dictionary pages he had temporarily set aside. He incised a thin line under some of the remaining words, highlighted italics in gold, perforated the quoted authors' names with a needle and marked Québec authors in green. The pages were then mounted together on large sheets of Mylar, which has a

Rober Racine

Montréal, 1956

mirrorlike finish. While doing all this, Racine also picked out syllables equivalent to the notes of the do-re-mi musical scale in certain words (*région, façade, dilapider, soleil*). From this he derived *La Musique des pages-miroirs* (1985), a sound work that transposes written language into aural harmony, shifting visual experience into an astonishing polyphonic arena.



Fig. 37.
Rober Racine performing Erik Satie's *Vexations* at the Véhicule Art gallery, in Montréal, November 4, 1978



Stars and Stripes

1985

Silkscreen on canvas,
310 × 172 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (2003.05)

With a degree in fine arts from Concordia University in 1979 and later film studies at the New York Film Academy, Dominique Blain gives full rein to the image in her practice, which is characterized by an interest in social and political questions. War, the status of refugees, racial inequality, colonialism and freedom of speech are some of the timeless universals she addresses in her works. Using photo and video archives compiled from books, magazines, newspapers and the Internet, she reframes, juxtaposes and recontextualizes images tinged with tyranny, manipulation and subjection.

Stars and Stripes (1985), a series of 12 silkscreen prints on canvas to be hung like banners (four of which are held by the MNBAQ), is representative of the way Blain appropriates images to make a pithy critical statement. The Miss Universe pageant and fleet of warplanes depicted throughout the sequence are likened to each other by their arrangement. The strict alignment of the women and the bombers recalls rows of soldiers, a symbol of order and might that subtly reflects the male domination of American society. The iconic power and imperialism of the United States are clearly evoked in the work's title – a reference that is strengthened by the way the bodies of the women and planes echo the American flag's stars. The propaganda-like repetition of the image drums out a critical commentary on capitalist society, which, rather than foster diversity and freedom of expression, functions as a model of standardization.

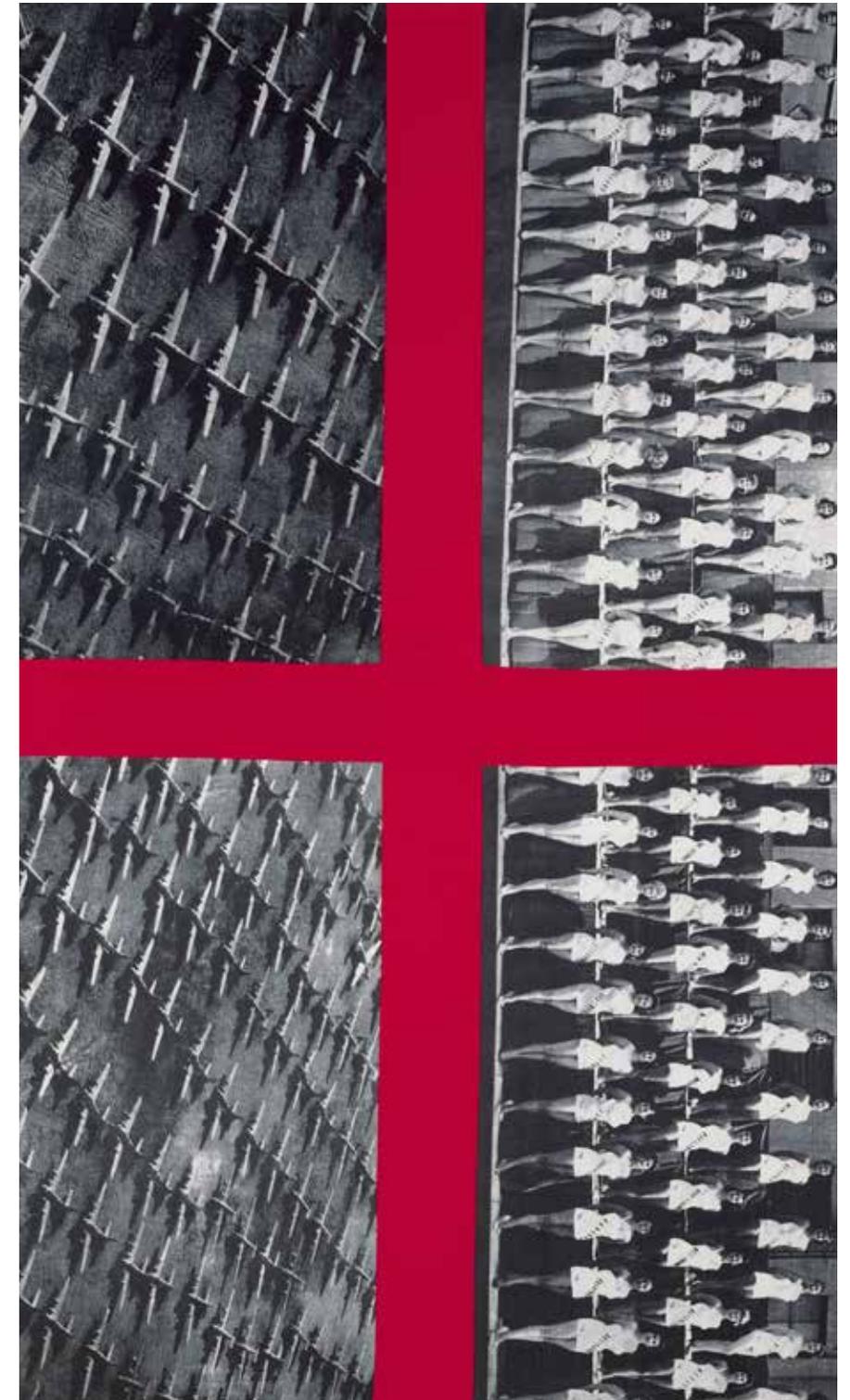
Dominique Blain

Montréal, 1957

Ten years later, Blain's work had lost none of its bite, as shown by *Locum Sanctum* (FIG. 38), a montage of nine photographs, each representing a person whose face is hidden. In keeping with her usual approach, the artist combed through archives (in this case a collection of magazines published during World War I), selecting images to enlarge, reframe and group into an incisive ensemble. Various characters are portrayed: a hooded wrestler, a businessman covering his face with a piece of paper, a Ku Klux Klan member, a helmeted knight, combatants wearing gas masks. The helmets and masks from different eras suggest threats and fears, which underscores the permanent presence of intimidation.



Fig. 38.
Dominique Blain
Locum Sanctum, 1995
Emulsion on film, wood and metal,
219.7 × 235 cm (overall)
MNBAQ, anonymous gift (2015.906)



False Faction

1987

Shotguns, books, various materials and objects, 122 × 450 × 51 cm

MNBAQ, gift of Patrice and Andrée Drouin (2004.445)

Active at a time that saw the object regain standing in conceptual art, Michel Goulet made his mark on the Québec art scene in the 1980s with works that contributed to revitalizing the language of sculpture. Rejecting conventional materials and techniques, he favoured the assemblage of found furniture and manufactured objects, divesting them of their utilitarian function to retain only the essence. His unusual method consisted of deconstructing a reality and reconstructing it as a work of art by lending it multiple levels of interpretation without changing its familiar appearance. For *Facsimile* (FIG. 39), he appropriated the idea of “table,” analyzing the attributes and functions of a piece of furniture central to everyday life so as to multiply its meanings and referents. Drawing table or bedside table, a place for meals and sharing, a surface for games or work: various possible uses emerge from the generic structure, from whose body the artist cut out the miniature tables that stand on its surface.

Goulet plays with objects the way some people play with words. He enjoys altering their meaning through unexpected juxtaposition with other objects, creating a new and surprising visual syntax. However, the playful nature of his sculptures and installations should not overshadow the serious political or social considerations that they convey. *False Faction* is one of three works that the artist exhibited at the 1988 Venice Biennale, where he represented Canada. The installation features a row of ten shotguns propped against as many objects – binoculars, candlestick, cup, brush, lemon squeezer, etc. On the mouth of each barrel sits a volume of the *Quillet* encyclopedia, serving as a stand for another object that holds

Michel Goulet

Asbestos, 1944

it closed. Allegorical signs of two forms of power supporting each other: the shotguns, metaphors for authority that subjugates or protects, seem to stand guard, while the books, symbols of knowledge, compile the multiple facets of culture. The precarious balance is evocative of today’s societies, where knowledge and power constantly struggle for the upper hand.



Fig. 39.
Michel Goulet
Facsimile, 1982
Steel, aluminum and Meccano set pieces,
120 × 274 × 91 cm (overall)
MNBAQ, gift of Patrice and Andrée
Drouin. Restored by the Centre
de conservation du Québec (2002.111)



Station III: Homage to the Plasticiens

from the triptych *Trilogie d'un triangle noir*
1987

Acrylic on canvas and synthetic carpet, metal frame, Styrofoam, cotton rope, nylon cord and thumbtacks, 277 x 487 x 32 cm

MNBAQ, anonymous gift.
Restored by the Centre de conservation du Québec (2011.198)

Recognized as a foremost player in the Montréal avant-garde, Serge Lemoyne contributed to laying the foundations of postmodernism in Québec. The initiator of the first happenings, he was also one of the province's first creative artists to adopt the ready-made of Duchamp and the sarcasm of Dada, to venture into the Pop world and to take an interest in participatory art. Ahead of his time, this multidisciplinary artist was involved in the changes sweeping through Québec art in the 1960s, when abstract painting predominated.

For a number of years, Lemoyne's house in Acton Vale was the object of his artistic activity. Intervening directly on it, appropriating its stairs, doors, railings and carpets, he pursued his ideal of abolishing the boundary between art and life. He was a confirmed promoter of access to art for all, a goal to which he remained steadfast throughout his long career. It is primarily in this spirit that, in the 1970s, he created a group of works on the theme of hockey, many featuring the red, white and blue of the emblematic Montreal Canadiens' uniform (FIG. 40).

In the 1980s, Lemoyne introduced other formal iconographic borrowings into his pictorial language. Quotations from modernist painting and artists who had influenced him appeared in his work: after creating a cycle of paintings "in the style of" various artists in 1983, he undertook an extensive series of works meant as homages. Consisting of irregular segments, each bundled in painted carpet or canvas and bound with rope, these thick, almost sculptural creations are like milestones in the history of contemporary painting. The first set, *Trilogie d'un*

Serge Lemoyne

Acton Vale, 1941 – Saint-Hyacinthe, 1998

triangle noir (Black Triangle Trilogy), pays tribute to the Automatistes, the Plasticiens and Christo. In addition to honouring his artistic influences, Lemoyne was casting a glance at the parameters of his own practice: recycling various objects and materials, and spontaneously applying bands of colourful paint to a support. These immense wall pieces offer a vivid digest of the characteristics of Lemoyne's approach from the very beginning.



Fig. 40.
Serge Lemoyne
Bleu, Blanc, Rouge continu 1, 2, 3, 1976
Acrylic on canvas, 168 x 122.2 cm
MNBAQ, gift of Pierre and Véronique Riverin (1992.33)



Self-portrait at the Light Table, Montréal, Québec

from the series "Les Tremblements du cœur"

1988

Gelatin silver print,
40.3 × 50.5 cm

MNBAQ, gift of Jacques Toupin
(2013.95)

Since graduating from the Institut des arts graphiques du Québec in 1968, Michel Campeau has dedicated himself to photography, becoming a major figure in this discipline as practised in Québec. His career got under way in the early 1970s, a pivotal artistic period during which photographers focused on the everyday reality and social values of the province. Campeau joined Gabor Szilasi, Pierre Gaudard, Serge Laurin, Claire Beaugrand-Champagne and others in espousing this new social approach, which favoured an authentic, direct, intuitive view of subjects captured in their immediate environment. With fellow members of GAP (Groupe d'action photographique), which he co-founded in 1971, he staunchly defended the medium's capacity to bear unvarnished witness to an era. Personal contact was important to him and early on he adopted a strategy of openness, bypassing official channels and traditional means of dissemination. The collective project "Disraeli: A Human Experience in Photography" (Fig. 41), in which he took part in 1972, embodied this desire for encounters and proximity. Now considered a key event in the history of contemporary Québec photography, the project sparked public debate on the role of the artist, provoked discussion of the photographic act itself and largely determined the framework against which the discipline defined itself in 1970s Québec.

In Campeau's work, the objective nature, social value and identity-defining role of photography gradually gave way to a more subjective exploration of the photographic language, as eloquently illustrated by the series "Les Tremblements du cœur" (Heartquakes). Banking on the expressive and narrative potential of the image, he began an introspective chapter in his work with a combination of snapshots, personal archives and visual quotations.

Michel Campeau

Montréal, 1948

Pictures of family, friends and everyday life taken by him are juxtaposed with images borrowed from family albums, photographic reproductions and movie stills. The series reads like a personal history in which different periods of his life intertwine. Underscored by poignant phrases, constructed by endless sifting and compiling, it conveys the vibrant testimony of a man in search of himself.



Fig. 41.
Michel Campeau
Mario Pouliot on Rang 5 Road, Garthby,
from the series "Disraeli: A Human
Experience in Photography," 1972
Gelatin silver print, 10.8 × 16.3 cm
MNBAQ, purchase (1999.52)



Tornado

1989

Acrylic on gouged plywood,
244 × 350.5 cm

MNBAQ, gift of Paul Mailhot
(2004.430)

After serving in the Canadian Army during World War II, Paterson Ewen enrolled at McGill University to study geology but soon changed course to take fine arts classes with John Lyman. The following year he transferred to the School of Art and Design at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts to study under Goodridge Roberts, among others. This dual interest in science and the arts emerged to varying degrees in his work, most clearly as of the 1970s, when he began a return to figuration that took shape in an innovative approach to landscape. Today, he is recognized as one of the contemporary painters chiefly responsible for redefining Canada's long tradition of landscape art.

Ewen's Montréal years, from 1947 to 1968, when he left Québec for Ontario, were rich in experiments that helped develop his pictorial approach. While training had given him technique, a sense of composition and an appreciation of colour, he was drawn to the gestural freedom and spontaneity advocated by the Automatistes. He befriended members of the group and exhibited with them, but steered clear of the movement's ideological foundations. Encouraged by the Automatistes' avant-garde stance and exploratory activities, he gradually moved away from figurative representation. But true abstraction did not appear in his work until the mid-1950s, when his rather structured paintings took on a more expressionistic style. The 1960-1961 "Blackout" series, though inspired by starry skies, marks the transition toward more radical abstraction. In *Untitled* (Fig. 42), an offshoot of that series, the paint is at the very core of the painting, whose rhythm is established by the movement of geometric forms in a monochrome field worked not unlike an engraving. The network of lines etched in the impasto reads like the imprint of the artist's hand, a treatment that became more pronounced in the large compositions on plywood gouged with a router of the 1980s.

Paterson Ewen

Montréal, 1925 – London, Ontario, 2002

Seeking to break free from the grip of painting history and a formalist orientation that was leading nowhere, Ewen turned to natural phenomena, reconnecting both with figuration and with his interest in geology. In 1971, he abandoned canvas and adopted plywood as a support. Governed by cosmic thinking, borne by the power and the sublimity of nature, the resulting large-scale paintings depict severe weather events, such as the menacing black form in *Tornado* sweeping everything in its path. Storms, turbulent skies and whirlwinds flood the space of these works in renderings more schematic than naturalistic, with graphic marks, dots, dashes and vigorous lines gouged to heighten the expressive charge translating the energies of the universe.



Fig. 42.
Paterson Ewen
Untitled, probably 1961
Oil on canvas, 91.4 × 116.8 cm
MNBAQ, purchase (1987.01)



Generic Man

1989

Gelatin silver print on Plexiglas, wood, 245.7 × 188.8 cm
MNBAQ, purchase (1991.12)

Prague-born Jana Sterbak immigrated with her family to Vancouver in 1968. She first visited Québec in 1973, to take a French immersion course. After discovering Montréal and its effervescent art scene, fuelled in part by emerging artist-run centres, she decided to complete her studies there and, in 1977, graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Concordia University. At a time when conceptual and minimalist aesthetics prevailed, Sterbak stood apart for her free, and at times irreverent, use of those approaches.

In forms of expression as diverse as performance, installation, sculpture, drawing, photography and video, her production offers potent reflections on the human condition. Effort, physical constraint and difficulty in communicating with others are among the main themes she explores. The evocations of the body that haunt her work point to our biological, social and cultural condition and remind us of our ineluctable fate. The humanistic scope of Sterbak's art is all the more striking for being expressed in a pared-down visual language.

From the outset, Sterbak has constantly pushed the boundaries of what is considered art. She has used human hair, fire, electricity and ice as vehicles for reiterated questions about the precarious and fleeting nature of life, as well as meat in *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (Fig. 43). Composed of slabs of raw meat sewn together and sometimes displayed on a live model, the dress unsettled audiences, who saw in it nothing but a waste of perishable food. Yet it reveals a tension in the relationships between body and flesh, living and dead, essential and superficial. Like many other of her works, this emblematic piece raises important questions about the female body and its stereotypes and, more broadly, the lot of humans in a consumer society.

Jana Sterbak

Prague, Czech Republic, 1955

The photographic work *Generic Man* embodies the same theme in exemplary fashion. It pictures the upper body of an unidentified man, seen from behind, with a barcode tattooed on his neck. This strikingly simple image crystallizes the idea of an inventoried human, reduced to the status of a standardized consumer product. Constrained to conformity and uniformity, the man bows his head in submission. It is a view that evokes not only the Orwellian world but the tragic circumstances of the Jews during the Holocaust. Although this work dates from 1989, its social and philosophical significance makes it as relevant as ever today.



Fig. 43.
Jana Sterbak
Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic, 1987
Raw flank steak on dressmaker's dummy and colour photograph, 113 cm, dress size 38
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, purchase (AM 1996-524)



On the Cliff in Quebec City: Houses-Poles-Flags

1989-1990

Chalk pastel on Arches paper, MNBAQ, purchase (1990.20)
137 x 249 cm

In his work as an architect, artist, theorist and teacher, Melvin Charney cast a critical eye on issues related to built heritage. His drawings, paintings, installations and photographs are imbued with the urban sensitivity that connects people to their environment. His thinking on the preservation of historic architecture stemmed from the Montréal context of the late 1960s, when the city was accelerating urban development at a pace that seemed bent on wiping out the past. In 1976, the concerns that Charney shared with many other artists, architects and intellectuals at the sight of century-old buildings being knocked down to make room for new construction led him to create a temporary full-scale facade at the intersection of St. Urbain and Sherbrooke streets as part of the controversial *Corridart* project, which he curated. This installation was his way of denouncing the municipal administration's rampant demolition of heritage properties. A group initiative carried out on the eve of the Olympic Games, the eight-kilometre-long outdoor exhibition was designed to take art to the street. Mayor Jean Drapeau ordered it dismantled on the pretext that it was in bad taste and too politically charged.

In the early 1980s, the critical import of Charney's work related to the historical, social and aesthetic dimensions of architecture grew sharper in a series of projects inspired by the concentration-camp world. The railroads, the death camp barracks, in short, the infrastructure of the Holocaust, became a metaphor for the alienation in which the modern city confines society. In *Fragments of the Forgotten City, No. 8*, concrete, industrial-looking buildings utterly devoid of human presence, tightly aligned and with tall, blood-red chimneys, conjure the terrifying vision of a totalitarian megalopolis made more ghostly by the transparent effect of the drawing.

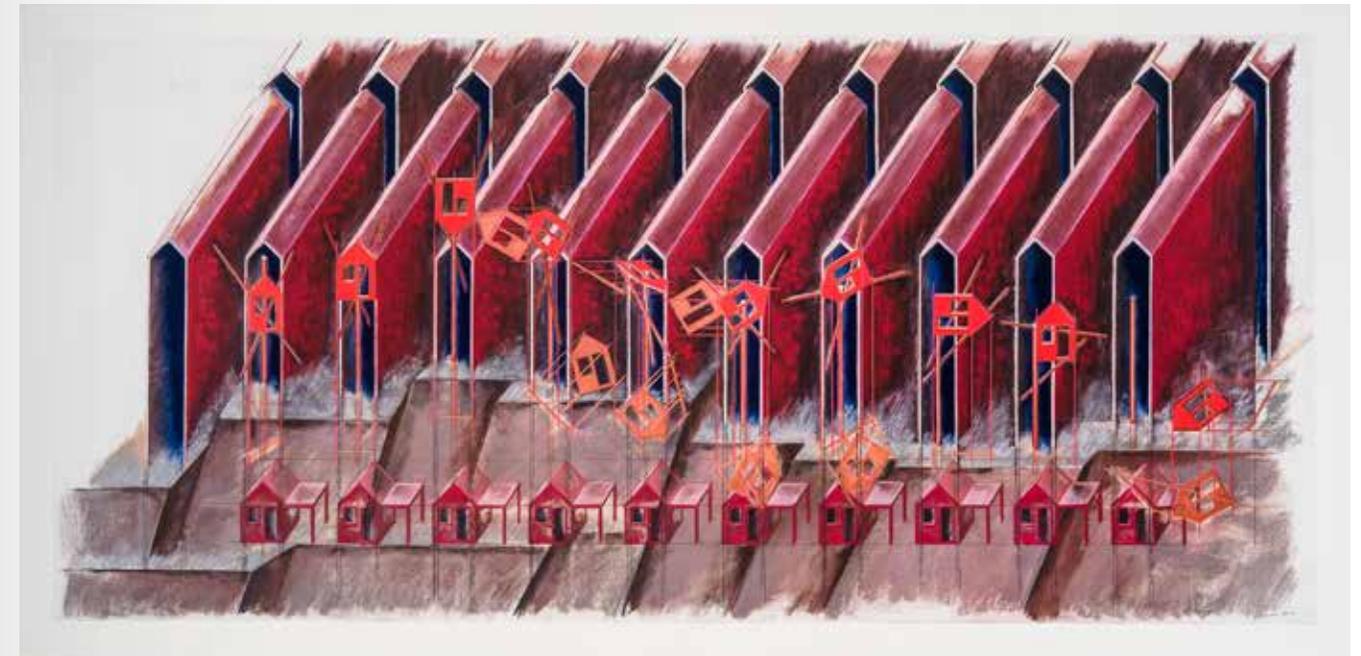
Melvin Charney

Montréal, 1935 – Montréal, 2012

Some of Charney's creations focus instead on the need for the built and natural environments to coexist harmoniously in cities. It is from this perspective that *A Construction in Quebec City: Houses-Poles-Flags* (FIG. 44) and the ensuing pastel *On the Cliff in Quebec City* should be understood. Invited to produce an outdoor installation for the exhibition *Territoires d'artistes: paysages verticaux*, organized by the Musée in 1989, Charney erected masts surmounted by house facades. The precarious position of these symbolic forms, some of them toppling, evokes not only the fragility of architecture within the social and cultural fabric but also the balance it must maintain with its primary host – nature in all its power.



Fig. 44.
Melvin Charney
View of the installation
*A Construction in Quebec City:
Houses-Poles-Flags*, 1989



Untitled (Abstraction)

1989-1999

Acrylic on canvas and rayon,
beam clamps, 745 cm (length)
variable dimensions

MNBAQ, gift of the artist
(2009.37)

John Heward began his self-taught career in the visual arts in the late 1960s, after working mainly in publishing. He initially took up painting but soon embraced sculpture and performance, in addition to pursuing his activity as a jazz and contemporary music percussionist, all of which he has practised concurrently for close to 50 years.

Heward is recognized for his contribution to deepening critical thinking about pictorial issues related to abstraction, issues that he envisages through new dialectical relationships: the use of abstract forms and codified signs from which figures occasionally seem to emerge, and a predilection for an expressivity at once spontaneous and skilfully gauged. His self-portraits, recurrent since the early 1990s, reveal the humanistic aspect of an art that, at first sight, can seem impersonal and purely formalist. Verging on abstraction, these works painted on used canvases or pieces of recycled fabric embody the transient nature of both the material and the human being. In *Untitled (Self-portrait)* (Fig. 45), the exaggerated traits, the large empty eyes and the morbid look of the black-and-white face suggest introspection more than physical description, composing an inner portrait that, with its pentimenti, bears the anguish of its precariousness.

Heward's practice is also characterized by an interest in process and improvisation that reflects his desire to pay as much attention to the performative dimension of creative activity as to the created object itself. In fact, his artworks are never entirely static or completed. They have a starting point, of course, but continue to evolve with each new intervention by the artist or with the effect of time on their materials. Heward's determination to foster truly active perception by encouraging visitors to manipulate his works further contributes to the ongoing transformation. The series "Abstractions" (1987-1999), to which *Untitled (Abstraction)* belongs, eloquently illustrates this. These pieces made with remnants of earlier works repainted and assembled with new sections stand out for the way they are displayed. Suspended in space, the painterly objects

John Heward

Montréal, 1934

change form from one exhibition to the next, depending on how the fabric is hung and the resulting gravitational tension. Visitors invited to touch and shift the different segments of fabric also participate in their reconfiguration. This constant mutation creates a dialogue among the work, the artist who produced and installed it, and the viewers who endlessly reshape it to the new spatial properties of the exhibition setting.



Fig. 45.
John Heward
Untitled (Self-portrait), 1992-2003
Oil on canvas, 164.3 × 139.2 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2005.2608)



La Fêlure, au chœur des corps

1990

Chromogenic prints on wood, MNBAQ, purchase (1991.02)
225 × 659 cm

Geneviève Cadieux is well known both in Canada and abroad, and her contribution to photography has made her a national standard of reference. In the 1990s, a fertile period for conceptual photography, she employed film-making strategies in works with a highly symbolic and referential dimension, and her unique approach helped promote the renewal of photographic vocabulary. At first she used the medium on its own – its effects of framing and narrative possibilities – but gradually introduced sound, video and installation. More recently, she has added sculptural elements, which, despite a minimalist appearance, are the product of the same sensibilities as her photos. However diverse these forms of expression may be, they are nonetheless all ways of exploring feelings of desire, suffering and anxiety, conflicted relationships, difficulties of communication and the evanescence of time and life – themes that, against a background of humanism, have pervaded Cadieux’s production from the start.

First exhibited at the 1990 Venice Biennale, where Cadieux represented Canada, the imposing triptych *La Fêlure, au chœur des corps* stands as a pinnacle in her oeuvre. (The title literally means, “The fissure, in the chorus of the bodies,” but the French word for “chorus” is a homophone of the word for “heart,” which lends a further poetic quality.) As often in the artist’s production, a reflection on the body coalesces, with skin serving as a sensitive surface that, like photographic film, reveals the memory of lived moments. Fragmentation and the opposition of elements are visual procedures the artist has used frequently. Here, a powerful ambiguity arises from the interlocked lips caught in the diagonal formed by two patches of scarred flesh: we could be witnessing a passionate embrace or a heartbreaking separation.

Geneviève Cadieux

Montréal, 1955

Juxtaposing views in a way that provides clues to multiple interpretations is a narrative strategy again used skilfully in *Perfume* (FIG. 46). This photograph combines close-ups – one black-and-white, the other in colour – of two pairs of closed eyes. The framing and mounting place the left eye of one pair flush against the right eye of the other, thus merging the two subjects, as if each could see from the other’s perspective. But the lowered eyelids prevent any shared vision. Are the figures arrested in a moment of silent introspection, or are they united in a refusal to see what is going on around them, in the shared denial of the inevitable?



Fig. 46.
Geneviève Cadieux
Perfume, 1991
Chromogenic prints
(one from a black-and-white negative),
2/2, 178 × 562 cm (overall)
MNBAQ, gift of Germain Cadieux
(2002.145)



Curio Cabinets (Bruxa, The Brain, The Trip)

1990-1994

Wood, metal, porcelain
and assorted objects,
244 × 112 × 30 cm,
238 × 99.5 × 30 cm,
244 × 122.5 × 30 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (2007.19)

Between 1983 and 1997, Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe gained fame in the field of site-specific art, a frequently ephemeral, space-based practice whose basic material is the site for which a work is expressly created and with which it engages. The duo's projects intervened in abandoned public buildings – libraries, firehouses, churches and theatres – reviving their memory and casting new light on their specific character. Each venue, chosen after extensive research, had a history unique for its past function and users. *Curio Cabinets (Bruxa, The Brain, The Trip)* holds shards of the history of the Battery Maritime Building, which stands at the southern tip of Manhattan on one of the oldest immigrant-ship landing sites in North America, recalling the days of European settlement and the trade in raw materials, merchandise and slaves that took place there. Made as part of the installation that Fleming and Lapointe mounted in the former ferry terminal in 1990, *Curio Cabinets* highlights the ties between colonialism and the development of museums. The display of disparate objects (rocks, curiosities, archives) evokes the way early collections were amassed, often simply as the spoils of colonial conquest rather than for any scientific purpose.

For this piece, Fleming and Lapointe salvaged furniture from an abandoned office to present items gathered on site, thus questioning the business of collecting, identifying and categorizing inherent to museums. The glass-fronted cabinets brim with exotic specimens of all sorts and origins, some of them outright fabrications. Most of the carefully selected and positioned objects

Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe

Toronto, 1958; Montréal, 1957

come from the natural, often marine, world. Symbolizing the great collections of the Age of Enlightenment, a rock-crystal carving of a human skull shares an empty old clock case with a sedimentary rock resembling a death's-head (FIG. 47). These memento mori proclaim the inevitability of human finitude as well as the lasting durability of artifacts and their meanings.



Fig. 47.
Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe
Curio Cabinet Bruxa (detail)



Surface Tension

1992

Computerized surveillance system, custom-made software, AP, variable dimensions
MNBAQ, anonymous gift (2014.237)

Born in Mexico, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer has lived and worked in Montréal since graduating from Concordia University in 1989 with a degree in physical chemistry. In the early 1990s, he began expressing his dual interest in science and performance art through electronic technology. His work is associated with the concept of “relational architecture,” a term that appeared in the 1960s and was used by the Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, in particular, to describe works they intended to be activated or manipulated by the viewer. Seeking to create interactive social experiences, Lozano-Hemmer conceives platforms in which the combination of technology and audience participation contributes to a spontaneous virtual transformation of urban space. The immense outdoor light installation *Articulated Intersect: Relational Architecture 18* (FIG. 48), produced for the 2011 Triennale québécoise organized by the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, is a perfect illustration of this approach: passersby were encouraged to manipulate powerful beams of light, constantly altering the surrounding landscape in real time to create a choreography of light that was visible from a great distance.

Robotics, video surveillance and telematic networks are among the technologies Lozano-Hemmer employs in his media installations. All his works involve active public participation, but the viewer becomes the centre of interest in *Surface Tension*, created in 1992 and today recognized as pivotal in the artist’s oeuvre. Its outsize eye pursues anyone who crosses its path, inviting reflection on social control systems and highlighting the omnipresence of surveillance devices in our daily life – aboard public transportation and in banks, museums and public buildings in general. However, the eye is not alone in this surveillance process. Visitors caught in its line of sight – and without them it would not be activated – join in the

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

Mexico City, 1967

visual game, captivated by the insistent gaze that follows them. Executed soon after the Gulf War, which saw the first large-scale deployment of camera-guided “smart bombs,” this Orwellian piece remains strikingly topical today, with the advent of drones and the disturbing prospect of their proliferation.



Fig. 48.
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
Articulated Intersect: Relational Architecture 18, 2011
Searchlights and assorted materials, variable dimensions
Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal.
Coproducted with the Partenariat du Quartier des spectacles de Montréal (A 11 68 I)



Limbo

1994

Metal rods, pillow and bed,
40 × 377 × 74 cm

MNBAQ, purchase for the Prêt
d'œuvres d'art collection, 1999;
transfer to the permanent
collection (2005.2758)

Multifaceted artist and teacher François Morelli quickly put disciplinary boundaries to the test with an open, versatile practice based on exploring the notions of transition, interaction, circulation and transformation. In an unclassifiable but manifestly coherent body of work, he reflects on the essence and status of art objects, paying special attention to their creative processes and conditions of reception. His production was initially associated with post-Plasticien painting but diversified radically in the 1980s, opening up to conceptual and transdisciplinary strategies in performance, installation, sculpture, drawing and printmaking. In the same period, Morelli adopted a relational approach that firmly tied his investigations to the participation of others. From 1981 to 1991, while living and teaching in New York, he carried out peripatetic actions – long walks punctuated by encounters and exchanges that led him to travel around North America, Europe and North Africa. Once back in Québec, his practice of breaking down borders between disciplines and reconciling art and life earned him recognition as an ambassador of Fluxus, a movement whose history is closely linked to Rutgers University, in New Jersey, where he had studied and taught. Working in Montréal, he developed an unusual practice, using rubber stamps to create complex narrative spaces composed of repeated motifs that address themes such as sexuality, fertility, the impact of technology on the human body and spirituality.

The grid motif is another element frequently revisited in Morelli's work. In the sculpture *Limbo* (1994), two large metal-mesh wings spread out from their resting point on a doll's bed. Although the image suggests lightness and liberty, the weight of the metal makes flight impossible. Imbued with fantasy, the composition conjures the world of childhood, the dreams and naivety that,

François Morelli

Montréal, 1953

with the transition to adulthood, are forever relegated to the realm of memory. The pillow, marked by reminiscences of the artist's sleep, lends the work a further autobiographical dimension. Interlaced materials and diverted objects are also found in "Beltheads" (FIG. 49), a series of sculptures fashioned from used belts. These works, which can be worn as masks and with which Morelli has experimented in various interventions, serve as prostheses, altering the body's relationship to the environment and to others.



Fig. 49.
François Morelli
Belthead, 2002
Belts (leather, vinyl and metal),
fabric and paper, 283 × 228 × 37 cm
(variable dimensions)
MNBAQ, purchase with support
from the Canada Council for
the Arts Acquisition Assistance
Program (2007.04)



Keyboard, Notes

1995

Ostrich eggs,
13.5 × 1,050 × 16 cm

MNBAQ, anonymous gift
(1998.40.02)

Vancouver native Irene F. Whittome settled in Montréal in 1968. Since then, she has steadily pursued a remarkably coherent artistic path based on principles of harmony and transgression. Her largely self-referential works reflect on communication and the transmission of meaning through channels such as history, memory, the body and spirituality. Collections, time and traces are recurrent themes in her art, which involves a variety of mediums including printmaking, photography, painting, drawing, sculpture and installation.

In 1972, she attended Documenta 5, in Kassel, Germany – a watershed in new museology that, under the curatorship of Harald Szeemann, redefined control of the exhibition context. The impact of this experience was so great that her practice, until then focused mainly on printmaking, took a decisive turn. She had been fascinated by the “artists’ museums” displayed at the event and now adopted the approach, seeing in it an opportunity to replicate museum practices, to imitate that hallowed institution. Appropriating the museumization process, she began orchestrating the presentation of her works, a strategy that placed her among the first installation artists in Canada. Initially explored in the 1974-1976 “White Museum” series (Fig. 50), the question of how objects are displayed later became a leitmotif in her art.

Often drawn from her surroundings, highly codified, always mysterious, sometimes wrapped, boxed or under glass, and arranged to their best advantage, the objects assembled in Whittome’s works are the very essence of the world that she fashions: a symbolic postmodern world that can be read in various ways. A few favourite objects appear again and again, such as the egg, associated with the development and protection of living beings. This symbol of life and fecundity, which Whittome uses as a metaphor for creativity, constitutes the fragile material of the 1995 *Keyboard. Notes*, an installation composed of 22 ostrich eggs affixed to the wall. Laid by the largest birds on earth, the eggs speak of Whittome’s personal history,

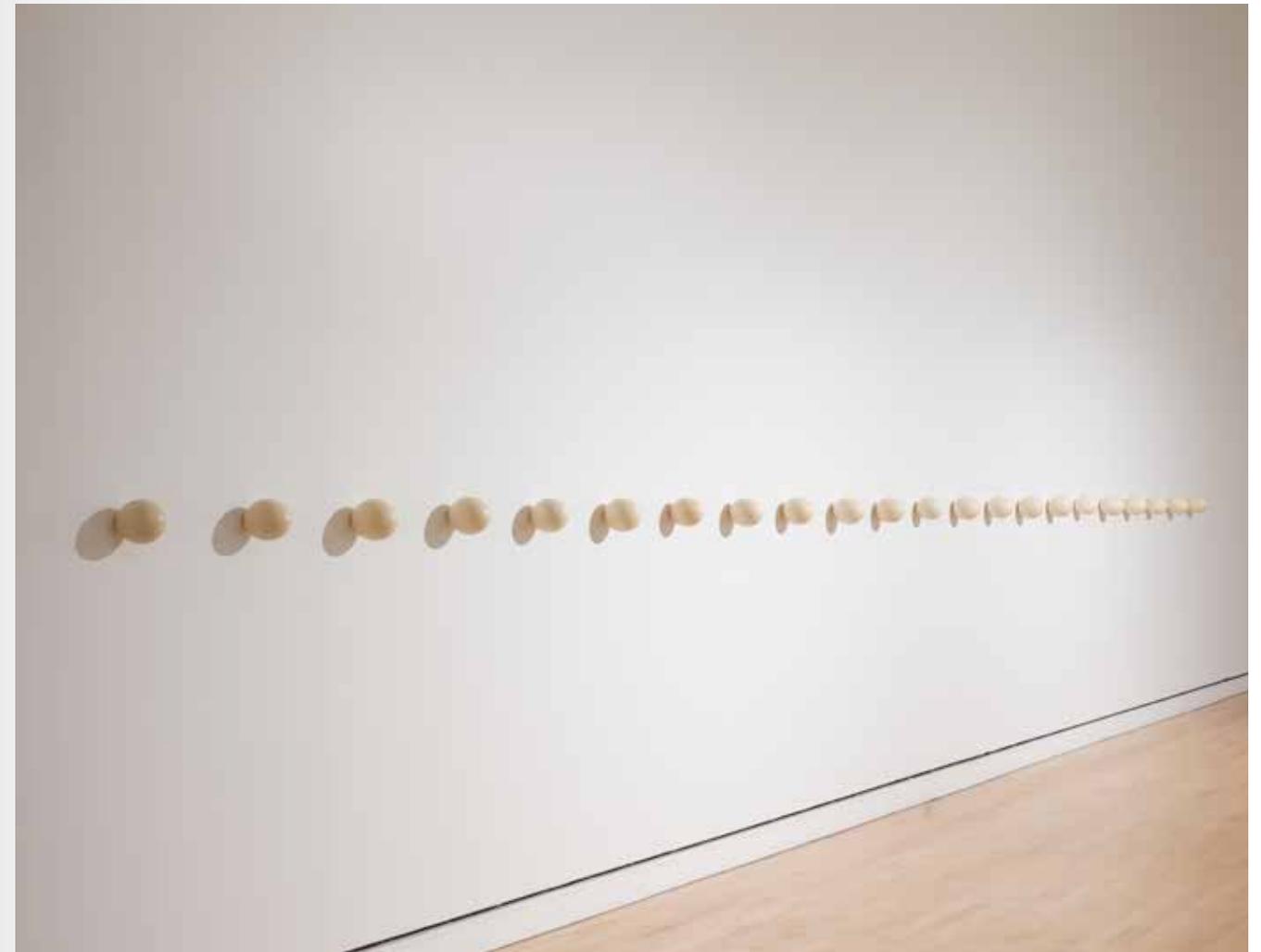
Irene F. Whittome

Vancouver, 1942

as it was egg farming that brought her maternal grandparents together. This motif also embodies the genesis of her own existence and is part of the autobiographical narrative that can be read throughout her work. As the title indicates, the sequential layout of the installation visually recalls a piano keyboard and the evenly flowing notes of a soundless music whose steady rhythm evokes the regular throb of heartbeats.



Fig. 50.
Irene F. Whittome
White Museum No. 3, 1975
Moulded paper, twine, wood
and glass, 233 × 44.5 × 91 cm
(8 boxes, overall)
MNBAQ, gift of Simon Blais in honour
of John R. Porter, Director of the Musée
from 1993 to 2008 (2010.213)



Model of Nubian Giraffe with landscape After Jacques-Laurent Agasse, 1827

1997-1998

Plywood, Styrofoam, plaster, joint compound, pigments, clay, glass eyes and sisal, 242 × 242 × 92 cm
MNBAQ, purchase for the Prêt d'œuvres d'art collection, 1999; transfer to the permanent collection (2005.2666)

Trevor Gould's production, composed mainly of drawings, sculptures and installations, raises cultural, historical and social questions that prompt us to reassess our relationship to the world. Packed with references, his works explore the history of representations perpetrated by fine arts and natural history museums, zoos and botanical gardens. His subtly erudite reflections lead us to question the way we view the Other and the way we relate to "museumized" artworks and artifacts, and the places where they are conserved.

In 1980, Gould fled the apartheid of his native South Africa to settle in Montréal. In his art, flora and fauna often provide a basis for a critique of imperialism. *Model of Nubian Giraffe with landscape*, for instance, is a scathing comment on the 19th-century British Empire and its colonial policy. This installation, from 1997-1998, features a life-sized reproduction of the giraffe depicted by Jacques-Laurent Agasse in his 1827 portrayal of the gift sent to the king of England by Mehemet Ali, Pasha of Egypt. Gould's model is posed exactly like Agasse's painted giraffe and stands on a base in front of an English landscape similar to the background of the 1827 canvas. The staging of the object borrows from the museological apparatus, alluding in passing to the popularity of taxidermy and dioramas in the 19th century and to the numerous expeditions that brought back hunting trophies to fill curio cabinets and museums. Decontextualized in the exhibition gallery, this giraffe seems as far from his natural habitat as the one in the painted landscape, like a creature that has strayed and lost its bearings. It is evocative of idyllic wild Africa but above all embodies the colonial grip on an entire nation.

Trevor Gould

Johannesburg, South Africa, 1951

George Vicat Cole
Portsmouth, England, 1833 –
London, England, 1893
The Harvest, 1876
Oil on canvas, 87.5 × 131.8 cm
MNBAQ, purchase (1937.22)

Steeped in his experience of migration, Gould's works are like metaphors for displacement and address issues related to identity and territory. The outdoor installation *Untitled (Inventing a Homeland)* (FIG. 51) consists of an illuminated sign that reads "Pacific Ocean" on one side and "Atlantic Ocean" on the other – a singular illustration of America, reduced to its coasts and bordering oceans. While this work echoes the artist's personal past, it also prompts consideration of the New World of promise and its colonial history, a reality in many respects the same as that of his native land.



Fig. 51.
Trevor Gould
Untitled (Inventing a Homeland), 1993
Polyethylene, aluminum and electrical
mechanism, 350 × 152 × 30 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2014.292)



Lost in Nature (The Car)

1998

Salvaged wood and painted wood, variable dimensions

MNBAQ, purchase (2000.356)

Founded by Jasmin Bilodeau, Sébastien Giguère and Nicolas Laverdière in 1996, the BGL collective draws inspiration mainly from its surroundings. The threesome's oeuvre stands out for the use of found materials, which they transform into objects, images or settings evocative of life in today's world. At first glance their works may elicit a smile, but under the guise of humour or irony they question the world of objects, material production and the culture of excess that it engenders.

BGL's unsettling and provocative creations follow on from the Pop aesthetic and constitute a critical appraisal of present-day society. Their playful appearance, coupled with a strange familiarity, takes viewers by surprise, capturing attention to make people aware of their consumption habits and often paradoxical relationship with the environment. *Lost in Nature* (1998) eloquently illustrates this strategy with a Mercedes convertible and an above-ground swimming pool flanked by a deck proudly sitting on a lawn of small green rods. Suggesting the typical image of a suburban property, this installation, made entirely of salvaged barn wood assembled like Lego bricks, projects an idealization of materialism and social success. But the mirage fades when the substitution contrived by BGL becomes apparent: the handcrafting and rustic look of the mock replicas challenge the industrial manufacturing and luxury cachet of the consumer goods. Stripped of their essence, these symbols of the American Dream are relegated to the status of useless junk.

BGL

Jasmin Bilodeau, Sébastien Giguère and Nicolas Laverdière

Lac-Mégantic, 1973; Victoriaville, 1972; Montréal, 1972

The recurrent use of fakes in BGL's work embodies a questioning of the art world. The more recent *In Service to the Impact (Homage to Paul-Émile)* (FIG. 52) proposes a reflection on art – itself subject to market logic – the canons of art and the issues surrounding the fate of artworks. The web of cracks imitated in this large composition made of self-adhesive vinyl alludes to the aging of old paintings, underlining the long-term conservation requirements for such objects. The incisions in the vinyl and the “scales” lifting from the black ground also replicate an area of impact, a configuration that formally recalls certain canvases by Paul-Émile Borduas, whose influence continues to resonate in the history of contemporary Québec art.



Fig. 52.
BGL
In Service to the Impact
(*Homage to Paul-Émile*), 2012
Self-adhesive vinyl and latex
on expanded polyvinyl chloride,
322.6 × 425.7 cm
MNBAQ, purchase with the assistance
of the York Wilson Endowment Award,
Canada Council for the Arts (2012.70)



Fountain No. 3

1998

Gelatin silver print and wood,
70 × 106.7 cm

MNBAQ, gift of the artist
(1999.340)

Angela Grauerholz, who holds degrees in graphic design and photography in addition to having a background in literature and linguistics, has been steadily pursuing her art career since the mid-1980s. Her work is concerned with archives and the documentary value of the image. The installations, photographs and books she creates present a fictional yet familiar world that plays on perceptual ambiguity and narrative blurring. Set in a state of latency, her scenes exude the evanescence of both personal and historical memory. These images, which straddle the real and the imaginary, call forth the psyche and the subjective, thereby fostering visual and semantic doubt.

Grauerholz sidesteps art conventions, orchestrating the image-making process so as to better capture the viewer's eye. Her photos overturn the rules governing the portrait, nude, landscape and genre scene. The landscape represented in *Fountain No. 3*, for example, does not evoke sublime expanses. Although the fountain is seen in close-up, it is eclipsed rather than highlighted, buried under a carpet of dead leaves that allows only its outline to be sensed. Stylistic traits, particularly the elimination of any spatial-temporal reference, contribute to creating the atmosphere of nostalgia and fleetingness that reigns in this composition. The out-of-focus subject, tight framing, sepia colouring, graininess and unusual angle causing distortion imbue the work with a kind of lyricism, composing an intimate landscape that, in its silence, invites us to meditate.

Angela Grauerholz

Hamburg, Germany, 1952

The intensity of Grauerholz's photographs, their warm, vaporous tones, their interplay of transparency and opaqueness, and their format (rivaling that of paintings) recall the aesthetic of early 20th-century Pictorialism, which emphasized photography's similarity to painting. *Emanation* (Fig. 53), like the entire 1994 series "Ideal Landscapes," represents this movement's quintessence. In the farthest reaches of the landscape, at the very boundary between figuration and abstraction, the image – perhaps a smooth stretch of water – raises doubts through the vagueness of its finish. Caused less by camera movement than by the confused reflection of reality on the murky water, this impreciseness embodies photographic subjectivity and the nebulous chinks of memory.



Fig. 53.
Angela Grauerholz
Emanation, from the series "Ideal
Landscapes," 1994
Gelatin silver print, 1/3, 122 × 183 cm
MNBAQ, purchase (1998.48)



Chandelier

1998, 2008 version

Glass, metal, nylon and halogen lighting, 170 cm (h.) × 115 cm (diam.) MNBAQ, purchase (2009.88)

The burlesque – even wacky – artistic bricolage of Claudie Gagnon is striking for the offbeat use of trivial objects, connoted images and foodstuffs designed to give viewers a surprising experience with normally ordinary things. Exploring themes like consumption, domesticity, love, childhood and the quotidian, her works include astonishing sculptural assemblages, ambitious installations and madcap stage performances. The emotional effect of her art vacillates from weird to wonderful, yet a sense of uneasiness accompanies the apparent delight it procures. In the 1980s, aiming to democratize art and to reconcile high-brow and popular cultures, Gagnon began producing works suffused with humour, levity and irreverence in a practice at once transdisciplinary (visual arts, theatre, film) and open to collaboration.

The objects that make up the artist’s material repertory are gleaned in the course of everyday life. Gathered and stored until they find a place in one of her creations, they are diverted from their original functions to play roles defined by how and in what they are arranged. Some works testify to an almost compulsive urge to collect and hoard, such as the immense chandeliers fashioned from tableware and glass baubles in which Gagnon transforms kitsch into majestic splendour. *Chandelier*, created in 1998 and reconstructed in 2008, unfurls in an ornamental overload of graduated colours. Though evocative of wealth and high society, this Baroque-inspired light fixture is made of materials of little value, which confuses its status in the hierarchical classification of objects.

Popular in late-19th-century bourgeois circles, staged representations of famous paintings called *tableaux vivants*, or “living pictures,” were initially devised to edify audiences and promote virtue. Gagnon appropriates the genre to compose scenes that instead celebrate human vices and flaws, notably in the cabaret-style show “Dindons et limaces” (literally, turkeys and slugs, alluding to inner ugliness masked by surface beauty), performed at the Musée in 2008. Taking charge of stage direction, set

Claudie Gagnon

Montréal, 1964

design, costumes and make-up, she brings to life a gallery of characters from classic works of art, as in her version of *The Arnolfini Portrait* (FIG. 54) by Jan van Eyck. Here, in a set that includes the chandelier and the famous mirror from the painting, the husband, wearing a heavy cape and a huge hat made from a lampshade, stands with his wife clearly about to give birth. Disregarding the solemn dignity with which the painter immortalized the couple, Gagnon’s *tableau vivant* imagines the scene that would have followed, with the woman feeling her first contractions and the man in a nervous fluster.



Fig. 54.
Claudie Gagnon
The Arnolfini Portrait, from the *tableau vivant* show “Dindons et limaces,” 2008
Set for *tableau vivant* with two performers (scaffolding, stage curtains, backdrop, costumes, chandelier and mirror), 366 × 366 × 183 cm
MNBAQ, purchase (2009.89)



Laboratory (Lego Block)

1999

Chromogenic print, 1/5,
127.4 × 147.3 cm

MNBAQ, gift of Andrew Lugg
(2015.369)

Born in the United States, Lynne Cohen moved to Canada in 1973, first to Ottawa, where she taught at the University of Ottawa, then to Montréal, where she lived for the rest of her life. Throughout her prolific career, she devoted herself almost exclusively to photographing interiors with a view camera, capturing them as she found them, with no staging or other alteration. The unique nature of her work lies in her choice of spaces that are generally unoccupied but always hint at human presence.

In the 1970s, Cohen photographed domestic interiors that conformed to models published in home decoration magazines. Her attention then turned to public and semi-public spaces – skating rinks, dance halls, men’s clubs, hotel lobbies – and their respective codes. In the mid-1980s, she began dealing with more complex, less accessible environments reserved for specific functions that determine and even condition our behaviour: classrooms (FIG. X), science labs, swimming pools in spas, military installations. Working at first in black and white, then, starting in the late 1990s, in colour, she revealed spaces normally out of public view and, in so doing, exposed the full measure of their strangeness.

Laboratory (Lego Block) (1999), one of the artist’s first ventures into colour photography, is permeated with the underlying suggestion of a human guinea pig and the potential physical and psychological consequences involved. Whatever the subject under study may be, the idea of sleeping on the wooden bed in this cramped cell,

Lynne Cohen

Racine, Wisconsin, 1944 – Montréal, 2014

if only for a night, provokes anxiety. The yellow of the freestanding partitions, almost pure in places, and their ceramic tile kick plates lend the inhospitable room an oddly playful air. The work’s subtitle, *Lego Block*, comes as no surprise in that the photograph emphasizes the site’s architecture, an aspect exploited in many of Cohen’s pictures. The same is true of *Classroom* (FIG. 55), where the somewhat forbidding space, with three desks lined up in front of an immense tubular conduit abutting a concrete pillar, does not appear to be suitable for teaching. Beyond a spatial ambiguity, these works share a formal treatment that brings to mind major artists (Sol Lewitt, Carl André, Richard Serra, Donald Judd) and art historical currents – aesthetic references Cohen frequently alludes to in her practice.



Fig. 55.
Lynne Cohen
Classroom, between 1990
and 1996, printed 1996
Gelatin silver print,
1/2, 114 × 138.2 cm
MNBAQ, gift of Andrew Lugg
(2015.363)



Claire, June 30, 1999,
7:55-8:45 pm

from the series “Les Écorchés,” 1999

Gelatin silver prints (63) mounted
on expanded polyvinyl chloride,
wood and cardboard, specimen
pins, 322 × 250.3 cm

MNBAQ, purchase with support
from the Canada Council for
the Arts Acquisition Assistance
Program (2012.82)

Since the mid-1980s, Roberto Pellegrinuzzi’s practice has revolved around reflections that encompass both the history of photography and the mechanisms and properties of this artistic medium. Working in the landscape and portrait genres, he explores perceptual phenomena and photo-making processes in relation to reality and memory. In the early 1990s, he focused on detailed visual descriptions of dead leaves, bringing them back to life in the photographic image. Grouped under the title “The Image Hunter” (Fig. 56), the pieces of this series, produced between 1990 and 1994, evince the meticulous approach of a botanist: fragmented motifs, use of boxes, pinned prints and herbarium-style display. The scientific stance taken by the photographer in creating these works characterizes most of his subsequent production.

The 1999 series “Les Écorchés” (The Flayed) marks a turning point in Pellegrinuzzi’s career. Although he continued to borrow from scientific observation, dissection, classification and collection methods, the object of his exploration changed. Here, the focus is on the human body, with the least details of the face captured and enlarged to monumental scale. The pores, the facial hair, the pigmentation, the little wrinkles – everything is minutely scrutinized. The suite consists of six immense portraits, each an assemblage of 63 shots. Each of the subjects – Claire, Pierre and Lucie – posed for two lengthy sessions resulting in two similar but different likenesses that read like topographical surveys, with the potential of photographic precision pushed to the extreme.

To produce the large mosaic-like portraits, Pellegrinuzzi developed a motorized frame that moved the camera centimetre by centimetre along horizontal and vertical axes to map each tiny segment of the face. The grid treatment generates a fascinating visual effect that gives full meaning to the series title: the skin of the faces looks as if it had been peeled off, stretched, fragmented and then pinned onto a flat surface that seems to unfold in three-dimensional space. This device creates a duality between

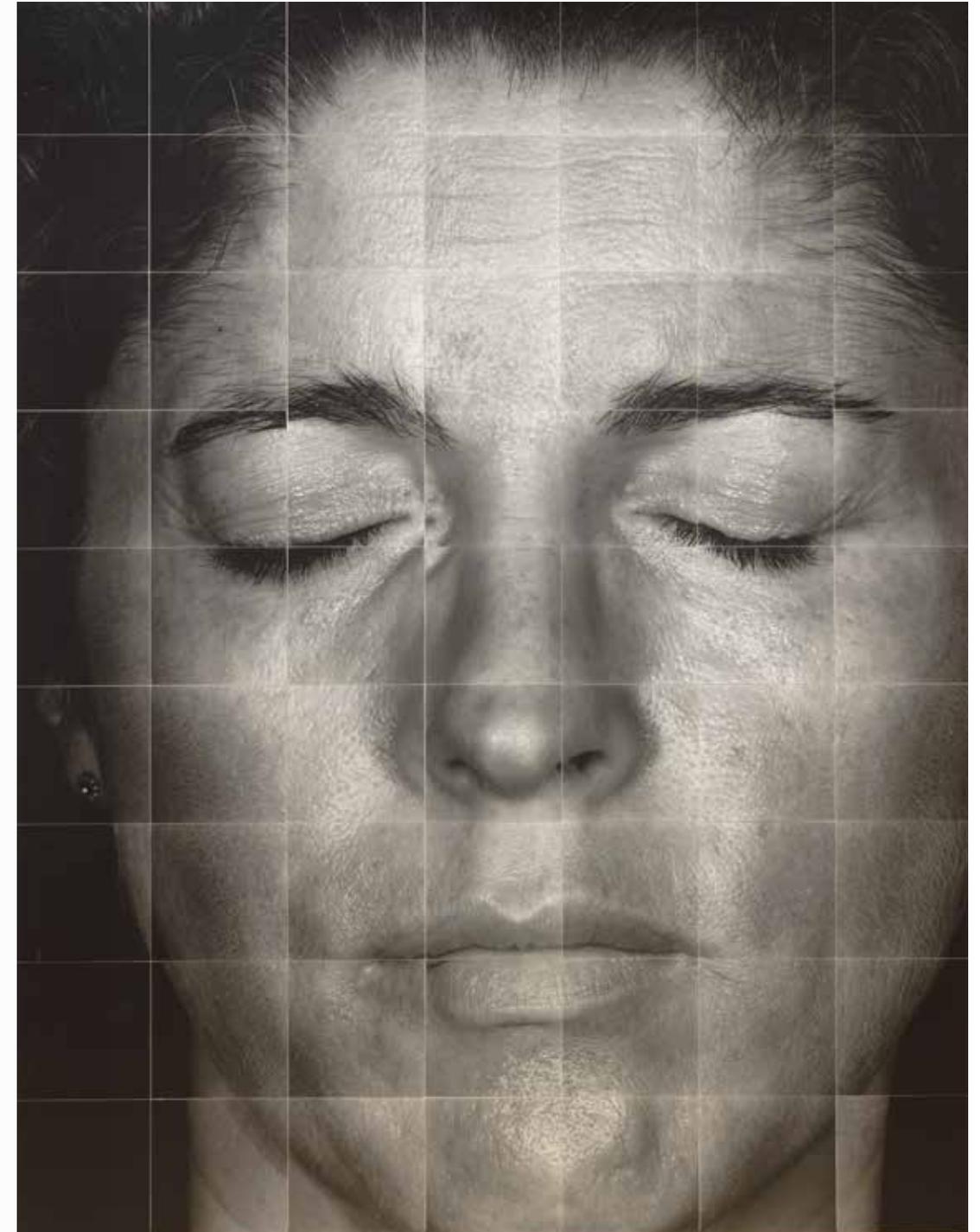
Roberto Pellegrinuzzi

Montréal, 1958

the sculptural appearance of the photographic object and the flatness of the represented subject. The pinning, though purely conceptual, adds to the scientific dimension of the approach. The subjects’ closed eyes bring to mind the funeral portrait, a staple in the history of photography. But the primary concern of “Les Écorchés” is the photographic medium and its potential.



Fig. 56.
Roberto Pellegrinuzzi
The Image Hunter (Leaves), 1990
Gelatin silver prints, wood and glass,
312.3 × 210 × 104.5 cm (overall)
MNBAQ, purchase (1990.278)



Embracing All

2000

16mm b/w film, sound,
57 min 44 sec, 1/2,
55 × 248 × 50 cm (tables
and monitors)

MNBAQ, purchase with support
from the Canada Council for
the Arts Acquisition Assistance
Program (2003.236)

Raymonde April was born in New Brunswick but has lived and worked for many years in Québec, where she is considered a major figure in photography. Since the late 1970s, she has been recognized for her minimalist practice and her representations of everyday life that lie somewhere between documentary, autobiography and fiction. Her intimist approach has influenced several artists of her and later generations.

April's images are distinguished by an evident interest in the people she immortalizes, an aspect that was apparent in her early black-and-white snapshots and persists in the colour photography and video she adopted around 2000. The series "Dix images seules" (2004) marks the transition to colour, as in *Mirror* (FIG. 57), where the artist plays with the planes by appearing in the foreground, hidden behind her camera, while drawing attention to the real subject – the woman seated near the window and looking at the mirror, in the viewer's direction.

Experimentation has allowed April to explore the narrative potential of the photographic image. For the film *Embracing All* (2000), she selected snapshots taken between 1972 and 1999 from her personal archives and assembled them in piles. The film shows her hand lifting the photos one by one from each pile, holding them in front of the camera, then moving on to the next pile. The long series of images is presented on four screens simultaneously but not in sync, so as to avoid an impression of narrative linearity. For although the pictures appear in a fitful, disjointed order, their sequential display leads the viewer to intuitively interpret them as a story.

Raymonde April

Moncton, New Brunswick, 1953

Embracing All exudes nostalgia, since the moments evoked in the snapshots are gone. Also, the withdrawal of each image after a few seconds can arouse a sense of loss in viewers seeing it vanish, as if the artist had offered a memory only to snatch it back almost instantly. Furthermore, the photos April selected for the film inspire thoughts of all those she left out, but especially of the myriad moments that have irretrievably slipped away and whose memory no camera ever captured.



Fig. 57.
Raymonde April
Mirror, from the series "Dix images
seules," 2004
Digital print on paper mounted
on aluminum, 1/3, 111.5 × 156 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2009.79)



Wavelength (for Claude and Michael)

2000

Oil on canvas, 183 × 122 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (2003.43)

As figurative painting was making a comeback in early 1980s Québec, Pierre Dorion developed an interest in the historical dimension of art through time-honoured and contemporary pictorial styles, themes, motifs and movements, which he continues to explore. References to traditional techniques and art history have become a leitmotif in his works. Photography is also part of his creative process, with many of his paintings based on pictures he has taken.

In the 1990s, Dorion experimented with the self-portrait genre, creating a series of drawings and paintings of himself in various, often full-length poses. In these works, the subject seems to ignore the viewers' presence, avoiding their gaze and instead focusing on his surroundings. In the diptych *Relic Bearer* (FIG. 58), the artist appears against a solid background that recalls monochrome art. The rectangle he holds in one panel is duplicated in the other, where a wooden frame is glued onto the canvas surface in a gesture reminiscent of the ready-made. In addition to playing with the conventions of self-portraiture by depicting himself from the back, the painter calls into question the tenets of formalism and parodies self-referentiality. Here he is tackling the issues of flatness and depth, spatial givens that have fuelled endless debate in the history of modern painting.

Such art historical references are also found in a later series that pays homage to other artists. *Wavelength (for Claude and Michael)*, an ambiguous composition from 2000, shows a painting hanging between two tall windows in a room where there is a radiator as well. The dedication in the work's subtitle sheds light on the curious juxtaposition of these elements. The painting at the

Pierre Dorion

Ottawa, 1959

centre of the canvas reproduces *Curved Vertical* (1957) by Claude Tousignant, known for his exploration of colour and his contribution to Québec painting, while the room itself recalls the loft where Michael Snow's experimental film *Wavelength* (1966-1967) was shot. The frequent representation of domestic interiors and intimate, everyday spaces in Dorion's art constitutes a sort of desacralization of pictorial art.

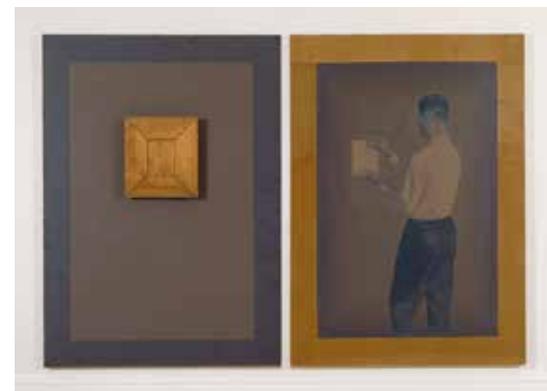


Fig. 58.
Pierre Dorion
Relic Bearer, 1992
Oil and wood on canvas, 213 × 153 cm
(each panel)
MNBAQ, gift of René and Janine Dorion
(1997.162)



After Nature 1, 2 and 3

2000-2001

Acrylic on canvas mounted on box frame, 303.5 × 79 cm (each) MNBAQ, purchase (2002.04.01 to 2002.04.03)

Stéphane La Rue's concern for the specific nature of pictorial art, his interest in paint itself as expressed in his work with colour, and his predilection for monochrome are evidence of the influence of his training under Guido Molinari. While his works explore the elemental properties of painting without reference to any particular object or place, they nonetheless do not embrace pure abstraction. Rather than seek to saturate the canvas's surface, La Rue strives to make his gestures visible and, in so doing, constructs pictorial worlds rich in spatial relationships.

Monochromes abound in the oeuvre of La Rue, for whom colour represents both material and form. The three large rectangular all-white paintings of the series "After Nature" (2000-2001) were produced by applying multiple coats of acrylic. The painter's choice of white was motivated not by a rejection of colour but by a desire to exploit the full spectrum of values that make up white. By using its capacity to absorb and reflect light and thus take on varied tones, he creates works whose surfaces are nuanced, never uniform. Other artists hide the painterly gesture in their monochromes, but La Rue lets it be seen in the layering of more or less opaque coats of primer and paint, which, depending on their thickness, either reveal or seal off the underlying layers. The resulting impression of blurring heightens the monumentality of the white canvases to produce an illusion of space in which the eye becomes lost among the different planes. Moreover, these planes – from the bare linen to the surface of the paint layer – are offset at a slight angle so that everything seems to quiver, making the viewer dizzy.

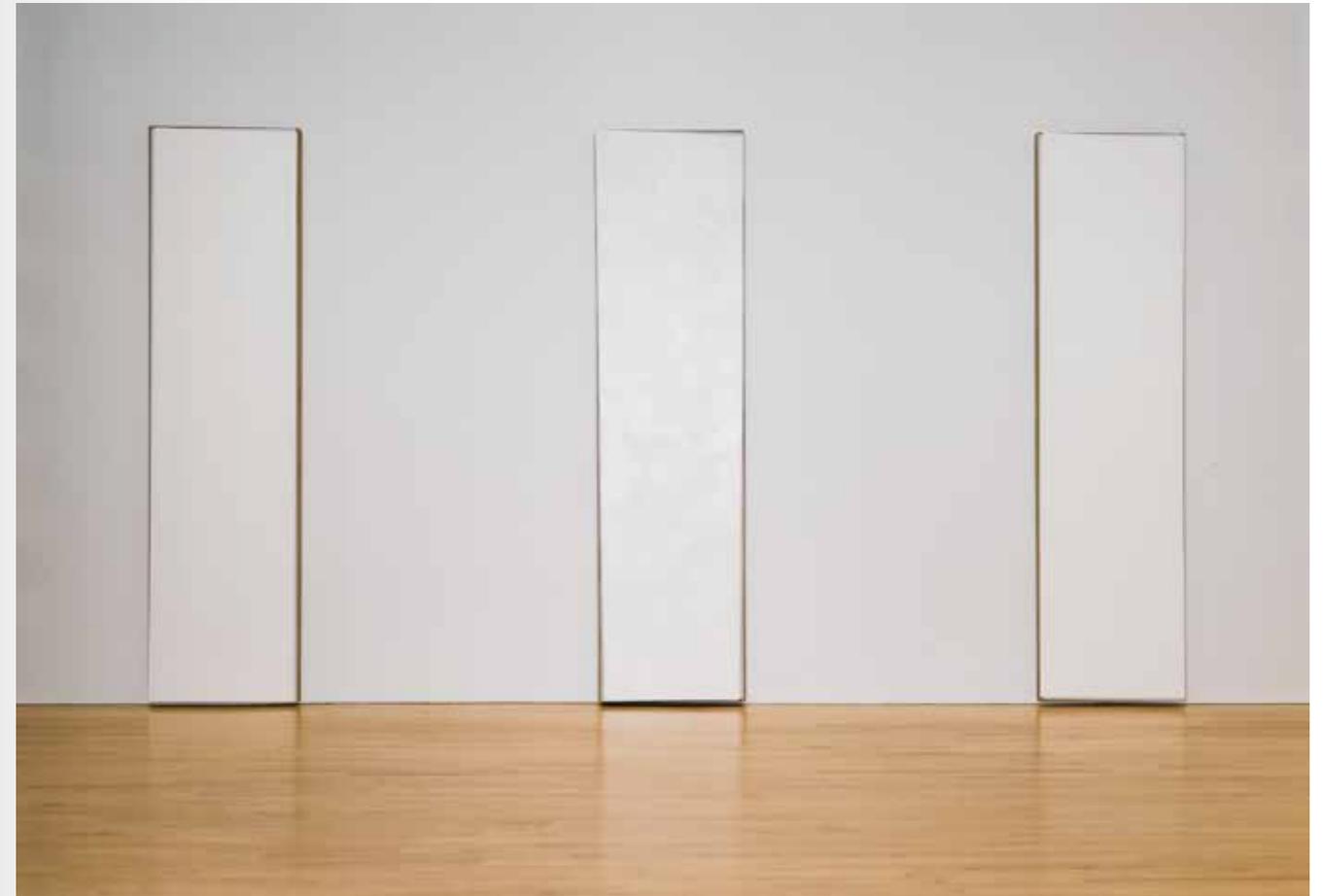
Stéphane La Rue

Montréal, 1968

The question of space and perceptual play recurs in the paintings of the later series "Upside Down." In the first of these (Fig. 59), the entire canvas is covered in graphite except for a band along the left edge, where the off-white support is exposed. This band, as wide as the stretcher is deep, is cut at both ends by protruding black triangles that create a three-dimensional optical illusion. Here, too, La Rue's pictorial research engages the viewer in a visual experience.



Fig. 59.
Stéphane La Rue
Upside Down No. 1, 2007
Powdered graphite on canvas,
182 × 181.5 cm
MNBAQ, anonymous gift (2012.289)



The Invention of Animals

2001

Colour video and image sequence generated in real time, sound, computer, software, projector, screen, amplifier and speakers, 1/3

MNBAQ, purchase with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (2008.63)

Jocelyn Robert is a leading figure in media art in Québec and one of the first to have integrated computer technology into his practice. His work with image and audio manipulation ranges from computer to video, sound and performance art. Using these varied mediums to forge new connections between visual art and technology, he explores themes of transference, memory and space-time.

In a number of works, Robert subjects the passage of time to ruptures, changes of rhythm or direction, or spiral distortions, which alter the viewer's relationship to temporality. The video installation *Domestic Politics* (FIG. 60), from 2002, presents a brief moment of delight: sunlight and shadows cast by leaves dance gently on the floor and a wall of a room. The almost still video images show time passing, a fleeting fragment of everyday life. They are projected into a cardboard box, as if this tranquil interlude were portable and could be inserted into another space-time.

In *The Invention of Animals*, made the previous year, the artist digitally disrupts the straight trajectory of an airplane in flight, a symbol of the linear passage of time. In what would otherwise be an ordinary video clip, a Lorenz attractor algorithm – a three-dimensional fractal structure at once fluid and chaotic – generates a non-linear playback

Jocelyn Robert

Québec City, 1959

order, causing the plane to appear to flit like a butterfly. Imperturbably linear motion becomes unpredictable event, like natural phenomena. The plane's fuselage arches and soars as it moves through the air in fits and starts, more evocative of the nervous, supple flight of a bird, as suggested by the audio, than of the smooth gliding of a rigid metal structure. The soundtrack created by Jocelyn Robert and Laetitia Sonami trills with sounds midway between the cry of an animal and the noise of a machine. This nature/culture hybridity is visually embodied in the work by the aircraft's quivering body.



Fig. 60.
Jocelyn Robert
Domestic Politics, 2002
Colour video, silent, 40 min loop,
cardboard box, projector and DVD player,
1/4, 30 × 40 × 160 cm
MNBAQ, purchase for the Prêt d'œuvres
d'art collection, 2003; transfer to
the permanent collection (2005.2780)



King's Girls / Pleasure Girls

2002

Acrylic on canvas, 217 × 184.5 cm

MNBAQ, purchase for the Prêt d'œuvres d'art collection, 1999; transfer to the permanent collection (2005.2678)

The work of artist and poet Cynthia Girard revolves around national identity and the fabrication of narratives that define and perpetuate it. Her production humorously challenges clichés about the origins, collective past and culture of French Canadians. Aiming to desacralize history, she creates works that are both subversive and critical.

Girard's trilogy "Le Pavillon du Québec" (Québec Flag), from 2001-2003, examines representations of Québec identity from the time of New France to the present. *King's Girls / Pleasure Girls*, from the second instalment of the trilogy, explores historical constructs related to the early days of French colonization in North America. The large, brightly coloured painting presents a schematic map of Québec with a *coureur des bois* (French Canadian woodsman) and a Native woman copulating in the forests north of a phallic Saguenay River. In the St. Lawrence River, scantily clad young women are swimming voluptuously toward the border where a row of Carignan-Salières Regiment officers stand ready and waiting to have at them. The painting's title and bawdy take on the events illustrated echo the popular belief that the so-called King's Girls, sent from France in the 17th century to start families and accelerate settlement of the colony, were actually women of dubious morals – a myth long since debunked but which lingers on.

Her subject matter is historically inspired, but Girard delights in adopting a manner antithetical to the lofty genre of history painting. In addition to mixing such diverse styles as Naive, Dada and Op, she peppers her works with references to contemporary mass culture. The

Cynthia Girard

Montréal, 1969

ostensibly simple and spontaneous pictures painted in acid colours also harbour numerous allusions to art history. In *The Sawmill* (Fig. 61), done in 2004 for the series "Fictions sylvestres" (Sylvan Fictions), the artist combines formalist painting with popular imagery by depicting the growth rings of logs as targets that recall the work of Claude Tousseignant and, nearby, a pile of sawdust that suggests Pointillism. In this way, and with a touch of irony, Girard pays homage to major figures of past and present art.

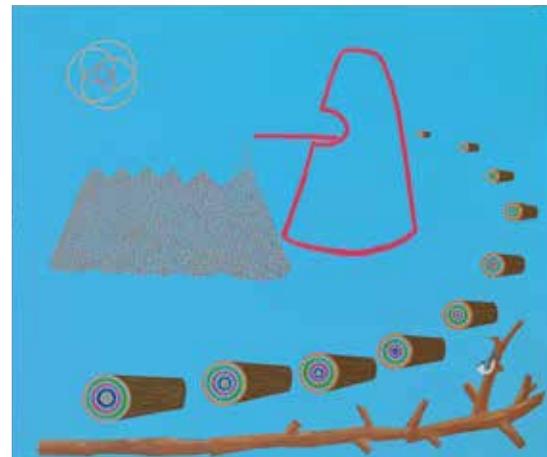


Fig. 61.
Cynthia Girard
The Sawmill, 2004
Acrylic on canvas, 187.3 × 222.3 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2012.432)



The Arborescent Heart / Restraint

2002

Acrylic and ink on canvas,
228.5 × 178 cm

MNBAQ, purchase with support
from the Canada Council for
the Arts Acquisition Assistance
Program (2004.414)

An important artist of his generation, François Lacasse is known for his rigorous approach and remarkable capacity for renewal. In the 1990s, he initially produced paintings with superimposed fragments of images borrowed from Western art, which he deliberately blurred with lines and daubs. Then, around 2000, he abandoned figuration and iconographic quotation to concentrate on the formal aspects of painting, working in particular with the materiality of colour and how it is applied.

A keen interest in paint itself and the technical exploration of its properties led Lacasse to develop a personal way of painting. First, he measured out a fixed quantity of paint, next he poured it onto the canvas laid flat, and then he tilted the canvas so the paint would flow along a path determined by its consistency, the slope of the support and any obstacles on the surface. Careful measurement and sustained efforts to control his gestures allowed him to maintain a balance between experiment and chance during the process. He then repeated the operation until the outcome satisfied him. In the resulting works, planes of colour are interlaced in a complex ballet of multiple paint layers.

Exploiting the physical properties of paint has allowed Lacasse to create abstractions that, through effects of transparency and texture, call to mind the fluidity of organic liquids or, more sensually, the translucent viscosity of honey or the glassiness of clear hard candies. In *The Arborescent Heart / Restraint* (2002), the background of irregular blotches is overlaid with sinuous, marbled drips of paint that resemble gentle plumes of smoke.

François Lacasse

Rawdon, 1958

Lacasse's creative process has long followed set rules, but over the years this aspect of his practice has grown more pronounced, as seen in later compositions like *Large Compilation IV* (Fig. 62). This painting was executed according to a strict protocol involving eight predetermined colours. Each of the motifs was reproduced three times on the canvas by means of transfer. Although the technique used to apply the pigment differs from his earlier approach, the artist's attachment to paint and colour is still apparent in the chromatic encounters and the play of contrasts among the juxtaposed forms.

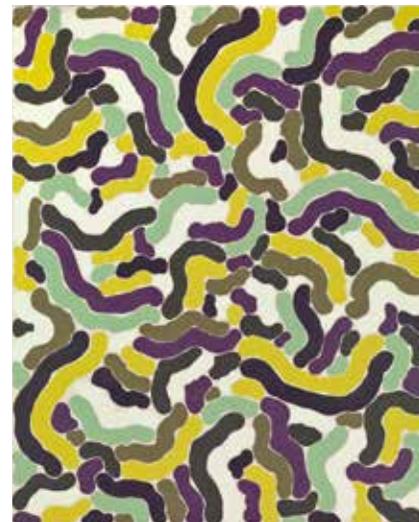


Fig. 62.
François Lacasse
Large Compilation IV, 2011
Oil on canvas, 191 × 152.5 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2012.126)



Prologue and Epilogue

2005

Photographic paper
and printed matter, wax, paint
and gilt highlights on wood,
251 × 434.5 cm (each)

MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2010.85
and 2011.85)

Donigan Cumming is known as a photographer but also works in video, painting, drawing and multimedia installation, and as a writer. In addition, he makes documentary films that reflect the same social approach as his photographs, exposing the viewer to a harsh, unadorned reality. Cumming's images immortalize the downside of everyday life, focusing on marginalized people who struggle with alcoholism, illness, poverty and old age.

Cumming's highly cohesive oeuvre frequently veers into grotesque fantasy. *Untitled* (FIG. 63) is from the three-part series "Reality and Motive in Documentary Photography." The first part lays bare the arduous living conditions and inner suffering of people in need. The second presents well-off individuals with physical wounds, while the third features die-hard Elvis Presley fans in somewhat dreary surroundings. Some of those who appear in this series return in *Prologue* and *Epilogue* (2005), which brought to a close the long collaborative effort between the photographer and the cast of characters who had kept company with him for 20 years. However, the artist shows them from a completely different, more distant perspective here in that none of them actually posed for the two pictures. Instead, Cumming collaged reproductions of previous works (photographs from his archives and video stills) onto huge wooden panels and then reworked everything with encaustic and gold highlights.

Donigan Cumming

Danville, Virginia, 1947

Prologue, which marks a turning point in Cumming's career, questions the fundamental premise of documentary practice by failing to represent its subjects faithfully. With this sea of nearly 10,000 human fragments – cut-up and manipulated images of bodies – the artist nudged portraiture toward narrative. The supposed objectivity of the documentary is also flouted by the recycling and transposition of intimate snapshots into a large-scale dream scene.

Prologue and *Epilogue* are based on the compositions of *The Suicide of Saul* (1562) by Bruegel the Elder and *Christ's Entry into Brussels* (1888) by James Ensor. Cumming's reference to religious images and to the form of an altarpiece sacralizes the diptych and the people in it.



Fig. 63.
Donigan Cumming
Untitled, from the series "Reality
and Motive in Documentary
Photography," Part I, 1982
Gelatin silver print, 27.8 × 35.5 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the artist (1995.502)



The Scar Project

2005-2013

String, wool, thread and nails
on canvas with perforations,
25.5 x 25.5 cm
(each of 350 squares)

MNBAQ, purchase with support
from the Canada Council for
the Arts Acquisition Assistance
Program (2014.140)

Montréal-born Nadia Myre is a multidisciplinary artist of Algonquin ancestry and a member of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation. Her art is strongly influenced by her Native heritage, and she frequently addresses the treatment of Aboriginal peoples and the themes of identity, language and loss. The culture of her ancestors is also expressed in the materials and methods she favours. The imposing *Indian Act* (FIG. 64), made between 1999 and 2002, consists of 56 pages of Canada's *Indian Act* sewn over in traditional glass beading by volunteers. In a gesture of rewriting and affirmation of identity, each page is partially or entirely beaded, the words in white, the colour of the lawmakers' skin, and the surrounding blank space in red, representing Natives. This colour combination is also evocative of the Canadian flag.

Myre often carries out her projects in a spirit of community, organizing interactive workshops and inviting the public to take part in making the works. The beading of the pages of *Indian Act*, for instance, involved nearly 250 participants. For *The Scar Project*, realized over eight years, between 2005 and 2013, the artist invited several hundred people, of all ages and from all walks of life, to immortalize their scars by depicting them with needle and thread on small squares of canvas. Each person also wrote a note explaining the physical or psychological injury he or she had portrayed. The purpose of the exercise was to make visible things that are usually hidden and to metaphorically suture the wounds. In this way, the act of creating became a healing process and helped to sublimate the pain.

Nadia Myre

Montréal, 1974

The political dimension of *The Scar Project* was amplified by the fact that the work's production coincided with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which was established in 2008 in an effort to rebuild the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, following acknowledgement of the harm inflicted on First Peoples by residential schools. Myre's own mother had been torn from her family as a child, and that experience provided the initial inspiration for the project and a vehicle for reflection on assimilation policies and their impact, not only on those subjected to them but also on the following generations, to which the artist belongs. These still-timely questions form the backdrop to much of her art.



Fig. 64.
Nadia Myre
Indian Act, 2002 (10 pages of 56)
Stroud cloth, printed paper,
beads, thread, tape and needle,
46 x 38.7 x 5.5 cm (each)
MNBAQ, purchase for the Prêt d'œuvres
d'art collection, 2005; transfer to
the permanent collection (2008.201)



How to Be There How to Conduct Oneself Hirsute

2006

Latex, straw and Styrofoam,
37 × 126 × 28 cm
Styrofoam, plaster, plush,
modelling clay and metal,
89 × 65 × 59 cm
Plush and acrylic on plywood,
117 × 117 cm

MNBAQ, purchase with funding
from Loto-Québec
(2009.260 to 2009.262)

Valérie Blass works with various techniques to create strange assemblages and hybrid objects. She borrows from the minor art of bricolage as well as from classical sculpture, to which her freestanding figures make reference. Blass enjoys playing in the grey area that separates artistic categories, generating a tension between figurative and nonfigurative in composite sculptures that raise a host of aesthetic questions. Much of her work investigates the distinction between art and design. While the objects she puts together conserve their primary meaning, they take on new ones for viewers to decipher. In this way, the artist reminds us that to look at an artwork is to ask what it is we are looking at.

The simple lines and sober appearance of the sculpture *How to Be There* recall minimalism and the industrial aesthetic, while the painting *Hirsute* suggests formalism and geometric abstraction, though it flies in the face of their precepts with its plush surface. *How to Conduct Oneself* presents a life-size pygmy chimpanzee comfortably seated on the platform it shares with *How to Be There*. The primate's eyes are turned toward *How to Pleasure Oneself* (Fig. 65), a video in which a slender sculpture swaying on the corner of a chair emits sounds that suggest ecstasy. With works that depart from naturalism or arouse no emotion, Blass seeks to construct visually and physically autonomous objects, heteroclit forms on the threshold between abstract and figurative. This approach, like her reliance on bricolage, aims to break down art history's classifications and hierarchy of genres, currents and materials.

Valérie Blass
Montréal, 1967

The interaction of works linked by the gaze or a shared base affords the artist an amused look at the viewer's relationship to art. Although the four pieces illustrated here seem to belong to a single installation, they are in fact independent, each with its own title. Blass capitalizes on the connections between them and between their respective components to capture attention and stimulate active observation. Moving through a group of sculptures and examining each one, viewers become involved in the interrelationships and their inherent dynamic.



Fig. 65.
Valérie Blass
How to Pleasure Oneself, 2006
Colour video, sound, 1 min 59 sec loop
MNBAQ, purchase with funding from
Loto-Québec (2009.263)



I Feel Cold Today

2006-2007

16mm colour film transferred to digital medium, sound, 14 min, 1/3

MNBAQ, purchase with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (2009.04)

Patrick Bernatchez, who is self-taught, works in drawing and painting as well as video, installation and photography. For the most part, he produces large cycles of work in which the strange and the fantastic, the wondrous and the monstrous rub shoulders and all-powerful nature reclaims its rights from civilization. Bernatchez also explores erotic and apocalyptic themes through which he expresses thoughts on life, death and the passage of time.

Time passing is the main subject of the film *I Feel Cold Today*, which tracks the unfolding of a snowstorm in an abandoned office. The storm begins gradually, with the appearance of a few flakes, and then whips into a blizzard that rages until doors and windows are blocked by drifts. The equally enveloping and unsettling soundtrack, created by the artist, adds to the anxiety aroused by the deserted space devoid of all but scant traces of past human activity.

This film, part of the “Chrysalides” cycle begun in the fall of 2006, was inspired by the Fashion Plaza, a former industrial building in Montréal whose vocation changed as the neighbourhood was gentrified. Manufacturing workshops and artist studios were supplanted by trendier, profit-oriented companies. For Bernatchez, who had his studio there for many years, the renovated building became the starting point for investigating the themes of displacement and change.

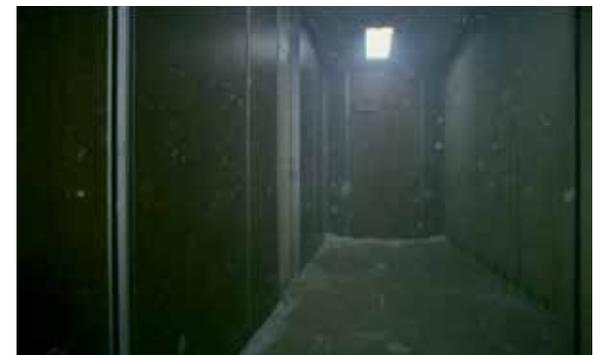
Patrick Bernatchez

Montréal, 1972

The “Chrysalides” group reflects the artist’s creative versatility with works from various disciplines: a trilogy of films, a sound installation, drawings done one a day over the course of a season, large paintings executed on aluminum, Plexiglas and other reflecting surfaces. Elsewhere, mirrors serve as a support. One such piece is the diptych *Fascination No. 6 and No. 7 (Dissolution)* (FIG. 66), from the series “Prophylaxie” (2002), where a thick coat of translucent varnish and secretion-like blotches of resin veil two heads kissing. Conveying the inevitability of the human condition in lewd or morbid schematic figurations, this series illustrates modern society’s sense of empty isolation and its quest for instant sexual or consumer gratification.



Fig. 66.
Patrick Bernatchez
Fascination No. 6 and No. 7 (Dissolution), 2002
Ink, acrylic and resin on mirror and wood,
182.5 × 365 cm (overall)
MNBAQ, purchase for the Prêt d'œuvres d'art
collection, 2003; transfer to the permanent
collection (2012.15)



Double Fog

2007

Super 16mm colour film transferred to digital medium, sound, 14 min 31 sec loop, 1/3

MNBAQ, purchase with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition Assistance Program (2008.01)

Active on the contemporary art scene since the mid-1990s, Pascal Grandmaison has developed an interdisciplinary practice that combines installation, video and photography. His precise treatment of the image adds a contemplative dimension to his works, which deal in particular with visual culture, metamorphosis, the human condition and solitude. Like other creators of his generation, Grandmaison eschews discernible storylines in favour of fictional atmospheres in which the narrative tension remains unresolved so as to heighten the dramatic intensity.

An eloquent example of this rejection of conventional structures is the film *Double Fog* (2007), structured as a series of events that, though they follow an order, have no outcome. Like a palindrome, the beginning transmutes into the ending and vice versa. Filmed in the bleak decor of an abandoned bank, a man slowly advances into the fog-filled main hall, then, as if the scene were rewinding, retraces his steps walking backward. In the looped projection, the anonymous figure moves ceaselessly back and forth, lost in a place he seems to find strangely familiar. The space itself becomes ambiguous, owing to the mirror-play that makes the protagonist appear to be in two places at once. The anxiety-provoking atmosphere is accentuated by the foreboding soundtrack, composed by the artist from ambient noises recorded on location.

In more recent works, Grandmaison defies the apparent and challenges the specific formal properties of artistic disciplines. In 2010, as his first venture in sculpture, he produced the series “Desperate Island” (Fig. 67) using

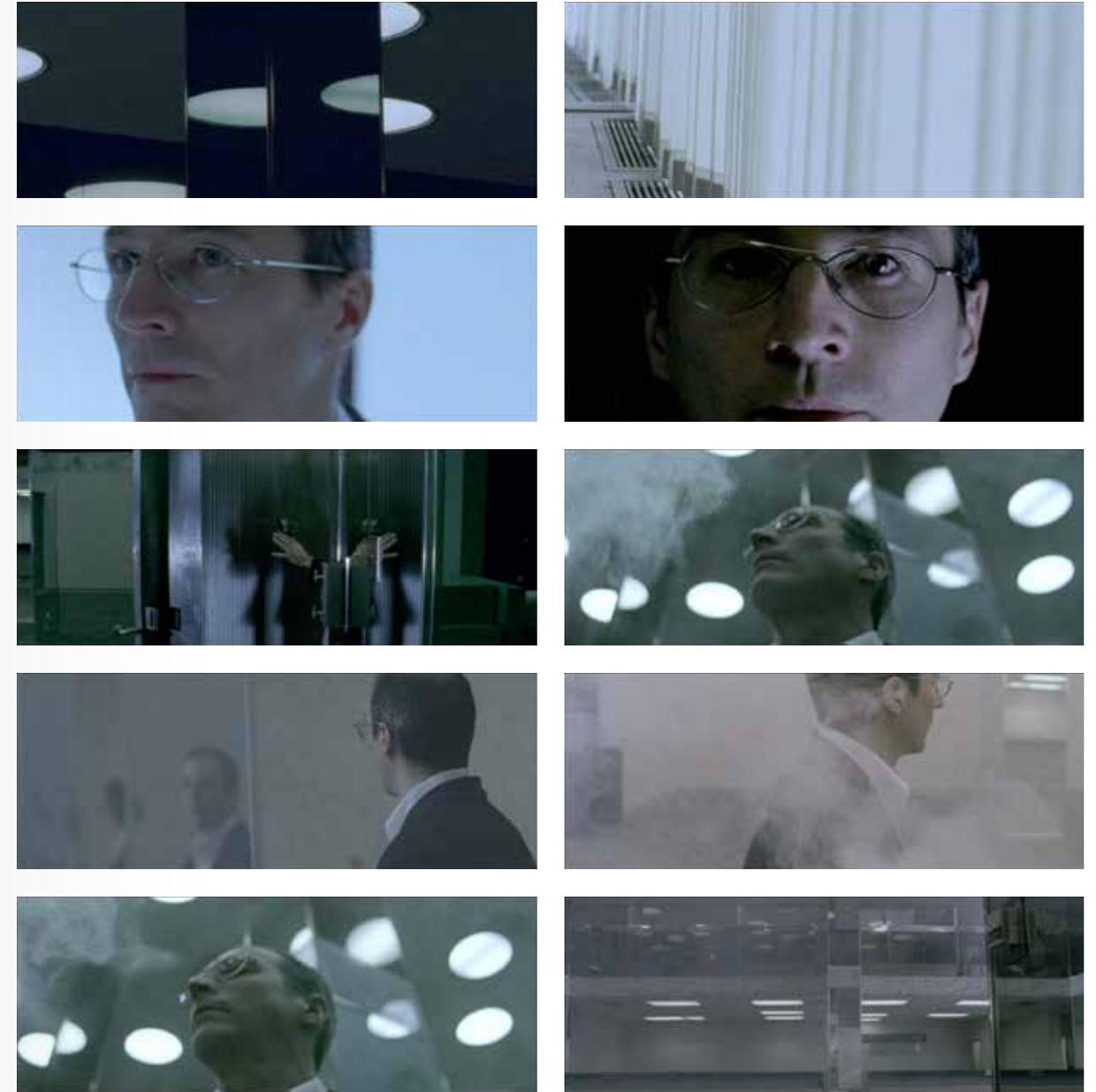
Pascal Grandmaison

Montréal, 1975

photography studio backdrop paper. Creased and crumpled, the paper served as a mould for the plaster sculptures, whose bluish hue calls to mind miniature icebergs. These works are akin to photography in that they constitute the negative imprint of the material that revealed them – an ingenious shift from one medium to another. In appearance at once sturdy and fragile but in fact more similar to empty envelopes than to solid bodies, the monoliths emerge from the floor like an archipelago waiting to be discovered and explored. The solitary, deserted islands exude an air of melancholy: like the backdrop paper that gave them shape, they seem to be desperately searching for a subject to absorb.



Fig. 67.
Pascal Grandmaison
Desperate Island 10, 2010
Hydrostone plaster and fibreglass,
122.5 × 126 × 87 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2014.278.06)



The Quail

2008

Wood, mirror, glue and quail eggs, 353.7 × 104 × 63.5 cm

MNBAQ, purchase (2013.136)

The work of Montréal-born David Altmejd, who has practised sculpture since the 1990s, teems with references to legends, popular films, science fiction and biology. Along with artists like Ed Pien, Shary Boyle and Patrick Bernatchez, he is part of a present-day art movement with a penchant for the supernatural, the fantastic and the monstrous. In his large installations, he likes to commingle the attractive and the repulsive, creating sublime works at once hideous and magnificent. To do so, he uses motifs typically associated with disgust or horror and embellishes them with jewellery, crystals, flowers, birds. The abundance of miscellaneous materials makes his compositions extremely complex and infinitely exuberant. In *The Flux and the Puddle* (Fig. 68), from 2014, he goes so far as to present a sort of roundup of his oeuvre by enclosing characters that have recurred since the beginning of his career in an immense Plexiglas cage.

Altmejd's fascination with grotesque creatures and metamorphosing bodies led to a series of gigantic humanoids with a foot in each of the three kingdoms – animal, vegetable and mineral. *The Quail*, from 2008, is part of this group. The giants' imposing size and massive bodies distance them from reality, allowing the artist to forgo anatomical accuracy. The colossal limbs were shaped with great freedom and the materials, textures and colours serve to give each figure the appearance of a natural architecture or ecosystem. The mammoth bodies look like habitats for fauna and flora, like “nature before the arrival of man and woman,” as Altmejd puts it. The inclusion of hair, feathers, fruits and small taxidermy animals demonstrates his interest in living forms. In the otherwise cold, uninviting *The Quail*, the incorporated quail eggs add a promise of life.

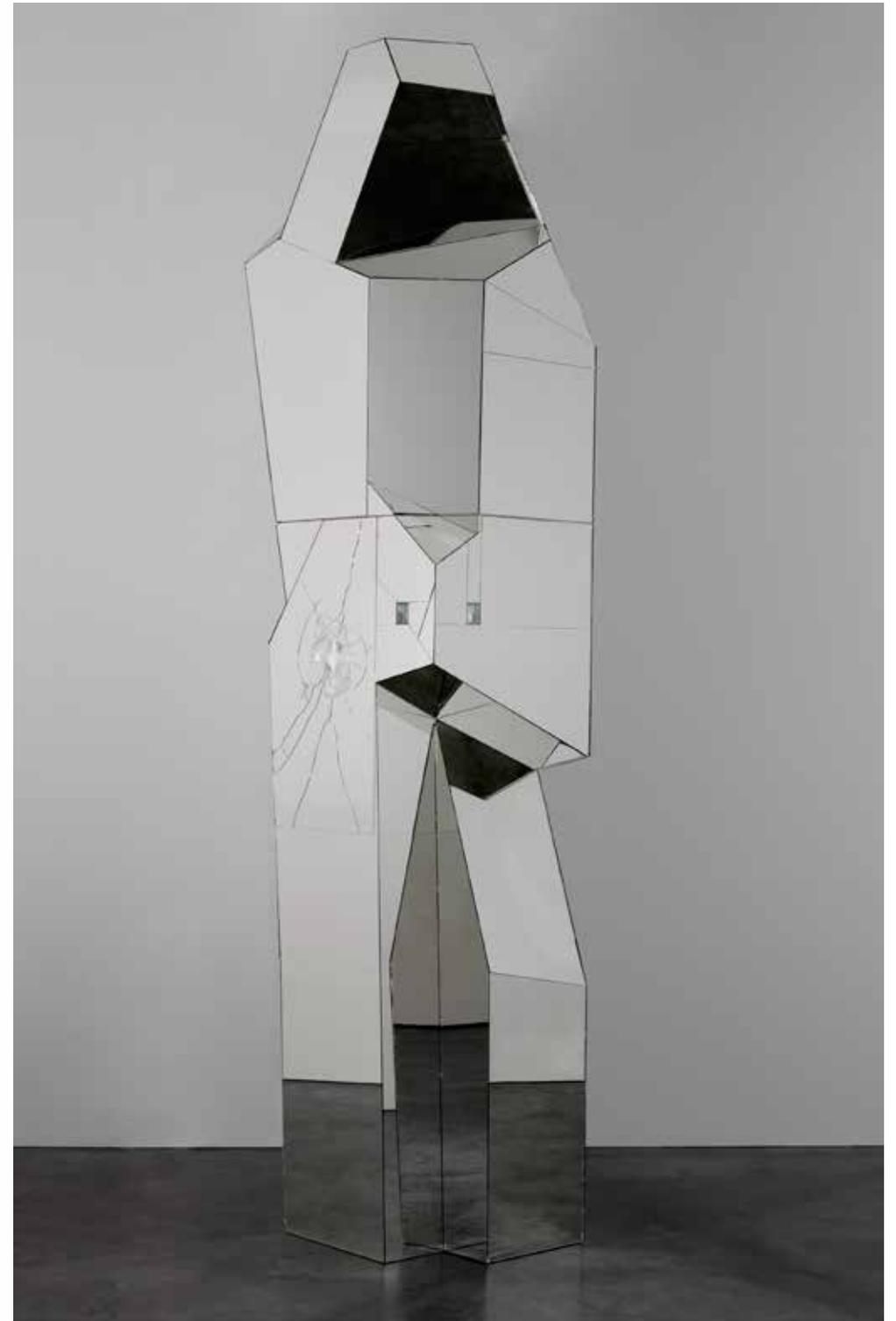
David Altmejd

Montréal, 1974

The metallic look of *The Quail* is due to the mirrored surface, which, despite the figure's towering height, allows it to blend with the space it dominates. However, the artist has given the almost immaterial cladding a certain materiality by hammering it here and there, leaving marks and cracks. The mirrors, with their interplay of reflections, open a door to an imaginary world, creating a wondrous yet troubling atmosphere while enveloping the enigmatic giant in echoes of sparkling light.



Fig. 68.
David Altmejd
The Flux and the Puddle, 2014
Plexiglas, quartz, polystyrene,
polyurethane foam, epoxy resin, epoxy
gel, synthetic resin, synthetic hair,
clothing, leather shoes, thread, mirror,
plaster, acrylic paint, latex paint, metal
wire, glass eyes, sequins, ceramic,
synthetic flowers, synthetic branches,
glue, gold, domestic goose feathers
(*Anser anser domesticus*), steel, coconuts,
burlap, ink, wood, coffee grounds,
lighting system (including fluorescent
lights), 327.7 × 640.1 × 713.7 cm
Giverny Capital Collection, long-term
loan to MNBAQ



Rainbow (for Rose and Licorice)

2008

Oil and acrylic on canvas,
234 × 422 cm

MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2013.19)

David Elliott's work was quick to gain national and international attention. While studying in Montréal, the Ontario artist took up collage and developed a largely experimental method that came to influence his thinking about painting. Though moored in a movement stemming from postmodernism, his art mixes recycling of existing forms, assemblage and eradication of the high culture/low culture hierarchy. He gleans material from everyday sources, subverting images from the media, advertising and even art history.

In terms of composition, Elliott's works often reference traditional painting genres. Some, such as *Rainbow (for Rose and Licorice)*, present an assemblage of objects reminiscent of still lifes. This 2008 canvas also recalls Metaphysical painting, a modern style developed by Giorgio De Chirico and Carlo Carrà, who devised static, atemporal worlds as a way to retain figurative qualities while departing from reality. The assorted items pictured in *Rainbow* appear to be contained in a box, giving viewers the impression of witnessing the opening of a time capsule and coming into contact with rekindled memories. *Sound System (for Ashley)* (FIG. 69), from the preceding decade, also revisits the still life but in a format suggestive of an immense advertising poster. In fact, Elliott's paintings borrow from the language of communications, expressing their message as a seemingly fragmented reality composed of disparate signs and leaving the viewer to decipher the overall meaning. His talismanic motifs – birds, audio devices, fruits, plants, constellations – seem jumbled together in an unreal space, like snippets of a vaguely remembered dream.

David Elliott

Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, 1953

Rainbow (for Rose and Licorice) is a trompe l'oeil painting of a collage. First Elliott chose images from a collection he often draws upon, and mounted them upright in a box so as to eliminate the flat look the arrangement would have had if laid out on a table. Next, he photographed the three-dimensional composition. And then he reproduced it in two dimensions on canvas, including the shadows and plays of light. The slipshod impression created by the white borders around some of the cut-outs is actually the result of extremely precise execution.



Fig. 69.
David Elliott
Sound System (for Ashley), 1994
Oil and acrylic on canvas,
295 × 123 cm
MNBAQ, gift of the artist
(2004.63)



A Radio Silence

2008

Colour video, silent,
7 min 47 sec loop, 1/3

MNBAQ, gift of the artist
(2010.88)

Since the early 1990s, Diane Landry has been constructing an artistic vocabulary all her own by appropriating existing objects. Her sculptures, kinetic installations, videos and performances invite us to an aesthetic experience in which these objects – automated and seemingly animated by a living force – cause the everyday world to spill over into a parallel universe. The use of lighting to project and modulate their shadows in space is a part of the process by which she transforms them. *Mandala Naya* (FIG. 70), from the series “Le Déclin bleu,” provides a clear illustration. With ordinary plastic water bottles attached to a clothes basket and a lamp mounted on a motorized arm, the artist creates a shadow on the wall and turns it into a cathedral rose window whose motifs expand and contract in response to the mechanized device’s movements.

Landry aims to merge the spatial nature of installations with the duration inherent in performances, a concept that implies an extent of time in a given space. She refers to such works as *mouvelles*. The appearance of the human figure proper to performance added a new dimension to her investigations, as seen in *A Radio Silence*, a performance-video made in 2008 during an artist residency in New York. Landry photographed herself every minute for two 24-hour periods, attempting to assume

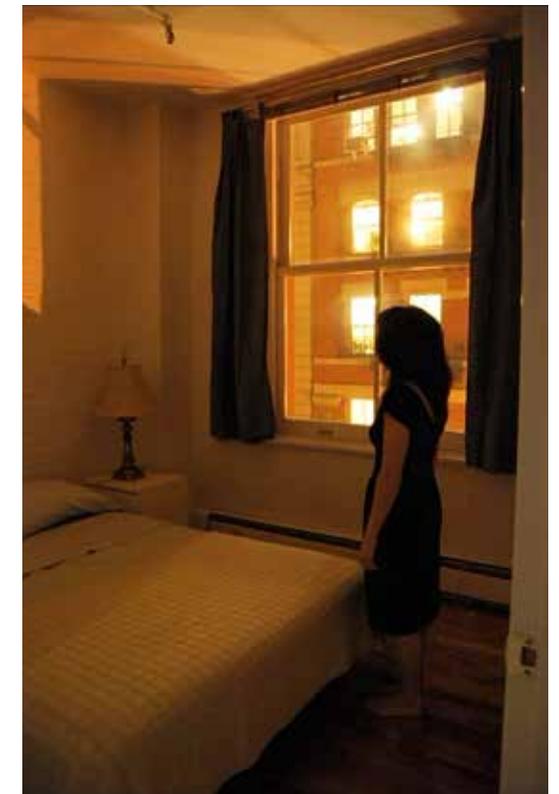
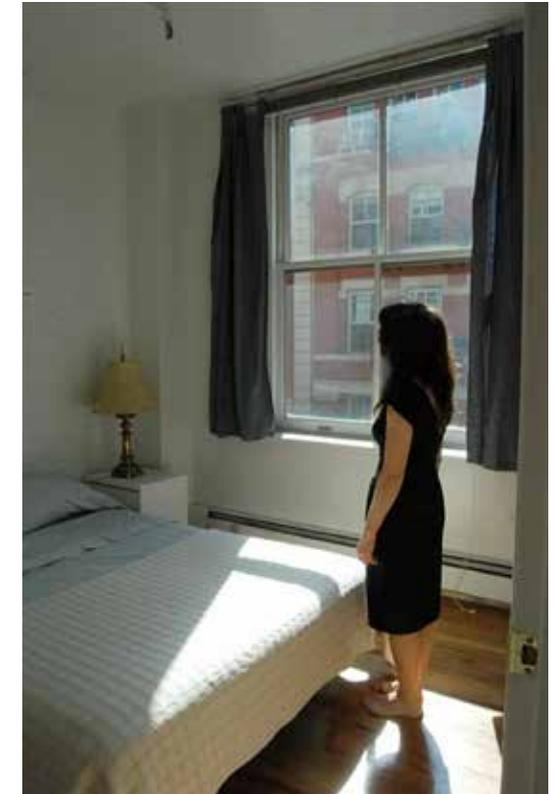
Diane Landry

Trois-Rivières, 1958

an identical pose each time. Two videos were produced from the snapshots, which, arranged in sequence, condense two whole days into less than eight minutes. The compression of space and time is noticeable from the rapidly fluctuating intensity of the daylight, which eventually fades to darkness, and from the artist’s twitchy immobility, which betrays slight unintentional changes in posture from picture to picture. This work makes us think about the limitations of the body (a frequent theme of performance art), the appropriation of space, motion and immobility, and reality as opposed to visual records of reality. Landry subverts the documentary role usually assigned to photographs of performances: by documenting actions carried out in private, the document itself constitutes the work.



Fig. 70.
Diane Landry
Mandala Naya, from the series
“Le Déclin bleu,” 2002
Plastic bottles, plastic clothes basket, tripod,
motor, aluminum, wood and halogen lighting,
1/2, 100 × 100 × 50 cm (device), variable
dimensions (projection)
MNBAQ, purchase with support from
the Canada Council for the Arts Acquisition
Assistance Program (2008.62)



Drift Ice

2010-2012

Single-channel video projection, MNBAQ, purchase (2015.27)
silent, 15 min loop, 1/2

An outstanding presence in Quebec's visual arts scene since the 1980s, Alain Paient is known for his exploration of photographic spatialization and the construction of sight. He came to photography from painting and has maintained a painterly concern for the pictorial quality of the image. In his installations, he questions the photographic vision of reality through devices such as the spatial disposition of snapshots. His practice draws inspiration from architecture, geography, history, anthropology and phenomenology.

In the 1980s, Paient developed a method that allowed him to create photo-sculptures. Working in university lecture halls, he recorded every detail of the interiors by scanning them from a fixed point with an omnidirectional camera. He then cut up the resulting pictures and assembled them face-out on a spherical steel structure. The image is thus inverted, as if, from the viewer's perspective, the subject had been turned inside out. One of the artist's first experiments of this kind, *Bachelard Amphitheatre* (Fig. 71), is composed of photographs taken in a lecture hall at the Sorbonne, in Paris.

In the following decades, Paient perfected his architectural-interior mapping technique and began applying it to video. Between 2010 and 2012, he developed *Drift Ice*, an installation that presents the movement of ice on the St. Lawrence River. At first look, the work seems to be an ordinary video, but careful observation reveals that the water is not moving and that the ice floes never

Alain Paient

Montreal, 1960

collide. The immobility results from the artist's treatment of the image. Similar to the architectural mapping pieces composed of assembled photographs, this work was constructed from video freeze frames. After filming the progression of the floes from atop the Quebec City Bridge, Paient froze a multitude of frames from the recording and digitally stitched them together to create a striking effect. In the projected video, the high-angle shots of the whitish ice against the dark water are shown vertically, which confuses the viewer by undermining all sense of spatial reference.



Fig. 71.
Alain Paient
Bachelard Amphitheatre, 1988-1989
Gelatin silver prints on wood and steel
structure, 268 cm (diam.)
MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2003.42)



The Coat

2012

Digital print mounted
on aluminum, 1/5, 66 × 100 cm

MNBAQ, gift of the artist (2013.52)

Raphaëlle de Groot's multidisciplinary practice comprises two main areas: one, individual, in which the artist uses varied forms of expression; the other, collaborative, which takes shape in encounters with diverse communities on the periphery of the art world. Exchanges with others were integral to the process of creating *The Burden of Objects* (2009-2014), a participative experience from which the photograph *The Coat* (2012) derives. For this project, de Groot invited people she met during her travels to donate a personal object they had kept but neglected and to tell her why they were ready to let go of it. In all, she amassed some 1,800 items that had lost their meaning or usefulness, or that were laden with a past the owners wanted to shed. Each object was then inventoried with a record of its weight, provenance and the reason it had been given away. By collecting these long-ignored or rejected items, by retrieving them from the shadows to form an archive, the artist in a way brought them back to life, forcing us to see them in a new light. But by the same token she took on the emotional weight with which the donors had charged them. In *The Coat*, de Groot appears wearing a garment expressly designed to carry the objects she gathered and, ultimately, to bear the symbolic burden of the memories they hold.

In her experiments, de Groot works under self-imposed constraints that impede her efforts. In collecting items for *The Burden of Objects*, for example, she limited the space for receiving and transporting them to a single wooden crate, at times straining her ingenuity to fit everything in. In other works, the artist explores a sense of lack or loss by deliberately depriving herself of sight. One such case is the video *Study 2* (FIG. 72), from 2005, where she is shown wrapping her head in paper before undertaking a task without the benefit of seeing. By making herself vulnerable in this way, she calls into question the romantic cliché

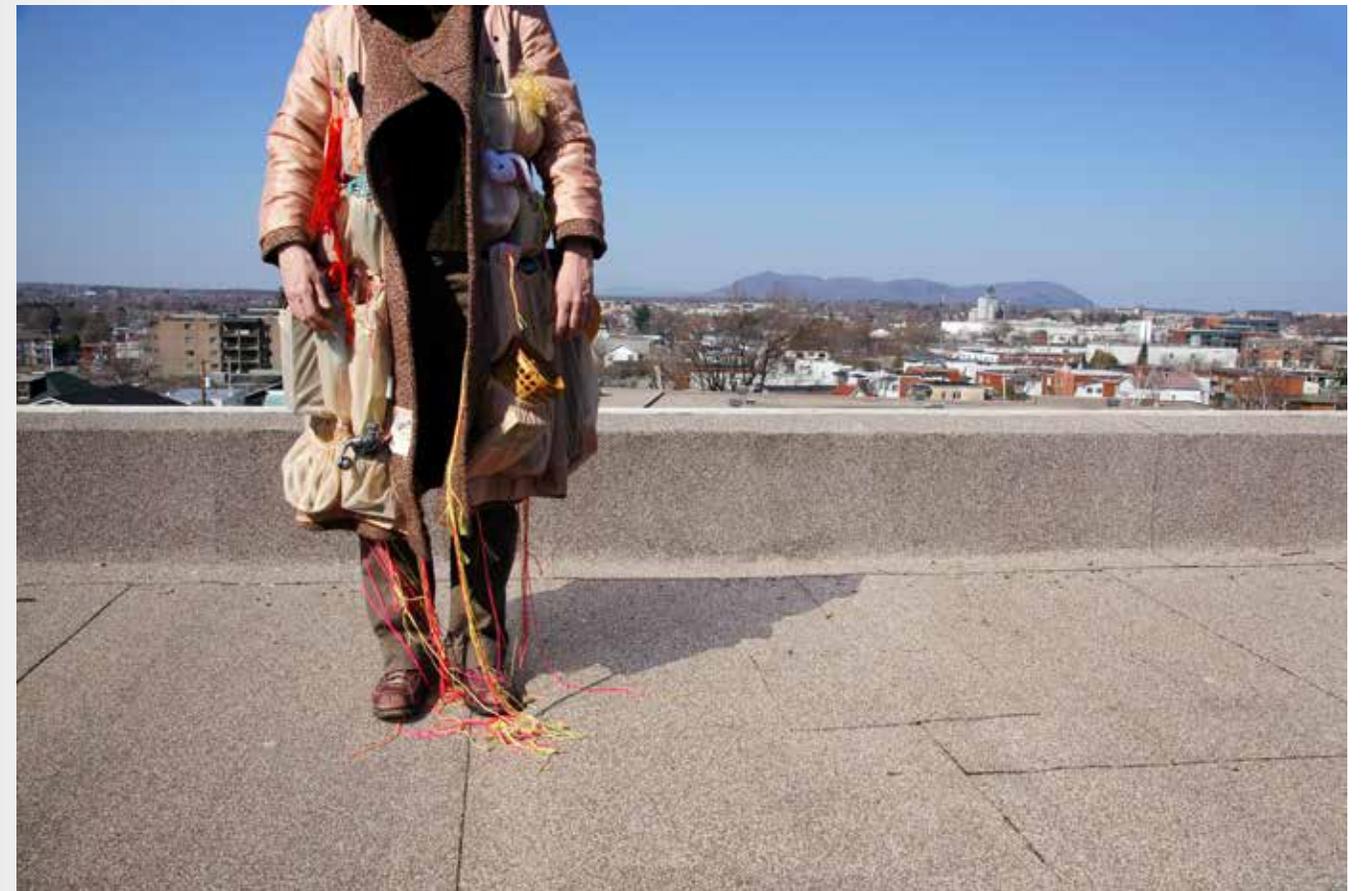
Raphaëlle de Groot

Montréal, 1974

of the inspired visionary artist in perfect control of his or her art. As a driving force in de Groot's creativity, deliberate sightlessness has also figured in productions such as a series of drawings done with nuns from the congregation of nursing sisters at Montréal's Hôtel-Dieu Hospital in the late 1990s and a blindfolded performance that involved walking through the site of the Venice Biennale and travelling by gondola along the city's canals in 2013.



Fig. 72.
Raphaëlle de Groot
Study 2, 2005
Colour video, silent,
17 min 30 sec loop, 1/1
MNBAQ, purchase (2009.07)



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En couverture: BGL, *Lost in Nature*
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